

German Short Stories of the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries  
**Gabriele Reuter (1859-1941)**

<b>Evi's Blot</b>	<b>p.1</b>
<b>The Pet-Sinner</b>	<b>p. 11</b>
<b>A Dead Man Returns</b>	<b>p. 38</b>

**Evi's Blot**

An old maid was buried. Polite people said: the old Miss.

"Miss?" someone asked.

"Well, yes – she wasn't Mrs., was she!"

"No – Mrs. – she certainly wasn't that..."

On the coffin of the departed lay a modest little myrtle crown. All the world could see it, and many people, who had walked to the churchyard out of curiosity, nudged one another and drew each other's attention to it.

Her relatives gave Miss Evi a decent funeral. During her life they had never completely dropped her.

The priest made a fine speech, in which he praised the gentle, helpful nature of the deceased. There was something guarded in his words – a mild sparing of the family's feelings – and, also, with regard to his assessment of the dead woman.

"Only God can see into the hidden reaches of the soul," he intimated, "therefore let us not condemn. One thing we shall emphasise: she loved much – and whoever has loved much will be much forgiven."

The relatives, men in good stations of life, bent their black forms

and threw a handful of earth on the coffin with serious faces. Every time it sounded like a dull and angry, and yet indifferent knocking with which the departed was bid farewell. The women in their crepe veils wept. But at home they hung their black hats in the cupboard ready for the next death; for Evi had actually been only a distant relation, and there was no need to remember this relationship by mourning any longer.

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Twenty-two years previously, Evi sat by her mother's deathbed. The girl was no longer young, and yet not old, and in this hour of the night she lost, by the dim light of the covered lamp, the only creature for whom she had lived and whom she had loved. The more necessary her care for her mother had become, the more had the filial piety in her changed into anxious affection, and through this she lost, at last, the desire for more passionate joys. She had never craved admiration, but she would naturally have liked to get married and have a baby.

Now and then she was surprised that no man took the trouble to seek her out in her hidden existence, for her mother had taught her that a dutiful, domestic girl was better suited for marriage than other girls. In spite of a dissenting voice within, she believed this for a very long time.

Now the future lay before her like a dark, airless space.

When the throat-rattling, which she listened to trembling, suddenly stopped, there ensued a twitching, groping movement by the old woman and a breath, and then all was quiet. Evi stood for a while dulled and stunned, and stared at the haggard face with the open mouth. A chilliness gripped her and made her teeth chatter. And then she screamed out loud

in her great fear.

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She wanted to live for others now.

A few married female friends asked the mourning girl to come and visit them very often.

“Look, our children are there! You don’t know what a comfort such little creatures can be in every sorrow. With their sweet chattering mouths, with their carefree happiness, they are our whole life! Be fond of them – occupy yourself with them! You’ll be a help to us, and the contact with them will do you good!”

Evi followed this advice. She had a longing for children and well understood how to handle them. The small company soon clung to her with affection. The mothers had not intended that. They were perfectly happy to make demands on the love and the time and the patience of this girl who lived alone, for their little ones – but the children’s love belonged to the mother alone, they were *not* going to share that with anyone!

When Evi sensed this, the old longing for a child of her own came over her with a new, forcible pain. She envied not only the women in respectable circles, who were in possession of a household and a family: her envy eventually prowled, with a timid craving, round every poor serving-girl, every abandoned woman, who could call herself Mother. In the end, she made the decision to adopt a child.

While her mother was alive, that would have been out of the question. But now she had time and money enough. Five hundred dollars annually – with that, she could certainly cherish and nourish a little

creature. She herself had few needs. However, some inhibition prevented her from informing her relatives of her plan. At a slight, cautious hint, they had immediately spoken of extravagant ideas. Evi could therefore imagine that she would have to bear their ridicule.

But what weight could that bring to the scales when set against the great, great happiness that she would enjoy if she only had the courage to take a small, unknown, helpless being to her lonely heart? It must be very, very small, and both parents must be dead, so she could have it all to herself.

Evi occupied herself with this plan as with a favourite toy – then suddenly – alarmingly suddenly – its realisation stood before her. She needed only to take hold of it. And she took hold!

It was on a journey in the mountains. The mother, a factory girl, had died giving birth; the father was unknown. The little mite was put up for fostering by the community.

Evi's arms trembled with joy when she took the abandoned human being. And how timidly, in what an ecstasy of intoxication she kissed it, when she held it alone on her lap for the first time! She dressed it in little cardigans and put little caps on its head which she herself had once worn and her mother had carefully preserved. She attentively received instructions in childcare from the nurse, from the doctor. With what delight did she run barefoot to the cradle during the night when the little one screamed, or even only stirred!

She stayed a few more weeks in the village where she had found her treasure, where people praised her and the women laughed at her, but

laughed in good-natured approval. Then she returned, radiant with joy and uplifted by a powerful pride, to her old place of residence.

Here, the amazement and disapproval were very great. Her relatives made serious and sarcastic remonstrances to her. What were people going to think?

“My life is clear to everyone,” said Evi, almost with a smile.

She kept the baby in spite of all the efforts to spoil her pleasure in it, in spite of all the difficulties the state made for her. Often it seemed to her as if this authority had progressed to such a plenitude of power in the course of world history only so that it could now set its extensive machinery in motion to contest the tiny orphan baby’s right to the warm place on her lap and at her breast. The poor maiden was soon known in every district office, and one witster gave her the nickname: the Virgin Mother.

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When the child – it was a girl – was around one year old, she contracted scrofula and came out in a nasty rash.

“Bad juices, tainted blood,” said the doctor. “Give the child away, she will give you no pleasure.”

Evi lowered her eyes, did not answer, and took up the fight with the disease virus that hampered the development of the little body. If she exerted all the strength of her body, her mind, her heart, this terrible inheritance from misery and poverty must admit defeat!

“There you see what comes from an old maid wanting to occupy herself with childcare!” cried Evi’s married female friends. “She’ll

completely destroy the poor mite yet!”

All the young women were united in the opinion that Evi had no right to the joy and the cares of motherhood without the wedding ring and the pains of the hours of labour. It was simply ridiculous for her to arrogate these to herself.

Evi had no time to pay any heed to the singular hatred that suddenly sprayed towards her. Little Lina had to take salt-baths, she had to undergo all kinds of cures. The five hundred dollars was not nearly sufficient for this. Evi translated for magazines, she knitted, and sewed for linen businesses. She sought to increase her income through the various means of earning that are open to women who live alone, and she calmly took into the bargain the humiliations and rejections that come hand in hand with them.

“I truly believe that the child will live and thrive,” said the doctor. “The care which has made that possible is admirable! And all that for someone else’s child!”

“Has nature not perhaps betrayed itself there?” asked the men in the club. The doctor shrugged his shoulders. “One would not otherwise think so great a self-sacrifice to be possible.”

Little Lina developed rosy cheeks and sturdy white limbs, she learned to walk and eventually also to speak. She was to call her foster-mother, “Aunt.”

Sometimes, at daybreak, when Evi did the little one the favour of taking her into her bed, and Lina, warm as a chick and still half asleep, snuggled in at her heart so very cosily, when the sober light of day had not yet penetrated the curtains and Evi was certain that nobody in the world

could hear her, then she would whisper to little Lina, "Say Mama!"

And the girl put her little arms around Evi's neck, pressed herself tightly against her with all her little strength, looked at her roguishly, and breathed in her ear, "Mama!"

Then tears ran soundlessly down the maiden's countenance and she kissed another's child a hundred and a hundred times.

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"Surely you're not going to send the girl to the Higher Girls' School?" said her relatives. "What pampering! Bring her up according to her station, to be a hardworking serving-girl!"

"Did my mother bring me up to be a serving-girl?" asked Evi.

- - When little Lina grew older, she began to complain to her foster-mother that people asked her strange questions which she often could not answer. And she wanted to know who her parents had been.

"Poor people, they died long ago," replied Miss Evi. Lina seemed to her to be still too young to have her cheerful nature clouded with the exact truth about her relatives.

Nobody had told Evi distinctly that she was an object of censure or of pity, and was highly respected only by a few people on account of her freedom from prejudice. Women, whose strength lies in the force of their emotional life, have an acute ability to sense such things. Evi could not have said if it was the pity, the censure, or the esteem on account of freedom from prejudice which inflicted the most painful wound on her. She would gladly have withdrawn entirely from society.

But Lina needed friendships, company and joy. When she raced up

the stairs, threw down her schoolbag and flung her arms round her foster-mother's neck, then bit into her buttered bread with white teeth and laughed – people could hear it in the street through the closed windows – and chatted familiarly at the same time about a hundred thousand different things just as they occurred to her – then happiness streamed from her over Evi, fresh and warm, like the air of a sunny May morning.

And Miss Evi proudly thought: She'll captivate men in a way I couldn't! I have no worries about her finding a husband!

One evening, Miss Evi caught Lina on the stairs in the arms of a schoolboy with a blue cap who kissed her right on the lips.

Miss Evi felt the high esteem for true love which is particular to all women for whom men's love has remained an untested ideal. She spoke to Lina very seriously and insistently. The girl should not throw herself away. From that time on, she became a little stricter and colder to her foster-daughter. She felt that something strange was developing there of which she possessed no understanding.

Lina was hardly grown-up when she was incessantly invited to sledge-drives, dances and country outings. Her foster-mother was often alarmed at the pert and impolite manner in which Lina treated old and young men. But they seemed perfectly happy with it.

For all this, there was still no talk of marriage. There was a middle-aged gentleman who courted Lina assiduously. He was called the "Australian" because he had once owned a farm somewhere "over there" and was a handsome, strikingly dressed man. Evi did not like him, but the young girl evidently was fond of him – how fond, Evi was not able to rightly

discover. Suddenly it came to her ears that Lina had visited the Australian in the hotel where he was staying. Evi could hardly get up the stairs after hearing this from a friend in the street. She positively staggered into the room, where Lina, in her fresh, strong beauty, greeted her with a smile from over the coffee-table.

“Aunt, is there anything wrong with you?”

“No – no!”

Lina became uneasy. She defiantly asked, “What’s happened?”

Now there was a scene – much, much more violent than the previous ones.

Initially Lina denied it, but only for a short time, then she was obdurately silent, and then she confessed, through short, angry objections, more than her foster-mother had supposed, suspected, feared. And then she completely stopped defending herself. She stood at the window and stared gloomily down into the street.

Evi’s eyes, red from weeping, wandered over to her, and stupefied with horror, she constantly repeated to herself, “How was it possible? How could it happen?”

And again, her great misery over her destroyed life’s work and her wasted love rose up to the loud complaint: “You unhappy child, how could you be so far forgetful of yourself?”

“You ask that?” the girl replied, and she walked past her foster-mother out of the room.

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After hours and days, which had elapsed in a hostile silence

between the two, Evi went up to her foster-daughter to speak to her. She had convinced herself that this incident must be conceived of as an illness, which could perhaps be overcome through patience and love and good sense, as that childhood illness had been.

“Lina,” she said, “I must undeceive you. I am not your mother.”

Lina cast her sharp, quick eyes over the old maiden. “But everyone says you are,” she exclaimed.

“What people say is immaterial here. You should believe me. I have a spotless life behind me. That gives me the right to punish you for your frivolousness. I could send you away and not concern myself with you anymore. But I don’t want to spoil your future. Let us both forget what has happened. I’ll take you with me to another town. There, when you have shown that you want to be a respectable girl, you’ll be able in time to get married and become a happy woman.”

“Married!” cried Lina. “And who is going to marry me?” She laughed, loud and hard. “Who has such an intention with me? Haven’t I always been treated as an exception? Oh, I’ve seen how little respected I am and how men take many more liberties with me than with other girls. Even when I was scarcely more than a child... I didn’t want to tell you... You – why, you were my mother!”

“I’m not your mother. Here are the papers which establish your birth.”

Lina glanced through the legal documents; she was not very interested in them. She was thinking of daybreak hours in her earliest childhood and of the tears her foster-mother had cried over her.

Miss Evi asked if Lina was convinced.

“Yes, yes – that’s how it’s always done...”

“Lina – ! *You* didn’t come up with such an idea!”

Lina blushed. “Now you will, of course, want to disown me,” she murmured indistinctly.

Miss Evi had caught her words. She was silent, as before an inexorable fate.

- That evening, Lina had disappeared. She had left the town with the Australian.

Miss Evi lived several more years. It rarely happens that a grief fells people with the first, powerful stroke. In most cases it secretly and maliciously bores its path until it finds a weak spot somewhere, from which it can gnaw away at the life. Then, certainly, it does not take much longer, and the person in question is said to have died of this or that disease.

### **The Pet-Sinner**

“Who are you fetching, Andres?”

“Our lady’s brother, the Turk!”

“Turk –? – God forbid!”

“They say he’s a Turk, or a Pasha, or something like that,” the old coachman mumbled. “Say he’s got on in the world.”

The train roared in. It stopped for a minute; a peasant woman with many baskets and a tall, slim gentleman alighted from it. A suitcase and a hatbox were flung roughly to the ground from the luggage-coach. Then it

continued on with a whistling, hissing and rattling.

“Uncle Hubert, Uncle Hubert!” a couple of boys cried, and they rushed towards the traveller, staring at his face with curiosity while he kissed them.

The porter remained standing at the coach door, after he had lifted the suitcase onto the coach and received his reward, to have a proper look at the stranger.

A Pasha – a Turk! Nobody had ever seen the like here.

“Good evening, Pasha,” old Andres said respectfully, raising his top-hat.

“Well, well, Andres, still on the road?” The arrival looked amiably into the red-cheeked face which laughed down at him from the box-seat of the venerable large coach.

He felt rather moved. It really was pleasant to return from the stupid, confused, agitating life out there to the bosom of one’s family.

The rock-roses were black and frozen in the small station-garden. The autumn wind shook the last red leaves from the maple trees on the high road and flew whistling over the fields of stubble, where there was nothing left to be destroyed. The Pasha turned up his coat collar and wrapped himself, by way of precaution, in his English travelling rug. The pains of incipient gout twitched through his limbs. He could also feel his liver again. Karlsbad had helped but little.

Oh well, one can’t live without *some* punishment.

Hopefully his relatives had put the heating on by now.

He had not been free from worry about the reception his brother-in-

law and sister would give him. He did have strong confidence in the power of his personality, but he also knew that they had learned certain things about him which tend not to be especially conducive to family love. Since, however, he had heard the respectful, "Good evening, Pasha," of the old coachman, he could look forward to what was to come with his mind at rest. Their having sent his nephews for the first greeting was a surprising proof of trust.

The two boys respectfully held their uncle's hand luggage on their knees: a colourful air-cushion, the travelling bag, a stick tied up in a long bundle, the knob of which was adorned with turquoises, inlaid pipe stems, and a whip of hippopotamus-hide.

All these things gave off the same exotic scent that clung to the uncle's clothes and his red fez and which sent the Pomeranian country boys into a transport of ever-increasing admiration.

Had their uncle by any chance flogged slaves with the bull-whip?

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Hubert Reissner had been the black sheep of the family in his youth. When his mother was at a complete loss what to do with the lazy, frivolous, and yet so amiable lad, her daughter's husband took him into his business. He did this readily. Because it was often necessary for him to undertake long journeys, he hoped to train his relative to become a support in the times of his absence. People had told him about some of handsome Hubert's mad escapades but had concealed others. After all, one had to go easy on the poor young man. The elder son-in-law, who was in on every secret because the mother lived in his house, gave this tactic his complete

approval. He thought: Hubert's self-confidence would suffer if he constantly read a silent reproach for his life in the eyes of those around him. Also, too great candour would perhaps prevent brother-in-law Wichern from employing Hubert in his office.

It seemed to have been a wise move. Hubert gave the impression of being diligent and content. Apart from the small sums that his family sent him every now and then, he did not ask for money. It was a very pleasant state of affairs.

When several years had passed and Hubert had come to occupy the position of a signing clerk in the office, his brother-in-law dismissed him all of a sudden. And it happened during the war, when he could well imagine how difficult it would be for a young man to find another job.

He never gave the family a reason for his conduct, and so they were certainly within their rights to regard him as cruel and capricious.

Hubert now had to perforce spend several months with his mother in the house of Upper Bailiff Tannenhofer. Through his amiable, gentle nature and his sombre melancholy at his hopes in life foundering anew, he made himself many friends on the estate. When he finally departed to seek his fortune in Turkey, his old mother missed his gentle hand-kisses and his tender little attentions. His brother-in-law missed him at the hunt, and sister Caroline as accompanist to her singing. His niece Elizabeth wept silent tears for him, and the chambermaid wept much more bitterly but did not let this show in front of her master and mistress.

Hubert invariably said, when his sudden dismissal was brought up reprovingly in conversation, that brother-in-law Wichern had had to cut

down on his staff in wartime, his affairs were not going so well as it seemed. But people said: In that case, he should have begun by dismissing strangers. The family had to stick together twice as firmly in hard times. What promises he had given his mother-in-law when Hubert was entrusted to him. And how had he kept them?

Hubert's hints were confirmed when the merchant Wichern died not too long afterwards. Apart from a small life assurance, there was almost no capital to be found on which his widow and children could have lived. That was incomprehensible given the flourishing state of his business. He must have spent far more than his means could afford.

His wife, to have a support in her sad situation, moved into the village in which Caroline's husband had taken a lease on the royal demesne. She had always been extraordinarily spoiled by her husband. The great misfortune which broke over her left her confused and aghast. She did not even notice how the family considerably intimated to her that it might perhaps be better if she chose another place to live, where her children and she herself would not feel the constant, painful difference between the penury that awaited her and the affluence which reigned on the official estate. The family of Upper Bailiff Tannenhofer were respectable and still rigidly Christian in their thinking. In the towns, and in the government also, a liberal bent prevailed, but the Upper Bailiff knew that it was favourably viewed from above when "the land" faithfully clung to old customs and to the old church doctrine. The honourable Upper Bailiff, who had a reputation for great charitableness, enjoyed an exceptional respect in the province. His advice and his judgement were often obtained and

valued very highly. He consequently considered it his duty to stand by his sister-in-law's side in these times of tribulation with this solemn and wise advice:

“Whatever happens, dear Clara,” he told her, “you absolutely must manage on your pension. Do not let any circumstances ever mislead you to borrow money from anyone. That is the beginning of inevitable ruin.”

The Upper Bailiff did not exactly know how much his sister-in-law's pension came to, but that did not concern him at all. He simply wanted to emphatically point out to her the consequences of her previous, frivolous lifestyle. His brother-in-law's books had been found in such remarkable disorder that he could not refrain from making particular mention of this.

The widow had kept silent up to then. She had the same respect for her brother-in-law as most other people and was too tired to comprehend much of his good advice. But when he came to talk about her husband's business circumstances, she began, with a trembling voice, to tell him a story which he did not entirely understand (and he did not ask for the details very much), but which nevertheless made him silent and pensive, indeed, almost a little embarrassed.

His wife then ordered their children not to say the name of Uncle Hubert in front of Aunt Clara as much as previously.

But that had been many years ago. If Hubert had been very much to blame, a complete change of heart must however have occurred in him since that time. He had made a good career. At any rate, so high a position as that of a Pasha in Turkey would only be entrusted to a man in whose honesty and competence one had every faith.

One day, Mr. Tannenhofer walked towards his wife with a letter from Pasha Reissner in his hand and informed her, in his considered and dignified way of speaking, that her brother Hubert intended to visit Karlsbad this summer for his weakened health, and then he continued: "I think we shall invite him to have his follow-up cure here, with us!"

His wife looked up at him in joyful surprise, and reached for his hand and kissed it. Caroline was so happy that her husband had finally let leniency overcome his strict sense of uprightness.

"It will of course greatly upset poor Clara again; she takes everything so emotionally," the Upper Bailiff said reflectively.

His wife interrupted him.

"She ought to get over her resentment and learn to forgive. I think, Adolf, we must give her the opportunity to do so."

At the prospect of Hubert's visit, Mrs. Tannenhofer felt an excitement that was quite foreign to her normally calm, happy temperament. She had always been very fond of her brother, even if her husband and children naturally came first. For that reason, it had often worried her to know he was in a land where he could not enter a church. The missionaries whom she readily accommodated always had much to tell of the degradations and vices which were in vogue among the infidel peoples. Had Hubert always completely avoided these?

One thought tormented her terribly: she had once heard that the Sultan heaped special honours on those who renounced their faith and formally worshipped the false prophet Mohammed ... And her brother had become Pasha ...

It was certainly a providence of the Saviour that He brought Hubert back to his homeland just now, into a Christian house, whose influence would not be lost on him.

He should be made to feel very comfortable, very much at home. He should feel at his ease, as at the time when his dear mother was still alive. How good it was that Elizabeth was present just now. Her husband was away on manoeuvres. Elizabeth had always had a great influence over her uncle. Mrs. Tannenhofer, in her eagerness for the wisdom of Heaven, felt one with her daughter.

If Hubert would only accept her husband's invitation. He might possibly believe that they had induced Clara to bring that foolish lawsuit against him some time before. And yet her husband had had absolutely no idea of Clara's intentions. Of course, it ended as he had predicted to his sister-in-law: she had to withdraw her suit for lack of the money necessary to carry through with the case. It was truly nasty of Clara to want to bring so unpleasant a family matter to public notice.

Mrs. Tannenhofer asked her husband if he could avoid mentioning the difference of opinion on this matter that existed between him and Mrs. Wichern in his letter. For it would be a pity if the Pasha's visit were to founder on a misunderstanding. The Upper Bailiff had already mentioned it.

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They all received the beloved stranger down in the high vaulted hallway. At the front, plump Mrs. Tannenhofer with her friendly brown eyes; beside her, the delicate, slightly pale young Mrs. Elizabeth, her youngest

baby on her arm. Then the Upper Bailiff himself, leading his eldest grandchild by the hand, and a couple of Clara's children who were there by chance. It was a charming picture: the stately family-circle and the old, faithful servants in the background. Only the chambermaid from that former time was no longer there; she had shown herself unworthy of service in a respectable Christian house.

Pasha Reissner embraced his sister. He had grown really old, his full beard was substantially mixed with grey, and the formerly so shining, seductive eyes had sunk deep into their sockets. He looked emaciated and ill, the poor soul. Alone in a foreign land, without loved ones, without family... Oh, it was hard.

He was quite silent, so greatly moved was he by this reception. Without a word, he kissed Elizabeth's hand. Then he looked at her sadly and also kissed the little hand of the rosy child on her arm.

"He'd have liked her to be his," the faithful old servant said to the housekeeper in the background. "Do you remember the two of them always being stuck together in the library? But if you have nothing, you are nothing! Our master has no love for such people."

How it actually came about, would be hard to discover: by the very next morning, it was no longer a secret for anyone that the Pasha had a very dark history behind him. Mrs. Tannenhofer had been seen bitterly crying after her brother had retired to the best guest-room, which looked onto the park. It was a strong proof of the earnestness of the Christianity which reigned in the house that his relatives received the Pasha with such love.

It was true that nobody knew what his crime had actually been, not even the private tutor or the old companion who received the bread of charity. But this made it doubly attractive and offered all the richer matter for the imagination and for conversation. It was a highly pleasant stimulation amidst the monotony of country life.

Such an exotic air wafted around the Pasha. His youthful sins had surely been of a wild, exotic nature – such as one read about in books, but certainly not in those which the Upper Bailiff's wife distributed among her children and servants from time to time.

Had the Pasha completely shed his interesting old Adam, or would some of it come to light here? A certain excited anticipation was perceptible everywhere. Somebody had asserted that the Pasha, being a Turk, was sure to have a harem. Mrs. Elizabeth had firmly countered this rumour. But since then, to her own torment, her imagination had been constantly filled with a chaos of images of white and brown women in silk garments with golden jewellery on their naked arms, which they all stretched out in desire towards the Pasha.

For this reason, Elizabeth could not take unalloyed delight in the beautiful embroideries Uncle Hubert had brought for her. "In memory of a dear old friendship," he said quietly while presenting her with them. He always spoke quietly and with a certain reverence to her.

A genuine Persian carpet for the living-room delighted the Upper Bailiff's wife. How nice of Hubert to have thought that the old, green carpet must have finally become shabby and worn-out.

To his brother-in-law, who had aristocratic inclinations, he promised

the arrival of an Abyssinian hunting dog, and the bull-whips were meant for his nephews. The Pasha had provided for everyone. No – whatever may have happened – his heart had remained soft and unspoilt! And how good it was that his life had been as bearable as these beautiful presents evinced!

In spite of the commotion and diversion that the unpacking and reception of the remarkable exotic gifts entailed, Mrs. Tannenhofer did not lose sight of her purpose. She had, on the previous day, obtained advice at the priest's as well as strength from frequent prayer; and she was, moreover, a woman who knew very well how to get her way. It was not easy to draw the Pasha away from her sons, who clung to him like chains and bombarded him with the strangest questions about the customs of the Orient and the adventures of his life. Nevertheless, she found an opportunity to invite him for a discussion in her room on the very day of his arrival.

The Pasha followed her obediently. Although he made as if to smuggle his nephews in, he took the hint that this was not on.

The Upper Bailiff's wife did not spare her brother. Insistently, but calmly and with sisterly mildness, she held his sin up before his eyes – the sin which no judge had punished but which remained none the less, which could only be wiped out by repentance and atonement.

She cried large tears during this, good, fat Mrs. Tannenhofer, for it was terrible to think that her brother's conscience was tormented by a trespass which the law punished with prison.

And not only this sin! She also pointed a little to that girl who had

sadly gone to ruin later – Even if she should have protected herself – her brother could not be entirely acquitted of guilt. Before the Lord, the All-knowing, only truth counts, the whole truth!

Thank God, Hubert was not unrepentant. Sitting beside his sister on the sofa, in her cosy study, he confessed in frank, manly words the full extent of that past deed of which Clara had accused him. He said in words which trembled with pain that all success, all happiness was as nothing compared to a pure, spotless conscience. And he kneeled down, in spite of the gout in his feet and his other afflictions, before his sister Caroline. She reminded him so much of their late mother, he said, and taking her hands in his, he covered them with kisses and asked her to forgive him.

“If only one could make amends for the past,” he murmured, his head bowed.

Mrs. Tannenhofer looked down at his curly hair. It had gone grey, and a bald spot was visible in the centre of the crown. It overwhelmed her to see how an aging man, a gentleman in authority, from whom the world did not withhold its honours, humbled himself – not before her – God save her from such thoughts – but before the Lord, whom he had insulted. But does God not forgive the greatest sinners also? Indeed, precisely those most preferably?

The Upper Bailiff’s wife almost felt a certain pride in her brother’s deed being an actual crime – as if it gave him a right to a particularly soft and honoured seat in Heaven. Her innermost self was all aglow with love for this man who had sunk low. She raised him up like a mother and pressed his head to her full, warm breast. She forgave him with all her

heart. She forgave him everything, everything.

Her beloved brother was going to learn to relish the sweet peace of the children of God.

The Upper Bailiff's wife inquired as to the state of the Pasha's creed. To her great relief, she learned that he had been very lukewarm, indeed, cold, these many years, but had never apostasised from the gospel. He declared himself ready and willing to participate in the walk to church and the Communion Service on the following morning.

Somewhat hesitantly, Mrs. Tannenhofer began to come out with the information that Clara would be joining them as well. The Pasha knitted his eyebrows and his teeth clenched the tip of his beard.

But Mrs. Tannenhofer spiritedly continued with her peace mission: "I have invited Clara for this evening. One should not let the sun go down on one's wrath,<sup>1</sup> and the enmity between the two of you has lasted for years now. That must not be among Christians. The poor woman will feel better too when she has given you her hand in reconciliation. She is unfortunately very bitter and does not bear the destiny laid upon her with the requisite patience and with gratitude to the Lord for the treasure he has left her, her healthy children."

The Upper Bailiff's wife was hot from talking. But it had not been in vain. The Pasha expressed his readiness to forgive Clara Wichern and forget what was past.

"But all of you have much to forgive *me*..." he murmured indistinctly.

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 4:26.

Men were always rather embarrassed during such scenes as these. One could not expect any more. Mrs. Tannenhofer was blissfully happy.

It flew through her mind that she had promised Clara to talk with their brother about a business matter as soon as the opportunity presented itself. – But now – in this hallowed hour, when she had led his soul towards the Lord, there should be no talk of sordid money-matters.

Poor Clara – it was a constant annoyance to the Upper Bailiff's wife that she placed so much value on money, and double-counted the pennies so pettily. Oh, if people would only realise that the Lord provides for His beloved in sleep!<sup>2</sup>

Mrs. Tannenhofer's plump, motherly face beamed with joy when, her arm laid around her brother's shoulders, she walked out of her study back into the common parlour.

She made a heartfelt sign to her daughter Elizabeth. God had given her a soul and she had carried through her will.

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Mrs. Wichern lived on the upper floor of the village grocer's. There was a smell of cabbage in her living-room, for she cooked in the stove to save fuel. In addition, the woollen stockings and the boys' boots, which were drying on the stove, gave off a nasty odour. The boys were doing their homework at the table. They had brought their mother the invitation from her sister Tannenhofer and they spoke enthusiastically about the Pasha.

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<sup>2</sup> Psalm 127:2.

“I can remember when he was in our house,” one of them said importantly.

“Mama, I’m supposed to take Aunt Caroline an answer,” said the other one. He was eager to see the interesting uncle again.

Mrs. Wichern stood undecided in the centre of the room, looking continually down at an ink-mark on the floor.

“Will you go, Mama?” her daughter asked, while ironing laundry in the same little room. She wore a cast-off grey raincoat of her cousin Elizabeth as her house dress. She was a girl with a pretty head, but so thin that her limbs formed sharp, pointed edges with every movement she made. She could not stand cabbage. And then her mother often bought horse-flesh in secret – the boys did not know, but she had noticed and could partake of only a little of it.

Mrs. Wichern suddenly looked at the wall clock and asked, in some agitation, “Shouldn’t Schmidt’s boys have been home long ago?”

At that same moment her two eldest sons, who attended the grammar school in the town, came thudding up the stairs. They charged in at the door and Ludwig rushed up to his mother with the question if he could take drawing-class.

“What made you think of that?” Mrs. Wichern asked sternly. “You shouldn’t take on even more distractions.” Her voice suddenly changed and became lachrymose. “You’ll have no chance of being moved up a form if you gad about so much. And now drawing-class of all things...”

“The class teacher suggested it to me himself,” the boy said, turning red with pride. “He said I had talent, proper talent!”

Mrs. Wichern looked at her son in alarm.

Another new difficulty! Yes, there was talent at drawing in her husband's family...

She stared at her children with distrust, almost with enmity. Another one of them was going to want to take music lessons, were they?

However could she make it possible, however struggle her way through all the demands that confronted her? When she lay dead-tired in bed in the evening, she began to count and to consider where else she could make savings. Then she counted and counted, until she lay there bathed in sweat and the numbers actually assumed form before her eyes and danced around her bed and past her face. And when she fell asleep, the numbers were there again, tormenting her. She had to do a calculation for her brother-in-law Tannenhofer – something or other, she did not know what – she could not solve the problem, and he said: "Before all else, dear Clara, take care never to borrow money from anyone. That is the beginning of ruin." At the same time, she knew that she wanted to approach him for *money*.

She had not done so yet. But even in the clear light of day, and with a clear head, she saw the moment when she would have to do it moving ever closer.

"I have told you often enough that we have nothing left over for private lessons," she answered her son. Her face took on a hard, icy expression. Not knowing what else to do, she walked out.

Her daughter turned down the corners of her mouth in scorn.

"You didn't need to start on about that," she said, violently running

the coal iron over the embroidered linen.

“Well, you can only try,” the boy grumbled, and he threw his books down onto the table with a crash.

You can only try, the girl thought with bitterness. She had led her mother on to the unhappy lawsuit. She had imagined that the law is the law, and if they could only get something out of the Pasha, she would be able to take her teacher’s exam. Her relatives on the estate thought, indeed, that a girl best found occasion to be useful at home and did not need to seek any other vocation. – If only it had not been so joyless at home.

It was now a long time since she had resigned herself to everything and saw her whole life before her like a long, monotonous, dusty road. By the time her brothers were in a position to care for themselves, her youth would be over. She had often figured this out. But it didn’t make any difference, for no man would think of marrying her anyway.

Mrs. Wichern had taken a dust-cloth and, in order to have a pretext to remain alone, began to dust in her better room. She still possessed a better room with a real sofa and a carved cabinet from the good old time. But here the heating was put on only when her relatives from the estate came to visit. It was now, with the stormy November weather, so cold inside that her fingers went numb and an unpleasant, icy feeling crept down her back.

She had to make a resolve. Yet her thoughts were so tired and confused that she rubbed the dirty duster senselessly back and forth over the embroidered tablecloth.

This sudden appearance of her brother Hubert had stirred up everything in the past which the many demands of the present had gradually pushed into the background.

A dull astonishment tormented the widow at his being received so cordially up on the estate, he who...

Oh yes, it was written in the Bible that one must forgive – in the Bible, from which she had so often found comfort in the passages where the talk was of the relievers of widows and the fatherless, and of those who sowed in tears and reaped in joy.<sup>3</sup>

A tender feeling crept over her. Hubert was her brother, after all. They had been small together and now they were old and tired, and he was ill... If he would only show that he wanted to make some recompense!

If only he had not denied everything in that unhappy lawsuit. And on top of that, to heap the accusation of running his business in a disorderly manner on her husband! And that of extortion on her! Oh, that lawsuit, how often she had regretted it. Moreover, her relatives had been much colder towards her since then.

She had never thought she would receive back the large sums which Hubert, when he was working for their business, had purloined little by little, faking his brother-in-law's name on bills of exchange and other business papers. She had only thought that after he had become Pasha, the court could force him to give her a yearly allowance, say, a hundred or two hundred dollars. That would have been a great help to her.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, Psalm 82:3-4; Psalm 126:5.

But it turned out that her husband had destroyed the most important proofs of his brother-in-law's guilt. And additionally, the German ambassador in Constantinople had told her in confidence that it was perhaps not a wise move to bring a man to an oath who had the reputation of using every means to his advantage.

So she gave the case up entirely. Her lawyer advised her to and said she would be better off with an amicable settlement.

She would humble herself and touch on all these terrible things once more, for the sake of her children.

She walked up to her husband's portrait to gather her strength. She looked up into his good face, out of which the eyes looked clearly – eyes which trusted people. He had trusted her brother – for her sake.

Tears trickled out from under her eyelids and ran down her cheeks, in the two long grey furrows which innumerable other ones had hollowed there with time, towards her mouth.

“I cannot! Oh God, I cannot,” she murmured, in great agony of soul. She had an indistinct feeling that she would have to give up all hope of an allowance if she thwarted her sister's wishes.

Everything was now clearly before her again: the day on which she had first heard that Hubert played on the Stock Exchange, when her first suspicion arose. At that time, he defended himself: he used the money his mother had sent him for that. Then her husband's hurried return. Then the hour in which her husband informed her of her brother's crime, saying at the same time that it must remain a secret as long as her mother was alive. The old woman would not have borne her darling's disgrace.

And then the time which ensued: the struggle and fight to conceal the losses from the eyes of the world and to keep the business above water – the secret cares, until her husband’s strength was undermined and he suddenly perished in his best years. She knew what he died of – she knew.

“Killed – you killed him!” she yelled, clenching her fists. Startled, she looked around to see if the children had heard anything.

She sighed and dried her eyes. Clasping her hands and vigorously squeezing them together, she looked up to the heavens.

“God, God, I cannot forgive him, I cannot,” she sobbed. “Do not demand it of me, I cannot!”

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On the estate, there reigned nothing but love and peace, joy and reconciliation. A gentle intimacy, emanating from the Upper Bailiff’s wife, held sway among all the family members. Was one not going to the Lord’s table all together the following morning?

The pastor had been invited for that evening. Actually, he did not go out on Saturdays, but this was a special case. Had the Lord not commanded to rejoice with them that do rejoice? And had the father in the Biblical parable not himself prepared a feast in honour of his found-again son?<sup>4</sup>

The meal was served in the lovely large room in the summerhouse. From consideration for the Pasha’s poor health, a fire had been lit in the

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<sup>4</sup> Romans 12:15 and Luke 15:11-32 respectively.

old-fashioned hearth. The flames cracked and crackled cosily while consuming mighty logs of beechwood. The old servant had put on white gloves and threw even more severe looks than usual at the village boy in the yellow livery, who was to learn the art of serving under his tutelage, when the boy clattered the plates – what would the Pasha think of such clumsiness? It was not what he was used to at the Sultan’s Court, where people served crawling on their stomach.

High lamps poured their light over the bowls of fruit, for which the gardener had delivered his freshest produce, and which Mrs. Elizabeth had arranged so prettily with colourful autumn leaves.

Elizabeth and the Pasha came in, when the others had already assembled, out of the dark park. They had been walking a long time and had spoken about the temptations of the world. The Pasha had bemoaned the power of sensuality to the young woman with soft words, had described to her the beauty of seduction. He had, sad to say, succumbed to it only too often, but he would never stop fighting until he had gained the victory.

What sincerity, what yearning for help sounded out through his confession.

Oh – to save him from these terrible powers!

Elizabeth’s eyes sparkled and her cheeks were hot. Her whole being showed a joyful exaltation. A thrill of delight ran through her body such as she had never felt, not even from her husband’s kisses. That was how it must feel, the joy of angels at the sinner who does penance!

The pastor was somewhat nervous before the refinement of the new

penitent. He spoke as though an obstruction in his throat were causing him difficulty, and when the Pasha turned to him, he hastened to smile. The Pasha was quite quiet. Every now and then he fixed his dark eyes on Elizabeth. In Constantinople, people said that the aging Pasha could still get far with women with those eyes.

“I am surprised not to see your sister-in-law here,” the pastor remarked to the Upper Bailiff. “I trust she is not suffering one of her bad migraines?”

The Upper Bailiff shook his head sadly. It was the venerable, hoary head of a Patriarch among his family.

“You know,” he began in a discreetly lowered voice, “how my poor sister-in-law is given to view all things through the glasses of her unhappy embitterment with the world. It is perhaps not unknown to you that a – hmm – a certain disharmony exists between her and my brother-in-law. We hope to settle this, however...” The Upper Bailiff made an elegant motion with his hand, which was to express ill success and also the final waving aside of the matter.

“It is bad for the children to have, in their mother, an example of a – how shall I say – of a hard, severe disposition constantly before their eyes. Well, the ways that our Lord leads mankind are mysterious, it is not for us to intervene.”

Then the Upper Bailiff steered the conversation onto lighter, more mundane topics, and sought to learn from the Pasha if he had brought his uniform – most exotic uniforms were surely splendid? – with him. He was expecting the Governor to visit any day soon, and it might be appropriate

to wear it then.

The pastor asked, with interest, how the Pasha had arranged his domestic affairs? It was at any rate difficult to obtain the necessary comforts in those uncivilised lands.

He had heard the rumour which supplied the “Turk” with the obligatory harem, and so he had to make thorough enquiries. Should any of that prove to be true, then Pastor Kiekenbusch was not the man who would fear to defend the purity of his altar from the great and the mighty of the world and to enforce strict church discipline.

But Pasha Reissner gave him the information, with his winning congeniality, that he had lived under the roof of a widow, an amiable, cultured lady with a daughter, and had not been devoid of German family life in their home. At the same time, the two women were more than welcome to the contribution they received from him for board and lodging, he added good-naturedly.

Well, then everything was all right – the Lord be praised.

At the bottom of the table, the private tutor and the companion were modestly discussing the transformation of Christian Byzantium into a Mussulman Empire. The boys devoted themselves, with satisfied zeal, to polishing off the tasty dishes which the housekeeper had prepared in honour of the guest from abroad.

Before the Upper Bailiff’s wife there was a mighty, brownly shining leg of veal, from which there arose, while she served it to the company at table, small pillars of smoke with a sweet sacrificial scent.

The Upper Bailiff’s wife looked irresolutely at the remains of the

roast. Then her eyes turned to her husband and remained lovingly fixed on him. He had repeatedly reminded her that it was absolutely wrong to spoil Clara. She had to learn to accustom herself to her altered station in life. He was certainly very right about that. Her husband knew how to get to the heart of the matter in all things. That afternoon, for example, he had pointed out: Brother-in-law Wichern could not be acquitted of the reproach of heedless credulity, her brother had probably been unreasonably tempted.

Since then, the Upper Bailiff's wife had thought of her deceased brother-in-law with a kind of aversion.

Regarding the support which Clara hoped to gain through her mediation, she had made a distant allusion to it, but the Pasha seeming not to understand her, she had not touched on the matter again. Who could know whether his circumstances were such that he could spare two hundred dollars a year without imposing sacrifices on himself? Moreover, a refusal from him would spoil the peaceful time of his visit.

The Upper Bailiff's wife placed a juicy peach on her brother's plate and heartily clapped him on the shoulder with her soft hand to console him for Clara's ungracious absence.

Soon after the evening meal, the pastor took his leave to return home to his study. Walking through the village street, he observed a light still on in Mrs. Wichern's flat. The thought came to him that it was really his duty to have a heart-to-heart talk as her spiritual adviser. Had he not seen that the Tannenhofers would set great store by their sister-in-law taking part in the walk to church?

A preacher who knows his business possesses a rich arsenal of effective weapons. Although Pastor Kiekenbusch had always found Mrs. Wichern to be lacking in that zeal for Christianity which distinguished her sister, he could be satisfied with his success this evening. When he had exhausted his references to the boundless suffering that Christ had taken upon Himself for us, to Death, which can take us unawares with such suddenness, to the Day of Judgement, when we shall be forgiven only to the extent that we have forgiven others, and also made some indication that it was not wise to anger loving relatives though obstinacy; when he held out to the widow the prospect that the Pasha, with that generous nature which he had encountered several times that evening, had at any rate the intention of looking after them as helpfully as possible – then he loosened the foundations of her emotions. Before him there sat a completely slumped woman, softly sobbing to herself. And when, at the end, he gave her his hand and looked at her kindly, but with expectant inquiry, she murmured almost inaudibly, “I’ll come.”

On the following morning, even before he took time for breakfast, Pastor Kiekenbusch sent a short note to Mrs. Tannenhofer.

When the Upper Bailiff’s family walked into the church in a long procession, Mrs. Wichern really was sitting there in her seat among the village people. She looked deep down into her hymnbook while the Pasha walked past her beside Mrs. Tannenhofer. Suddenly she raised her head with a forcible effort. The Pasha looked calmly at her, but she quickly lowered her eyes back to her book in painful embarrassment.

After the sermon, there was always a slight interruption of divine

service. Pastor Kiekenbusch strove, it was true, to honour the old, original church liturgy, which stipulated: The community shall assist the communicants with their presence and their prayers. However, on most occasions there were some mothers who had to hurry back to their children and to the kitchen, as some servants and maids did to the livestock, while some other people took advantage of this favourable opportunity to slip away also.

When all had settled down again, it was noticed that Mrs. Wichern had left as well. Some very disapproving looks, and many curious ones, were directed from the gentry's seats, from the servants' pews, and from the ranks of the day-labourers, at the empty space in the pew where she had been sitting in her black communion dress.

It would have been such an edifying spectacle for the village people to see the family united before the altar. Clara had spoiled half of the Upper Bailiff wife's joy in going to blessed Communion.

As if by agreement, all contact between the estate and Mrs. Wichern was cut off from that day on.

Her boys went over to their cousins' on Sunday afternoon, innocuous as ever, and Mrs. Wichern did not prevent them. They came home sooner than usual and out of sorts. The family had not been unfriendly to them, it had simply ignored their presence. Even their cousins now knew how to play as if they were not there at all.

Eight days later, the Pasha departed.

Some time afterwards, Mrs. Wichern saw, to her great amazement, her sister walking down the village street, heading for her flat.

She was so pleased at this visit that, tearing off her kitchen-apron, she hurriedly ran down the stairs and embraced the entrant in the hallway. Mrs. Tannenhofer was very frosty. And she did not stay long. After she had squeezed herself down the narrow staircase in her large fur-coat and Mrs. Wichern returned from seeing her out, her daughter noticed that her mother's face was red and swollen from bitter weeping. As soon as Mrs. Wichern was alone with her daughter, she fell heavily down on a chair. Holding a wet, crushed handkerchief in her hand, she gazed silently into space.

Her daughter knew these moments full of despair and bewilderment. She calmly waited a while. Then she went up to her mother and quietly took her in her arms.

"We're to go away," said Mrs. Wichern, "far away from here. Hubert is coming back next year and wants to stay over summer. He has given Caroline a thousand marks for her day-nursery. She says she could not refuse him a home in her house, and my presence would be disagreeable to him."

The girl had bitten her lower lip hard.

"So - -" she drawled out at length, "for that – for that - -" Then, suddenly and vehemently: "Let's move away, Mama!"

"You say that – but where to? And what are we to live on in the future? Our capital shrinks every year, and it already isn't enough."

"We're used to privations. And we shall work."

"Women without help or counsel, where do they find work?"

"That is true, it is very hard. Perhaps we shall not succeed and we

shall go under. But I don't believe that. Today a strength has awoken in me, in which I put my trust. It will carry us and fortify us in the future – you and me and the boys.”

The girl spoke very earnestly. Her right fist clenched, and there was a look of determination in her eyes.

Mrs. Wichern looked at her admiringly and was almost comforted.

“Yes, child,” she whispered through her tears, “the spirit of self-sacrifice and love will help us.”

“No, mother,” the girl answered, “not the spirit of self-sacrifice and love. Too many lies are told in their name. What will give us strength to sustain ourselves and win a life befitting human dignity, is pride and hate.”

### **A Dead Man Returns**

“You see, dear Mrs. Dorrit – you cannot blame me for this – one *would* like to – My God, young girls nowadays are so sensitive and excitable... Please understand me – I would not for all the world want us to part on cold terms – our children are friends! Marie has felt so happy in your house – my husband and I are agreed that she has developed splendidly in this last year. In body and soul, I must say...”

“Professor – I would of course see to it that the young girls saw little of... of the house's new occupant. One could also, I am sure... at least, separate meals...” “Dear Mrs. Dorrit, do not delude yourself, such a measure could never be implemented. He is your husband after all – that says everything.” Mrs. Dorrit was silent. That word did indeed say everything. The visitor rose and gave Mrs. Dorrit her hand.

“I am glad to have spoken with you one-to-one. I could not write that we want to take Marie away. It seemed to me to be so cruel. Please send her to me at the hotel later. You understand, do you not, that we cannot act any other way in our child’s interest!”

“Certainly, madam, I understand perfectly!”

The two women’s hands lay in each other’s clasp again. The Professor ventured a hearty squeeze, but it was returned only weakly.

Mrs. Dorrit was alone. After she had returned from showing her visitor out, she stood there at the door, looking into the room at a loss.

A soft spring twilight began to fill every nook and cranny with grey shadows; there remained only a pale lightness in which the white hyacinths shone with a silver lustre and gave off a strong and heavy scent. It was very warm, for the heating had been turned on too high. Mrs. Dorrit anxiously put her hand to her brow; her heart beat apprehensively. Suddenly she ran to the desk, snatched up some letters, walked into the last light of day, took one after another out of its envelope, glanced at the contents, and then put it to one side; and it seemed as if a new veil of care was drawn over her friendly face with every one of these movements.

“Three are left to me of ten,” she thought. “In the end, they will all be taken. It won’t do – how am I going to manage... No – I would not do it myself. I least of all... Oh Helga – Helga...” An old sorrow groaned in this sigh and suddenly dissolved from years of detainment into a river of tears, which poured quietly and hurriedly down Mrs. Dorrit’s cheeks. They were hastily dried. Then a racket of clattering feet, of rustling clothes, of clear girls’ voices and laughter came along the corridor outside and through into

the room, which began at once to fill with the fresh and cold breath of spring. All the young figures brought it home from their walks in their skirts and in their hair.

And: Mrs. Dorrit this, Mrs. Dorrit that – Mrs. Dorrit, the storm! But one feels hot! Spring is coming! And Helga’s hat flew away! And: Mrs. Dorrit, I’ll get a kiss, for I finished my essay in advance! And: we found willow-catkins! And: we threw dry leaves at each other, out in the forest, and Mademoiselle got some in her collar and is shaking herself outside like an angry poodle!”

“But Marie, what a comparison!”

“Oh, forgive me, sweet, heavenly Mrs. Dorrit! ... May we? May we?”

“You may not do anything other than get out of those clothes and go to your work. Only Helga and Marie remain...”

--- “Marie, I have a surprise for you, your mother came this afternoon. Mademoiselle will take you to her at the hotel. She was with me a short time ago.”

“Mama! Mama? Why, what is wrong?”

“Just go, my child. Helga, I need to talk with you. Yes – Helga – the Professor would like to take Marie home a few days before the Easter holidays.”

The lamp was brought, a large lamp with a red silken shade, which lit the room with a cosy glow. Helga stretched out wearily and contentedly in a low English wicker chair, ever so slightly annoyed because her friend was going to leave early, and at the same time surveying the plate with small cakes on the tea-table with youthful covetousness.

Now Mrs. Dorrit had to tell her.

But how was she to begin?

What should the first words be?

How would Helga take it?

However had it been possible to keep the secret from the child, and whyever had she done it?

Perhaps... Perhaps Helga had known about it already for a long time – sixteen-year-old girls occasionally know so much more than their mothers suspect. Perhaps she would understand her straight away and make everything easier for her.

“Do you actually remember father?” asked the mother in an apprehensive tone. Her brown eyes looked past her daughter. “No, Mama.” Helga let out a ringing laugh. “I was only a year old when he died.”

“Yes, that is right. I had forgotten. So fifteen years – fifteen years... Of course you cannot remember any more – it was a horrible time – a dreadful time – all that year...”

Mrs. Dorrit sat on the armrest of the wide wicker chair. Helga embraced her. “My poor, good Mummy!”

And then she suddenly asked the question which she had never, strangely enough, asked before... She asked so sensibly, as if she would say: “I shall be an adult soon, you know, and people can bestow their confidence on me.”

“Just what did Papa die of? You’ve never told me.”

Mrs. Dorrit gave no answer for a long time. Then she quietly said, “He was mentally ill.”

And again a long silence followed. Mrs. Dorrit only felt Helga's arms clasping her more tightly and the soft little face burying itself entirely in her breast.

"My child," she whispered tenderly and stroked her hair caressingly, "my dear, good child."

She finally heard Helga murmur: "How horrible that is," and she softly answered her, "Yes, child, it was very hard. Finally, he could not stay with us any longer. He was put into an institution. He has been confined there for fifteen years now."

"Mama – Mama – he is alive?"

"His body was alive – his mind was dead – his soul... O God, what do we know of these mysteries? Helga – he has no memory of us any longer. He existed only in confused dreams... The doctors said there was no more than a faint hope that he could ever get better. I stopped believing in this hope a long time ago. Once every year, I visited him. He did not know me anymore."

Mrs. Dorrit observed the girl attentively while she spoke. Helga was very pale. Her lovely eyelids with the long eyelashes trembled over her lowered eyes, which her mother did not dare to look at for fear that her expression might make the difficult revelation she was on the point of making even more difficult for her. This delicate, tense, nervous creature, who was conceived by a father in whose brain the illness had already caused secret devastation, who was borne under the fears and anguish of soul of a tormented mother, who grew up to existence with an emotional life that had heightened sensibility, who was sensitive like those plants

whose development can be hampered by an overly hot ray of sunshine, a draught of air or a shower of rain at the wrong time, bringing them to ail and wither.

“My Helga!” The girl opened her eyes. Her mother saw the wild horror in her face: the fancies which were already, greedily, inexorably, taking possession of the young brain.

“Helga,” she said sternly, and rising to her feet, she stood before her daughter as an instructress. “You are a big girl, you will be sensible! Hear what I have to say to you and why I am discussing these matters with you today. Father is feeling better, much better. It is like a miracle. Even the doctors are utterly astonished at the change in his condition. His memory has returned, he wants to live with us again – at least, that is what they write to me. There is no reason to keep him in the institution any longer. We shall have him back with us, Helga.”

The girl stood as if someone had landed repeated blows on her head with a hammer, and these had completely stunned some sensory nerves. In vain did Mrs. Dorrit wait for a remark from the mouth of her daughter. She drew her close, caressed her, as one caresses a small child. She sat down, took the tall, lanky girl on her knee, and whispered tender, comforting words in her ear. And finally Helga began to cry, bitterly and unstoppably, at her neck.

Then, when she had recovered her composure, she clasped her hands together, and there was a solemn expression in her still, moist eyes when she reverently whispered, shuddering with trepidation: “It’s like a resurrection of the dead.”

Mrs. Dorrit walked out the door of her property, a neat country-house with large balconies, surrounded by orchards and flower-gardens which nestled into a hill on the mountain-road. It had grown dear to Mrs. Dorrit, as one becomes fond of every possession one has earned through work, cares, and pains. She had hoped that the income from her thriving institute would enable her to pay off, little by little, the mortgage with which the estate was encumbered. This prospect was of course now over, once and for all. The woman who had learned to govern the affairs of her life cleverly and practically, like a man, turned the situation over in her mind while she walked through the garden, which was resplendent with the spray of blossoms on the fruit trees and sent down a shower of little silver petals onto the brown, fertile earth with every breath of wind. The high fees which she had hitherto had to pay the lunatic asylum would stop. That was a relief. But what did that signify against the fact that her existence was ruined? Upon the news that the sick man was going to return home, every one of the young girls was demanded back by her parents. Mrs. Dorrit had advertised her house for sale and yet harboured the secret hope she would not find anyone enthusiastic for it so soon, for the idea of living with her husband, of whose condition she was hardly able to form an idea, in rented accommodation among strangers, was indescribably worrisome to her. Nevertheless, in the end there would be no alternative. She considered new possibilities for earning, she thought of translating, of needlework, of all the dead-end, stopgap measures for women who are condemned to work with their hands and feet bound. And yet August's

siblings considered her to be a well-to-do woman! From this side, she had been given to understand, in quite a sharp way, how outrageous it was not to want to take one's husband in. August's sister had even, when she tried to find another asylum for him, where he could have brought his days to a close in peace, whipped up a tremendous storm of indignation among the relatives – who, in passing, had never cared about the sick man – and threatened to enlist the help of the courts to force the wife to carry out her duties. And the courts... Mrs. Dorrit would have suffered and done anything just to avoid ever coming into contact with these powers again. August's sister knew this well enough. It was strange, the secret hatred with which this woman pursued her, a hatred which she had not initially comprehended, until age and experience had sharpened her sight. August's mental illness should and must have external causes: that was of tremendous importance for his nearest blood-relatives.

What could be more natural than to lay the blame for his illness upon his wife, upon his unhappy marriage! And that was why it mattered so much to the sister to now prove to all the world, to a certain extent, that there had been no organic condition but only a passing disorder. Therefore August had to return to his family. Mrs. Dorrit almost felt sympathy for the woman who had already done her so much harm in life, for she understood only too well her restless striving to prove to her husband, her children and friends that she was healthy and came from a healthy family. The sisters-in-law had as a consequence maintained next to no contact ever since August's illness had begun.

Mrs. Dorrit had been offended in the uttermost depths of her soul by

the accusations of August's relatives. For this very reason she wanted no association between them and Helga. And it was necessary to carefully keep the secret of her father's sufferings from the child. She did it at the advice of an experienced psychiatrist, whose instructions for bringing up the delicate child she followed scrupulously. And now Helga had blossomed so delightfully, she was so charming in the mixture of curiosity, roguery, and fear with which she looked into life!

Oh – if only she had been able to protect her – to continue to keep her in happy ignorance!

Her lips pressed together, a crease of worrying reflections between her eyebrows, Mrs. Dorrit walked on with quickened steps.

She was heading for the nearest train station, whither she had ordered a carriage. She was going to pick up her husband. It was embarrassing for her to meet him again surrounded by the curiosity of her neighbours. She had lived as a widow in this place for years. Now the passion for scandal and gossip, which seethes in the constricted world of such small towns, would all at once be wildly excited and keep her name, her fate circling in their eddies for weeks.

Ultimately – that did not particularly worry her. She had suffered times in which she had learned to defy the gossip and the curiosity of strangers and friends. Those times when her husband's illness began to show itself in peculiar moods, unpredictable acts and words, without anyone yet recognising, or wanting to recognise, all these things as illness, those times when his wild outbursts of rage in public establishments created bitter enemies, whom Mrs. Dorrit later strove in vain to placate.

She had forcefully pressed the memories back, she had believed them to be almost forgotten – suddenly they clearly pushed their way, in every detail, back into her imagination, filling her heart with disquiet and bitterness.

The doctor had written that the invalid had become quiet. Scenes such as the past had brought were quite out of the question. In addition, his physical strength was far too exhausted. He was cheerful and satisfied. She would carry out the care easily with the help of an experienced servant. The man might live in this condition for some time yet. All of that sounded reassuring. She did not want to worry about the distant future! And above all, she must not brood her time away in painful memories! Life was just the way it was, and that was how it had to be lived.

Ten years ago, she had passionately requested a judicial divorce – and been refused one. The doctors could not definitely deny the prospect of recovery. And the judge upbraided her with how inhuman it would be to deprive the unfortunate invalid, in the case of his cure, of a loving wife, a child, and a cosy home.

Luise Dorrit had laughed bitterly at that time, and the worthy gentleman put on a very stern and reproachful expression.

A loving wife... Did this man, who was himself a husband and a father, have no idea of the delicate and fine components which make up conjugal love? Or did he not want to have any idea? Conjugal love – how could she bear it in her heart for a man who had, for a long time, before she decided to commit him to an asylum, filled her only with disgust and horror? – Certainly – gradually, when his physical proximity no longer

frightened her, she had learnt to think of him with mercy and kindness. She was even ready to care for him from a distance. She just wanted to be free of him, just not eternally feel the fear of his return walking as a ghost by her side.

Cruel to the sick man... Who asked how cruel the decision of the law was to her, the healthy woman? And how her fresh vitality was being destroyed by this?

The cruel mockery! For him, the miserable ruin, the man who had become incapable of performing the duties of a husband and father, they wanted to keep wife and child and home for him! As for her, the blooming young wife, they left the jangling chain on her foot, they denied her any possibility of new happiness, new life, new love, which her lovely, vitality-exuding body, her yearning heart and every healthy instinct inside her imperiously demanded.

And it not being immutable fate, but human will, presumptuous human wisdom that made her miserable – that always incensed her anew.

In the end, however, she had learned to renounce. A spring bloomed again for her in her child. And with fresh youth around her, she took pleasure in the world once more and in its eternally self-rejuvenating beauty.

But even as her thoughts turned towards Helga, to pacify her mood, the thought crept into her head that she would be forced to part from her. A yet further horror, which she was drawn towards with headlong rapidity by an inescapable force. Helga – the source of her strength and her spirit – the unspeakably loved, guarded and tended child of sorrow... to part from

Helga... A pain rose up in her, rending her breast, stunning her, causing her to halt her regular steps and close her eyes until the wave of woe that was welling up inside her slowly subsided, leaving behind only a torpid, dull feeling of affliction.

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The splendour of the young spring burgeoned around her in leaves and blossoms with the power of the divine. It was a delight for the eye, the pale foliage of the birch trees, of the noble chestnut-trees between the blue-black of the spruces up on the mountain slope. The apple-trees on the meadow which her way took her through stood under the load of their rose-red blossoms, which formed such a remarkable contrast every year to the gnarled, withered old branches which they grew out from in such wondrous delicacy. And underneath, in the tall grass, flowers were crowded in luxurious abundance, bursting with sap and yet so delicate and fixed in a thousand various forms, forget-me-nots, speedwell and dandelions and countless yellow buttercups. Spring had arrived late this year and had now poured its gifts over the fertile ground in extravagant haste. The air was aglow and full of fragrance, a trembling, buzzing, breathing song and rejoicing, a sensual delight in existence which took possession of people. Everyone, enjoying the end of the working day, flocked out of the little town with its quiet cobbled streets, its grey towers and remains of walls, into the orchards, up onto the vineyards, into the forest. It was like a general and major celebration of spring. Babies in prams waved twigs with young, green little leaves, the swarming infants with their shining, merry, black Palatine eyes had their brown hands full of

flowers. The big girls came out of the bright forest-green, arm-in-arm in wide lines, with shrieks of giggling and laughter, and a fragrance of lilies of the valley went before them, these adorning their round young breasts in large posies. Coming from the town, a troop of young men moved towards them. It may have been some gymnastics club or choral society, for the foremost one was carrying a banner in the sweat of his brow. They sang and waved their hats, which they had wound long green larch shoots around, and which purple elder-umbels nodded from like feathers. And it was as if all these youths, passing by one another with amorous laughter and shouts, with the song of bridal birds floating around them, were celebrating the feast of the Goddess of Life, of Fertility and of Love. Even on the faces of the old men, contentedly returning home for their evening drink and carrying bundles of woodruff for their wives' linen cupboard, there lay a reflection of desire, and they smiled thoughtfully as, coming to a halt, they followed the procession of young men with their eyes.

Helga was sitting at home now and crying, her mother knew. She had cried very much since that disclosure. She knew no other way of expressing the turmoil of her feelings and it was perhaps fortunate that she wept. But she was ruining herself. Her cheeks had become pale and thin in the last few weeks. Night after night, Mrs. Dorrit heard her furtively sobbing into her pillow.

"I reproach myself so often because I can't be glad that father's alive," she confided to her mother in a quiet hour of the night. "Mother – we really should be glad that he's become healthy. It's such a favour from God," she had added with a moving fervour in her voice.

“But, you see,” she timidly breathed after a while, “I’m afraid – I’m afraid...”

Mrs. Dorrit walked softly to her bed in her bare feet and sat down by her.

“Tell me, mother, is he completely healthy – quite like other people? Then why have all the girls gone away?”

“Dear heart, you must not forget that the terrible illness has exhausted his strength. He is said to be very quiet and pensive, the cheerful activity and noise of the young girls in our home would hardly have pleased him.”

How agonising such conversations were.

Yesterday, Helga had shyly asked if she should hang a garland on the front door and decorate father’s room with flowers, and if she should don her white dress. Mrs. Dorrit had shaken her head. “Place a bunch of lilies of the valley on his table,” she had added after a while.

Did she herself know how she would approach him, how their life together would turn out?

Festive arrangements? – She was not in a festive mood. It was simply a question of performing a difficult duty.

Anyway, the smell of the lilies of the valley and the young leaves hurt her. Scents often bring memories too clearly to mind. The sweet, intoxicating smell of spring reminded her with painful pleasure, every year, of the day when she first came to this region to look at the villa which was later to become her property and which, at that time, was advertised to let in the newspapers. She came with Rudolf Ratgen, her true friend, who had

first given her the idea of assembling young girls around her and thereby give her life a purpose as well as raise the funds for Helga's upbringing. He thought and planned for her, to give her energy and zest for life, as it was denied him to give her happiness – which he would rather have done.

Her friend – thus did she call him – she did not want to lose him, even if they could not come together. And his remaining her friend, her comfort and adviser – he had promised her that in the hour when she had broken down sobbing before him, in despair at the inexorability of the fate which lay over her.

Oh, the melancholy bliss of those last days of being together, which were inescapably followed by the long separation!

She had bravely borne her lot up to the night which followed that day, when she lay awake listening into the darkness and Happiness crept quietly to her bedside and whispered in her ear: “Do you know now, how I would look? Do you know what eyes I would look at you with, what lips I might kiss you with? Do you know it? Do you feel it? Do you feel that you are young and healthy, and your child is not everything to you – has not been everything for a long time since?” If only she had never learned that he loved her so much, loved her so unutterably – she often thought later on – then much would have been easier to bear. But she learned this... how she learned it! Kindness, understanding, warm, tender protection, strong will – all these were in him, and wooed and begged, and she gave herself so willingly!

How she blossomed in all the hopes they had. They barely constrained themselves, they were both so sure that the law would return

her freedom to her. And then came the devastating decision. Be Rudolf's mistress? She was not made for that. She was made to be a wife who presides in the bright sunlight and cares for her husband, who has many children and watches over them with motherly love. She was no woman of sensuous fires, but warm and bright as a fruitful summer's day, he wrote to her once, and he did not want to lure her onto paths on which she would have to lose what he most loved about her, the sure clarity and serenity of her being.

Did she thank him for this? She did not know. Not then and not now. She knew only of nights full of fever and passion – of days on which she screamed out against the renunciation required of her, on which she gnashed her teeth and shook her clenched fists in impotent hate at that man behind the barred windows of his invalid's cell. Throttling him – throttling him with her own hands – that would have been her desire, her release. And she tore his photo to pieces, she stamped on it and spat on it in the fury of her despair.

In vain – the law wanted to keep his loving wife for him. Yes – if she had been religious and had regarded marriage as a mystical sacrament to which one offers body and soul as a sacrifice – a martyress, who in those very moments of rapture sees heavenly glory opened before her – but she had been brought up by unbelieving parents. What were Heaven and salvation to her!

She felt reverence for the secret of her motherhood, for the power she felt inside herself to bear new young beings who were not under the curse which her poor child suffered under. And when people barred her

from fulfilling her calling, for which she was made, in the name of God and morality, it seemed to her that they were mocking God, whom they felt moving and making around them according to His own morality which has nothing to do with that of mankind.

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Then – then the old anguish came over her again, and her heart became as heavy as a stone in her breast, her eyes truly burned with repressed tears... But all of that had been overcome long ago. Why did such an ardent desire for lost happiness rise up in her just today – today – at the most inconvenient time?

She had to pull herself together! For weeks, under all the duties which the day entailed, she hardly thought of Rudolf.

The worst time had been that in which they both still clung to their friendship as to a shaky bed on which they wanted to escape from the sea of their passion, only to be hurled helplessly up and down by its waves. Then people found Rudolf's visits to her, the Principal of the Institute, to be scandalous, and her invitations to him went out more rarely; he detected more of a rejection than a request, and stayed away. And so they became separated. It was not only what people said that separated them. They both used this as a pretext because they were no longer able to bear the tension and secret torment of this cool, sensible friendship.

Now they had not seen one another for years. Rudolf was married and had several children.

Over... over...

Mrs. Dorrit wanted to force herself to feel pity... In this mood, she

could not possibly receive her husband. She imagined his deplorable existence these many, many years. She called to her mind clever remarks of his and tried to remember the time when she got to know him and he was still vigorous and healthy. Who looked into the secrets of such a sick brain – who could know if he did not after all feel the misery, the ignominy of his condition? And what moments of despair he must have to go through! What were her sorrow, her care, to that?

But a healthy, vigorous person, in spite of all their good will, can inwardly comprehend the tribulations of all illness as little as he can comprehend death. And so Mrs. Dorrit's thoughts returned to her own life.

Now, however – she had to get by now – she could not spoil and mollycoddle Helga so much anymore. She would barely be able to retain a servant. Who knows, it might just do Helga good if she learned to work.

No, she certainly wanted to look after the poor fellow with loving care. She would quickly learn to overcome her secret horror. Perhaps they could then dispense with the attendant, whom she feared, ridiculously enough, almost as much as the invalid himself.

It was really necessary for her to give herself a rough rebuke, as she had done to Helga today.

And yet, as she stood at the small station and heard the train roaring up, her breath stopped again, and all went black before her eyes from the strength of the emotion inside her.

The train stopped. In the window of a first-class compartment, a man's round, red, beardless face appeared. She knew at once: that was the keeper who had been sent along, although August had had a different

person to serve him in the asylum. She walked over, the man opened the door, and the guard approached. Both men helped a corpulent and laboriously mobile figure out of the carriage. The attendant asked the figure to walk in a low voice, and now it really could stride forward, leaning on his arm, which one would not initially have thought possible. Mrs. Dorrit took care of the luggage. The arrival had taken no notice of her whatsoever, and she did not know if it would be a good idea to draw his attention to her. Soon they were sitting in the carriage and driving towards the villa and Helga.

Then Mrs. Dorrit could not help gently touching the bloated white hand which lay limply on the bulky man's knee and, leaning towards him, cordially saying:

"It is nice of you to visit us."

He looked at her, knitted his brow as if in thought and murmured, "Why shouldn't I visit you? I'm healthy, quite healthy, you understand me?"

"Well, of course you're healthy, Mr. Dorrit," cried the attendant with unnaturally loud and lively joviality, "I should say so! We'll be going for a walk in the mountains every day! Just you see, you'll learn to run like the youngest of them yet!"

Dorrit got angry. "Go for walks! You and your stupid walks, again and again! I have much too much to do for that."

"Well, yes," cried the attendant again with his loud laugh, "the collection, it must be attended to. Mrs. Dorrit, you should see our collection! It's great, I tell you."

At the mention of her name, Dorrit looked at his wife searchingly for

a moment, but then immediately lost himself in silent daydreams again.

Somehow, Mrs. Dorrit had imagined her husband's convalescence differently. She had thought of portrayals of prisoners who were allowed back out into freedom for the first time. It astonished and almost shattered her to see with what indifference Dorrit took in all that was happening, how little interest he showed in his new surroundings. And yet at the same time, she felt a kind of relief when it became clear to her that this was no longer a man who would make demands on life and on her.

In his room he examined the desk with the utmost carefulness, was delighted at all the drawers inside it, and opened and closed every one with satisfaction. Then he put the key in his pocket and said to his attendant: "The collection will go in there, Schulz. Do you believe the lock to be secure? One could put a chain before it as well."

"Of course!" cried the nurse. "I'll go to the locksmith right afterwards and get a chain."

Dorrit sat down in the easy-chair by the window, took some stamps out of his waistcoat pocket and began to regard them attentively and feel them between his fingers.

Mrs. Dorrit stood irresolute at the table. Helga had been instructed by her to stay in her room until she called her. Should she do that or not? Should she leave or stay? Her habitual healthy energy had completely left her all at once. She felt afraid in this great uncertainty to which she was unaccustomed.

Schulz came up to her and whispered confidentially:

"He's tired. Will probably fall asleep soon. Just don't grieve – he

never talks very much. But he insisted on going home. There isn't much more that can be done with him. But he has a good heart – oh no – like many others – he's not like that!"

Mrs. Dorrit measured the man with a haughty look. Did he wish to dare to comfort her?

"The master's dinner will be served up here," she said coolly and left the room.

She found Helga in an alarming state. The girl was huddled up on a little bench, her elbows on her knees, her head in her hands, and she flew up with a shriek when her mother walked in, staring at her with horrified eyes. And then she threw her arms around her neck, passionately clung to her and breathlessly whispered: "Mama, is it true that I too will become so – so ill as father? – Will I have to go into the lunatic asylum too?"

"For God's sake, child! Who has said such things to you?"

"Anna says it! I'm not right in the head, and that was no wonder, it was hereditary."

Interrupted by wild sobs, the confession was wrung out of the poor, frightened soul.

"Helga – how can you give even a moment's thought to the foolish prattle of a stupid servant!"

"Yes, Mama – but – Mademoiselle also told me about a family, where – where –"

"Helga – do you love me?"

That came from her deepest heart. The girl looked up at her mother with astonished eyes.

“Then show me you do now. Do not make our serious duties more difficult for both of us with unnecessary fantasies. Master your emotions and help me, child. Help me!”

“Maman, how can I help you?” said Helga meekly, disheartened and remorseful.

“You know how, Helga.”

Helga rested her wet cheek on her mother’s hand.

They stood like this in silence for a long time. The sorrow in the young child’s heart ebbed away and let her soul become calm, under the wings of motherly love, in whose care she felt safe from every terror.

Mrs. Dorrit listened to the inaudible steps of a ghost which she had been able to exorcise from her house up to then, and which had now found admission, which would henceforth live and sleep with them and frighten them all the time... Her face revealed nothing of her sad thoughts. Her brown, motherly eyes smiled warmly at her child. When she had Helga read out to her later that evening, one could have thought that contentment itself was sitting as a guest in the cosy room, where the scent of lilac and blossoming apple-trees floated in through its opened verandah doors.

Helga had asked if her father did not wish to see her, and her mother had put her off until the next morning. She did not in fact know to what extent the unhappy man’s memory of his child was still alive. Every year she had sent him photographs of Helga and received the answer from the doctor: Dorrit showed it to his fellow patients with evident pleasure. But he had hardly noticed her *own* presence.

When Helga returned from lessons at noon the next day, which she

was given by a former grammar school teacher who lived in the town, she saw her mother walking slowly with a big, strong man on the broad garden path. She timidly stayed at a distance until her mother called her over.

“August, this is our Helga,” said Mrs. Dorrit.

“Indeed, indeed, I’m pleased,” murmured the man, and politely taking his hat off, he said: “Good morning, Miss Helga. How are things?”

Mrs. Dorrit saw how colour entered and left the young face in sudden succession, how the lids of the lowered eyes, which did not dare to look up, trembled. She too felt the powerful emotion which gripped the girl standing there, for the first time, opposite a father whom she had for years believed to be slumbering in the grave, whom she awaited with horror and yet with the secret thirst for sensation which torments such young souls exposed to all the horrors of incomprehensible feelings... And now the dry, “Good morning, Miss Helga, how are things!”

“Fetch father the comfortable wicker chair,” she said, as a diversion, to soothe her.

“Let us sit down a little. Isn’t it beautiful here, where one can see so far over the valley?”

He nodded and repeated absent-mindedly: “Very beautiful, very beautiful!” When Helga brought the chair and a silk cushion to put behind his back, a smile stole over the pale, bloated face. He turned to Mrs. Dorrit and remarked, “A friendly child, a very friendly child.”

It was strangely moving to Mrs. Dorrit to see Helga henceforth strive, through small services and attentions, to arouse this weak smile again and earn the eulogy: “A friendly child – a very friendly child.”

Haughty little Helga, who was usually quick to twist her lips in a contemptuous expression – she seemed not to know contempt or disgust any longer. She tied the broken man's serviette around his neck, cut his meat, scolded him in a maternally-playful manner when he spilled his soup, and communicated with him in a familiarly cheerful way, as with a child who must be looked after. Mrs. Dorrit would never have decided on this tone, for fear of wounding the man's self-esteem, which might still exist somewhere. Yet Helga had evidently hit upon the right approach.

In the beginning, he had addressed the young girl formally, until Helga amiably forbade him. Now he addressed her informally. When he sat, out of sorts, on the verandah, until she came back from her lessons, one could see that he was waiting. When she set about helping him with his collection, bringing innumerable stamps which she had impetrated in writing from her friends, he began to give her detailed instructions. She had to stick them in the worn and yellowed exercise-books, of which he possessed whole piles, now arranged in squares, now in stars or zig-zag lines just as his fantastical whims dictated. Then his face took on a satisfied expression, and when she had done this particularly well, he promised her that one day, he would confide to her the secret which was hidden in the collection and the marvellous meaning it had. He let his nurse touch his treasures only with reluctance. Helga was the only one before whom his distrust disappeared for some moments. Towards his wife, he remained reserved, and employed that measured, mechanical courtesy which many years of education in the asylum had inculcated into him. Now and then, Mrs. Dorrit sadly wondered if, in his ossified brain, in

his extinguished spirit, or perhaps in some secret depths of his faculty of sensation, there were yet a kind of instinct which gave him to suspect that she needed an effort to overcome the revulsion, yes, the hatred, which his person filled her with, although it never manifested itself in her behaviour to him. Recently, a strange jealousy had been added to the abundance of tender kindness which Helga lavished on her father. Formerly, Mrs. Dorrit had looked into her daughter's soul as into an open calyx, with ever new delight in the fine colour stimuli which revealed themselves there – now something strange had stepped between them.

What thoughts and feelings had been aroused in Helga by the intercourse with her sick father – her mother did not find out. An expression of earnestness and maturity had appeared on the refined little face which showed that, beneath the frequently childlike cheerfulness Helga showed in her dealings with her father, there was much that moved her young soul. But it was as if a delicate inhibition prevented the girl from talking with her mother about her father – as if she felt the invisible bond which connected her to her father more closely than to her mother, and as if it were her duty to keep his weaknesses, his eccentricities even from her mother.

Perhaps Mrs. Dorrit had never felt so disconsolate and isolated in her hard life as in these weeks, when her usual occupation with her pupils was taken from her, when worrying about her daily bread caused her sleepless nights, and when she saw a development taking place in her daughter which remained hidden from her, and which, for that very reason, made her twice as anxious. Regarded in the light of reason, everything had actually turned out beyond all hope and expectation. Her fear that Helga's

nerves would not be able to stand this man who was becalmed to the state of a mindless idiot, seemed to be unfounded. The girl proved to be a better companion for the poor man than she herself. Helga was tranquil, and if her eyes often looked serious and melancholy when she thought herself unobserved, who could have been surprised? The opposite would have been unnatural. And yet – yet there sat in a corner of Mrs. Dorrit's soul a secret fear which she herself could not have described – the fear of something uncertain to which she could not give a name. How often do we remember, when some great disaster has struck us, that we had a hunch long before sober reason could perceive the direction from which it would seize us. The most sensitive feelers of our soul had already felt the dangers which were still hidden from our waking consciousness.

“Mama,” said Helga one day, “I believe father is more inwardly alive than we think. And I believe he loves me very much. You should just have seen how warmly he looked at me when I took a bunch of roses into his room today. He usually has a mind only for his stamps, but today the roses interested him. He looked at them for a long time, played with them and... he stroked my hand,” she added very quietly in deep emotion. “Perhaps he will become stronger and completely healthy one day after all...”

“Oh, Mummy, I also think: that terrible asylum...”

“The thought sometimes comes to me: if we had had father with us...”

“Dear child,” Mrs. Dorrit interrupted, “these are things you do not understand. Don't forget that father got so worked up at times – we could

not have kept him at home because there was a real danger he could do harm to himself or to others.”

Helga’s eyes widened. She said nothing, staring into the distance with an absent look. Suddenly she embraced her mother and pressed her head to her shoulder. Mrs. Dorrit could feel a nervous twitching and trembling passing through her limbs. Finally, she whispered into her mother’s ear: “Mummy, dear, sweet Mummy – if... if I ever... Oh, don’t send me there – there, where father was! Oh, mother – rather strike me dead – I am so very afraid!” she suddenly screamed, holding her clasped hands up in supplication, her pale face streaming with tears. “Promise me you’ll keep me with you!”

“Child, child – you’re healthy!” stammered Mrs. Dorrit. “Why are you tormenting yourself so? And what do you know about the asylum which father lived in? It was a lovely, friendly place...”

“Yes, yes,” the girl shouted, beside herself, “that’s what you tell me–! But I know differently. Oh – what I have learned is terrible!”

“Helga, did father...?” asked Mrs. Dorrit, horrified.

“Father – oh no, not him – but Schulz – Schulz has told me much, how strict they have to be to the patients and how the most unfortunate ones are punished when they’re disobedient, and – and – many of them are not even mentally ill – they’re only locked up – you know, for revenge!”

“Helga, how can you listen to such silly horror stories? Really, I had taken you to be more sensible and more refined. In future, I forbid you to have such conversations with father’s carer – do you understand me?”

Mrs. Dorrit spoke with an unusual harshness and vehemence; her

voice trembled, echoing the agitation she felt.

Helga kept silent, abashed. However, as she left the room, she shot a cold and distrustful look at her mother, such as the latter had never before observed in the girl's gentle eyes.

Schulz was closely interrogated. But the man felt himself to be indispensable. Initially, he denied it; when Mrs. Dorrit nevertheless reproached him – he could poison a young girl's imagination in that way – he maliciously answered: "But when the young Miss is so inquisitive that you can't escape her questions? Why, she asks questions that can make the likes of us blush – the things she wants to know!"

A look of such severe contempt met him from Mrs. Dorrit's eyes, she cried such an energetic, "Do not speak such impertinences to me!" at him, that he found it preferable to withdraw with a discontented murmuring.

He lied – he lied, without a doubt – but – Mrs. Dorrit had had experiences with young girls of Helga's age which were too singular for her not to keep anxiously wondering: How far had Schulz's disclosures gone? How much damage had they done? And yet Helga had been so closely guarded! And yet she herself had been constantly in the house and nearby!

Indeed – the walks in the garden, in which Helga carefully led her father and Schulz walked alongside them – the stamp-sticking on the verandah, while she was working in the kitchen...

In the next few days, Mrs. Dorrit kept Helga constantly busy close to her, not letting her out of her sight, nor out of hearing range. But how touched she was when, working in the kitchen with Helga one morning,

she heard heavy footsteps shuffling along the corridor and suddenly saw her husband, who had laboriously worked his way down the basement stairs in search of Helga, suddenly standing before them with the laughter of a triumphant child, cheerfully calling to the girl: "Come, let's go for a walk!"

Did she not just have to let her do as she liked?

When the two of them had gone up the stairs, a feeling suddenly rose up inside her, a strange mixture of pity and fear and sudden, savage hatred, and she clenched her fists, inside her screamed the wish: "Dead – dead – if only he were dead – he's taking away the last thing left to me! I wish I could kill him!"

And the wife, whose life had been duty and renunciation, stood at her stove – considered how it could be done, secretly and safely exterminating this miserable living remnant of a man... Would it be a crime, she thought? Would it really deserve the name of murder? Would the judge not himself acquit the frightened mother? Oh – the law – the law – did she not know how inhuman it was? One plans such things – the thought that one never does them passed through her mind, reassuring and at the same time tormenting, because she did not possess the courage to free herself and her child.

At this time, Mrs. Dorrit received a letter addressed in a hand she had not seen for many a year. How overwrought her nerves must be, she scolded herself, because a dizziness came over her and she laid the letter down before her on the table, staring into the air with wet eyes. Then she opened it and read. Rudolf Ratgen wrote that he would pass through her

place of residence on a journey with his wife and children. He would like to stop for a day and visit his old friend. Furthermore, his wife looked forward to making her acquaintance, and it would make him happy to be able to introduce his sons to her.

Mrs. Dorrit twisted her mouth into a bitter smile and wrote: Of course she awaited a reunion with the greatest pleasure.

They were sitting in the arbour in the front garden, around which a big Marshal Niel rose-tree stretched its branches with their yellow, heavily fragrant blossoms. Mrs. Dorrit fed her friend's strapping little boys chocolate and cakes, and much was spoken about their resembling his wife, not around the mouth but around the eyes and also in the way they walked. She found this herself and it pained her, whereas Rudolf came back to it again and again with a quiet satisfaction.

Later, the boys chased after butterflies between the lawns and the flowerbeds. Helga was invited to play with the children, but she refused and whispered: "Mother, let me sit still, I'm tired."

And she looked tired. Mrs. Dorrit clearly noticed how Ratgen's gaze, full of sympathy, became fixed on the serious, narrow face with its melancholic eyes, and how he sank into silent reflection.

What they had avoided mentioning in the presence of the children was now touched on, Dorrit's presence in the house. Mrs. Dorrit talked about Helga's loving care for her father, and Ratgen remarked what a fine feeling it must be for her to be able to brighten his old age for him. And some words about the miraculous recovery, and how moving it was that he

had wished so ardently to be with his family – how one could see that love for them had remained intact in the depths of his soul.

Helga was still just as serious. She said dreamily: “I would not like to recover in that way. I would far rather die. Far rather – far rather.”

She closed her eyes and threw her head back. Her mouth remained painfully half-open. She resembled the image of a young martyress who awaits severe torments with resignation.

All the phrases that Ratgen had uttered seemed very banal and foolish to him. “If I only knew,” Helga said quietly and timorously, “how it is all connected: sometimes it seems that he knows me and loves me, then again he thinks I am Mama when she was young and angrily scolds me – then again I’m a stranger to him and he thinks I’m sick too and I’ve come into the asylum. Yesterday evening, he took me into his room and told me he wanted to show me something nice. And then he took out all the photos of me, laid them on the table, and told me proudly and mysteriously that this was his daughter and she was very far away from here. I said to him: But, Daddy, they are all photos of me, and I’m your child and I’m with you. But then he flew into a passion and scolded: Stupid person that I was, I should not imagine such a thing. It was an impertinence on my part, and he was going to tell the doctor so he would be stricter with me.”

Silence ensued at the table. Everyone looked out with troubled faces at the blooming, fragrant splendour in which, every now and then, the two little boys raced through the sunshine like slender greyhounds let loose.

The visiting woman thought, with a certain antipathy towards the

formerly loved friend of her husband: How disagreeable and terrible these circumstances are. If only we had not come here...

Her husband was thinking: the girl must get away – absolutely – I must talk with her mother – she is too delicate a plant...

Mrs. Dorrit's thoughts moved with an incessancy which tormented her in a very narrow circle: Morphine is the only way – it will not cause him any pain – but how do I get it without arousing suspicion – I must go away – far away, to fetch it. Where there's a will, there's a way. But why don't I want it with all of my soul? Why am I such a coward?

Helga quietly rose to her feet and went to her father on the verandah.

Those she left followed her with their eyes. Mrs. Ratgen suddenly leapt up with a cry of fear and rushed down into the garden when she noticed her boys running after the girl. She was gripped by the fear that the invalid might do something to the children, and she decided not to let them out of her reach again.

"I don't like the look of Helga," Rudolf Ratgen began when he was alone with Mrs. Dorrit. "She could be serious without this hopeless melancholy which I noticed in her eyes just now."

Mrs. Dorrit sighed. "What am I to do? I often admire the patience with which Helga devotes herself to serving August and empathises with his moods and the sparse, disconnected remnants of his thoughts. How has the child come to have this strength of soul?"

"Strength of soul?" said Ratgen doubtfully. "Yes – if it were that. I fear it is something else."

His arm was clutched in a clawing grip in which there shook the fear of a drowning soul.

“Ratgen – do not say that. That must not be. It would be too – too hard.”

The woman burst out into distraught sobs.

“Dear friend, you are excessively upset yourself. Give Helga to us. She will be in good hands with us, you know that. In a week’s time we shall return home from Heidelberg and pick her up from here. A year of separation – what does that signify? The tragedy here must reach its end soon anyway.” The man took the weeping woman’s hand. “Luise – I was with the invalid just now, I observed him – the decline of his strength seemed very far advanced to me. Courage, dear friend! You still have a long life with Helga before you. We just have to prevent the dear girl from constructing a tragic fate for herself in her imagination.”

He called his wife over. The plan was discussed in detail. Helga arrived on the scene. Marie informed her what had been decided about her near future. Her face took on an expression of singular determination, almost of defiance.

“I’m staying here,” she firmly declared. “I am not leaving my parents now.”

Ratgen smiled and clapped her on the shoulder.

“Dear child, your hesitancy is very understandable. But I think you will bow to your mother’s greater understanding.”

Helga shook her head without saying a word. Nobody pressed her further, but it was taken as read that the friends would come and collect

her after a week.

Mrs. Dorrit made the necessary preparations, although her daughter implored her with fervent passion not to send her away.

“You see, Mama,” she said, sobbing, “I know that Father will miss me. It’s a terrible thought for me to know he is alone with that Schulz.”

“Child – / shall be here.”

“You – yes –“ the girl said hesitantly. “You... oh, Mummy, just don’t be angry with me... But I can see that it takes you an effort of will to be with Father.”

“Child, it takes you an effort of will also.”

Helga stared gloomily down. “In the beginning, yes. It’s just, I keep thinking – if I’m very good to Father, the good Lord might have mercy on me.”

“Helga – if you give yourself up to such morbidly hysterical thoughts, then it is highly necessary that you change your surroundings.”

“You think so, Mama?” the girl asked humbly. The tone in which she said this cut her mother to the quick more painfully than her tears of agitation earlier.

Mrs. Dorrit heard her frequently sighing during the night, knew that she could not sleep, and longed for the day of her departure.

In the beginning, it had been difficult enough for her to agree to the plan. She returned Mrs. Ratgen’s suppressed antipathy with all her heart. And she had to secretly admit that Helga was right when she said one time, “You can believe me, Mama, Mrs. Ratgen is very reluctant for me to go to her. I know she will be mean to me. I can feel it. I have seen it in her

eyes. Mother, mother, don't you love me at all any more, that's why you want to leave me alone now?"

She wrung her hands and threw herself onto the ground beside her mother, pressing her head into her lap and wrapping both arms around her. Mrs. Dorrit spoke comforting words to her. She almost wavered in her resolve. In the end, was she not the best support for the poor child in this time when her soul was struggling in the waters of affliction?

When, on the following day, a telegram arrived from Ratgen in which he asked for everything to be made ready, for he would pick Helga up on the following morning, Mrs. Dorrit had the suitcases fetched and began to pack her daughter's things. Helga watched her in silence, her face gone pale.

"Mama – you're really sending me away?" she quietly asked at last.

"Yes, child," Mrs. Dorrit replied with a little harshness and severity, for she did not want to let softheartedness overcome her, "your excessive, morbid agitation has shown me how necessary this removal is for you."

Helga walked quickly out of the room, and Mrs. Dorrit went on with her packing. Later she betook herself to the invalid, expecting to find Helga with him. It was a lovely, warm summer's evening; the world shone in a golden light which the departing sun poured over the blue sky with its lightly gathered, snow-white mountains of cloud.

Mrs. Dorrit met Schulz, who was putting the invalid's room in order for the night, and he told her he had left the master sitting in his wicker chair on the garden lawn an hour before. Miss Helga was not there. He had looked over from time to time, and Mr. Dorrit seemed to be sleeping.

That was often the case now; the invalid slumbered for hours. Mrs. Dorrit took a blanket to lay over his knees and went out.

He was sitting under an apple-tree whose branches bent down, heavy with ripening fruit, and the sun played between the branches in sparkling light. There was a buzzing of bees and bumblebees in the air, a shrilling of crickets in the tall grass. Mrs. Dorrit approached him. The man's head had sunk to the side and hung down helplessly. She reached forward to push the pillow under his neck, and stood there trembling, her hands dropped down...

She was looking into a face with half-shut, lifeless eyes – into the face of a dead man.

Her breath came and went.

Deliverance – deliverance...

She raised her clasped hands and leaned her brow against them.

God was merciful!

With a gentle, timid movement she lifted the man's head up and laid it against the pillow. It was almost unbearable for her to call a stranger over – such peace streamed in her soul from the sight of this dead man under the fruit-bearing tree. Tears flowed from her eyes; she was filled with a devout gratitude to Providence, which had saved her from liberating herself with sinful daring.

Finally she went and called the nurse. They had to get help to carry the heavy body into the house. The doctor was sent for as well. When everything had been done and the dead man laid in bed, Mrs. Dorrit sought her daughter. She was pleased that Helga would see her father

now, when he lay in bed so peacefully. Helga was not to be found in her room, nor anywhere in the house. Mrs. Dorrit was momentarily displeased that the girl had gone out without telling her. No doubt she wanted to buy a little something for the journey. And then it occurred to her that the separation had now become unnecessary. She breathed a deep sigh of relief, and she felt that she did not need to worry about Helga so much now or evermore.

The doctor now took up Mrs. Dorrit's time. It was dark when she escorted him out, and she stood in front of the door waiting for Helga. Then she saw the doctor return with a woman of the neighbourhood who had spoken to him, and come back up to her. And suddenly she was gripped by a cold, appalling horror. The woman told her she had met Helga up in the wood, crying and talking to herself.

"It might well be a good idea to search for the young girl," said the doctor.

"She knows the area like the back of her hand – no harm can befall her," murmured the mother. "But it would be better all the same – I'll go up."

"I shall accompany you," said the doctor.

The next morning, when the sun stood gloriously over the sparkling, dewy green summer-world, a group of men brought young Helga's body to her mother's house. She had been found in the forest pond up in the mountains. She must have lost her way in the darkness and fallen into the pond, the townspeople conjectured. Mrs. Dorrit knew better. The night before, she had ordered a thorough search of the water.