

FICTION

August Strindberg

Fair Haven and Foul Strand

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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**FAIR HAVEN
AND
FOUL STRAND**
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CONTENTS

FAIR HAVEN AND FOUL STRAND
THE DOCTOR'S FIRST STORY
THE DOCTOR'S SECOND STORY
HERR BENGT'S WIFE

FAIR HAVEN AND FOUL STRAND

The quarantine doctor was a man of five-and-sixty, well-preserved, short, slim and elastic, with a military bearing which recalled the fact that he had served in the Army Medical Corps. From birth he belonged to the eccentrics who feel uncomfortable in life and are never at home in it. Born in a mining district, of well-to-do but stern parents, he had no pleasant recollections of his childhood. His father and mother never spoke kindly, even when there was occasion to do so, but always harshly, with or without cause. His mother was one of those strange characters who get angry about nothing. Her anger arose without visible cause, so that her son sometimes thought she was not right in her head, and sometimes that she was deaf and could not hear properly, for occasionally her response to an act of kindness was a box on the ears. Therefore the boy became mistrustful towards people in general, for the only natural bond which should have united him to humanity with tenderness, was broken, and everything in life assumed a hostile appearance. Accordingly, though he did not show it, he was always in a posture of defence.

At school he had friends, but since he did not know how sincerely he wished them well, he became submissive, and made all kinds of concessions in order to preserve his faith in real friendship. By so doing he let his friends encroach so much that they oppressed him and began to tyrannise over him. When matters came to this point, he went his own way without giving any explanations. But he soon found a new friend with whom the same story was repeated from beginning to end. The result was that later in life he only sought for acquaintances, and grew accustomed to rely only upon himself. When he was confirmed, and felt mature and responsible through being declared ecclesiastically of age, an event happened which proved a turning-point in his life. He came home too late for a meal and his mother received him with a shower of blows from a stick. Without thinking, the young man raised his hand, and gave her a box on the ear. For a moment mother and son confronted each other, he expecting the roof to fall in or that he would be struck dead in some miraculous way. But nothing happened. His mother went out as though nothing had occurred, and behaved afterwards as though nothing unusual had taken place between them.

Later on in life when this affair recurred to his memory, he wondered what must have passed through her mind. She had cast one look to the ceiling as though she sought there for something--an invisible hand perhaps, or had she resigned herself to it, because she had at last seen that it was a well-deserved retribution, and therefore not called him to account? It was strange, that in spite of desperate efforts to produce pangs of conscience, he never felt any self-reproach on the subject. It seemed to have happened without his will, and as though it must happen.

Nevertheless, it marked a boundary-line in his life. The cord was cut and he fell out in life alone, away from his mother

and domesticity. He felt as though he had been born without father and mother. Both seemed to him strangers whom he would have found it most natural to call Mr and Mrs So-and-so. At the University he at once noticed the difference between his lot and that of his companions. They had parents, brothers, and sisters; there was an order and succession in their life. They had relations to their fellow-men and obeyed secret social laws. They felt instinctively that he did not belong to their fold.

When as a young doctor he acted on behalf of an army medical officer for some time, he felt at once that he was not in his proper place, and so did the officers. The silent resistance which he offered from the first to their imperiousness and arbitrary ways marked him out as a dissatisfied critic, and he was left to himself.

In the hospital it was the same. Here he perceived at once the fateful predestination of social election, those who were called and those who were not called. It seemed as though the authorities could discern by scent those who were congenial to them. And so it was everywhere. He started a practice as a ladies' doctor, but had no luck, for he demanded straightforward answers to his questions, and those he never received. Then he became impatient, and was considered brutal. He became a Government sanitary officer in a remote part of the country, and since he was now independent of his patients' favour, he troubled himself still less about pleasing them. Presently he was transferred to the quarantine service, and was finally stationed at Skamsund.

When he had come here, now seventeen years ago, he at once began to be at variance with the pilots, who, as the only authorities on the island, indulged themselves in many acts of arbitrariness towards the inhabitants. The quarantine doctor loved peace and quietness like other men, but he had early learnt that warfare is necessary; and that it is no use simply to be passive as regards one's rights, but that one must defend them every day and every hour of the day. Since he was a new-comer they tried to curtail his authority and deprive him of his small privileges. The chief pilot had a prescriptive right to half the land, but the quarantine doctor had in his bay a small promontory where the pilots used to moor their private boats and store their fishing implements. The doctor first ascertained his legal rights in the matter, and when he found out that he had the sole right of using the promontory and that the pilots could store their fishing-tackle elsewhere, he went to the chief pilot and gave them a friendly notice to quit. When he saw that mere politeness was of no avail, he took stronger measures, had the place cleared and fenced off by his servants, turned it into a garden, and erected a simple pavilion in it. The pilots hailed petitions on the Government, but the matter was decided in his favour. The result was a lifelong enmity between him and the pilots. The quarantine doctor was shut in on his promontory and himself placed in quarantine. There he had now remained for seventeen years, but not in peace, for there was always strife. Either his dog fought with the pilots' dog, or their fowls came into his garden, or they ran their boats ashore on each other's ground. Thus he was kept in a continual state of anger and excitement, and even if there ever was quiet for a moment outside the house, inside there was the housekeeper. They had quarrelled for seventeen years, and once every week she had packed her things in order to go. She was a tyrant and insisted that her master should have sugar in all his sauces, even with fresh cod. During all the seventeen years she had not learnt how to boil an egg but wished the doctor to learn to eat half-raw eggs, which he hated. Sometimes he got tired of quarrelling, and then everything went on in Kristin's old way. He would eat raw potatoes, stale bread, sour cream and such-like for a whole week and admire himself as a Socrates; then his self-respect awoke and he began to storm again. He had to storm in order to get the salt-cellar placed on the table, to get the doors shut, to get the lamps filled with oil. The lamp-chimneys and wicks he had to clean himself, for that she could not learn.

"You are a cow, Kristin! You are a wretch who cannot value kindness. Do you like me to storm? Do you know that I abominate myself when I am obliged to get so excited. You make me bad, and you are a poisonous worm. I wish you had never been born, and lay in the depths of the earth. You are not a human being for you cannot learn; you are a cow, that you are! You will go? Yes, go to the deuce, where you came from!"

But Kristin never went. Once indeed she got as far as the steamer bridge, but turned round and entered the wood, whence the doctor had to fetch her home.

The doctor's only acquaintance was the postmaster at Fagervik, an old comrade of his student days, who came over every Saturday evening. Then the two drank and gossiped till past midnight and the postmaster remained till Sunday morning. They certainly did not look at life and their fellow-men from the same point of view, for the postmaster was a decided member of the Left Party, and the doctor was a sceptic, but their talk suited each other so well, that their conversation was like a part-song, or piece of music, for two voices, in which the voices, although varying, yet formed a harmony. The doctor, with his wider, mental outlook, sometimes expressed disapproval of his companion's sentiments somewhat as follows:

"You party-men are like one-eyed cats. Some see only with the left eye, others with the right, and therefore you can never see stereoscopically, but always flat and one-sidedly."

They were both great newspaper readers and followed the course of all questions with eagerness. The most burning question, however, was the religious one, for the political ones were settled by votes in the Reichstag and came to an

end, but the religious questions never ended. The postmaster hated pietists and temperance advocates.

"Why the deuce do you hate the pietists?" the doctor would say. "What harm have they done you? Let them enjoy themselves; it doesn't affect me."

"They are all hypocrites," said the postmaster dogmatically.

"No," answered the doctor, "you cannot judge, for you have never been a pietist, but I have, and I was--deuce take me--no hypocrite. But I don't do it again. That is to say--one never knows, for it comes over one, or does not--it all depends on----"

"On what?"

"Hard to say. Pietism, for the rest, is a kind of European Buddhism. Both regard the world as an unclean place of punishment for the soul. Therefore they seek to counteract material influences, and in that they are not so wrong. That they do not succeed is obvious, but the struggle itself deserves respect. Their apparent hypocrisy results from the fact that they do not reach the goal they aim at, and their life always halts behind their teaching. That the priests of the church hate them is clear, for our married dairy farmers, card players and good diners do not love these apostles who show their unnecessaryness and their defects. You know our clergy out there on the islands; I need not gossip about them, for you know. There you have the hypocrites, especially among the unfortunates, who after going through their examination have lost faith in all doctrines."

"Yes, but the pietists are enemies to culture."

"No, I don't find that. When I came to this island it was inhabited by three hundred besotted beasts who led the life of devils. And now--you see for yourself. They are not lovable nor lively, but they are, at any rate, quiet, so that one can sleep at night; and they don't fight, so that one can walk about the island without fear for one's life and limbs. In a word, the simplest blessings of civilisation were the distinct result of the erection of the prayer-house."

"The prayer-house which you never enter!"

"No, I don't belong to that fold. But have you ever been there?"

"I? No!"

"You should hear them once at any rate."

"Why?"

"You daren't!"

"Daren't! Is it dangerous?"

"So they say!"

"Not for me."

"Shall we wager a barrel of punch?"

The postmaster reflected an instant, not so much on the punch as on the doctor's suspecting him of cowardice.

"Done! I will go there on Friday. And you can carry the punch home in a boat, if you see anything go wrong with me."

The day came and the postmaster ate his dinner with the doctor, before he took his way, as agreed, to the prayer-house. He had told no one of his intention, partly because he feared that the preacher might aim at him, partly because he did not wish to get the reputation of being a pietist. After dinner he borrowed a box of snuff to keep himself awake, in spite of the doctor's assurance that he would not have any chance of sleeping. And so he went.

The doctor walked about his garden waiting for the result of the experiment to which many a stronger man than the postmaster had succumbed. He waited for an hour and a half; he waited two hours; he waited three. Then at last he saw the congregation coming out--a sign that it was over. But the postmaster did not appear. The doctor became uneasy. Another hour passed, and at last he saw his friend coming out of the wood. He came with a somewhat artificial liveliness and there was something forced in the springiness of his gait. When he saw the doctor, he made a slight wiggling movement with his legs, and shrugged his shoulders as though his clothes were too tight for him.

"Well?" asked the doctor. "It was tedious, wasn't it?"

"Yes," was the only answer.

They went down to the pavilion and took their seats opposite each other, although the postmaster was shy of showing his face, into which a new expression had come.

"Give me a pinch of snuff," said the doctor slyly.

The postmaster drew out the snuff-box, which had been untouched.

"You did not sleep?" resumed the doctor.

The postmaster felt embarrassed.

"Well, old fellow, you are not cheerful! What is the matter? Stop a minute!" The doctor indicated with his forefinger the space between his friend's eyes and nose as though he wished to show him something, "I believe ... you have been crying!"

"Nonsense!" answered the postmaster, and straightened himself up. "But, at any rate, you know I am not easily befooled, but as I said that fellow is a wizard."

"Tell us, tell us! Fancy your believing in wizards!"

"Yes, it was so strange." He paused for a while and continued:

"Can you imagine it? He preached, as was to be expected, especially to me. And in the middle of his preaching he told me all the secrets which, like everyone else, I have kept most jealously hidden from my childhood's days and earlier. I felt that I reddened, and that the whole congregation looked at me as though they knew it also, which is quite impossible. They nodded, keeping time with his words and looking at me simultaneously. Yes, they turned round on their seats. Even regarded as witchcraft it was----"

"Yes, yes, I know it, and therefore I take care. What it is I don't know, but it is something which I keep at arm's length. And it is the same with Swedenborg. I sat once in an ante-room waiting for admission. Behind me stood a book-case from which a book projected and prevented me from leaning my head back. I took the book down and it was part of Swedenborg's 'Arcana Coelestia.' I opened it at random and--can you imagine it? in two minutes a subject which just then occupied my thoughts was explained to me in such detail and with an almost alarming amount of expert knowledge, that it was quite uncanny. In two minutes I was quite clear regarding myself and my concerns."

"Well, tell us about it."

"No, I won't. You know yourself that the life we live in thought is secret, and what we experience in secret.... Yes, we are not what we seem."

"No." His friend broke in hastily. "No; our actions are very easy to control, but our thoughts ... ugh!"

"And thoughts are the deeds of the mind, as I have read somewhere. With our silent, evil thoughts we can infect others; we can transfer our evil purposes to others who execute them. Do you remember the case of the child murderess here ten years ago?"

"No, I was away then."

"She was a young children's nurse, innocent, fond of children, and had always been kind, as was elicited in examination. During the summer she was in the service of an actress up there in Fagervik. In August she was arrested for child murder. I was present in court when she was examined. She could not assign any reason for her action. But the judge wished to find out the reason, since she had no personal motive for it. The witnesses declared that she had loved the child, and she admitted it. At her second examination she was beside herself with remorse and horror at the terrible deed, but still behaved as though she were not really guilty, although she assumed the responsibility for the crime. At the third examination the judge tried to help her, and put the question, 'How did the idea come to you of murdering an innocent child whom you loved? Think carefully!' The girl cast a look of despair round the court, but when her eyes rested on the mother of the child, the actress, who was present for the first time, she answered the judge simply and naturally. 'I believe that my mistress wished it.' You should have seen the woman's face as these words were uttered. It seemed to me that her clothes dropped from her and she stood there exposed, and for the first time I thought of the abysmal depths of the human soul, over which a judge must walk with bandaged eyes, for he has no right to punish us in our interior life of thought; there we punish ourselves and that is what the pietists do."

"What you say is true enough, but I know also that my inner life is sometimes higher and purer than my outward life."

"I grant it. I have also an idea of my better ego, which is the best I know.... But tell me, what have you been doing for a whole hour in the wood?"

"I was thinking."

"You are not going to be a pietist, I suppose," broke in the doctor as he filled his glass.

"No, not I."

"But you no longer think the pietists are humbugs?"

To this the postmaster made no reply. But the drinking did not go briskly that evening, and the conversation was on

higher topics than usual. Towards ten o'clock a terrible howling like that of wild beasts came over the Sound. It was from the garden of the hotel in Fagervik. Both the philosophers glanced in that direction.

"They are the crews of the cutters, of course," said the postmaster. "They are certainly fighting too. Yes, Fagervik is going down because of the rows at night. The holiday visitors run away for they cannot sleep, and they have thought of closing the beer-shops." "And of opening a prayer-house, perhaps?"

This question also remained unanswered, and they parted without knowing exactly how they stood with each other.

Meanwhile the report spread in Fagervik that the postmaster had been to the prayer-house, and when the next afternoon he found himself in his little circle at the hotel with the custom-house officer and the chief pilot, they greeted him with the important news:

"So! you have become a pietist!"

The postmaster parried the thrust with a jest, swore emphatically that it was untrue, and as a proof emptied his glass more thoroughly than usual.

"But you have been there."

"I was curious."

"Well, what did they say?"

The postmaster's face darkened, and as they continued to jest it occurred to him that it was cowardly and contemptible to mock at what in his opinion did not deserve mockery. Therefore he said seriously and decidedly: "Leave me in peace! I am not a pietist, but I think highly of them."

That was tantamount to a confession, and like an iron curtain something fell between him and his friends. The expression of their faces changed, and they seemed all at once strange to him. It was the most curious experience he had had, and it was painful at the same time.

He kept away for a few days and seemed to be in an introspective mood. After that, by degrees, he resumed his old relations to them, came again to the hotel, and was gradually the same as before, but not quite. For he had "pricked up his ears" as the phrase goes.

The Saturday evening *tete-a-tete* were resumed as before. Now that the postmaster had become more serious, and showed interest in the deeper things of life, the doctor considered the time had come to communicate to him some of the stock of observations which he had made on human life, without any reference to his own particular experience. It was reported that he had been married and had children but no one knew exactly the facts of the case.

After he had satisfied himself that the postmaster liked being read to aloud, he ventured to suggest to him that they should spend the Saturday evenings in this higher form of recreation, after they had first exchanged opinions on the questions of the day, as suggested by the events of the week. The subject-matter read would then provide occasion for further explanations and expressions of thought.

Accordingly, on Saturday evening after supper, while the weather outside was cold and wet, they sat in the best room of the doctor's house. After searching for some time in a cupboard the doctor fished out a manuscript; at the last moment he hesitated--perhaps because it was autobiographical. In order to give himself courage he began with some preliminary remarks.

"I don't think that, in your recollection, I have expressed my views on a certain question--the most important one of our time. This question, which touches the deepest things in life, and is treated most superficially because it is taken up in a spirit of partisanship.... I mean----"

"Nevermind! I know!"

"You are afraid of it, but I am not, for it is no question for me, but a riddle or an insoluble problem. You know that there are insoluble problems whose insolubility can be proved, but still men continue to investigate the unsearchable."

"Come to the point! Let us argue afterwards."

"And they have tried to make laws to regulate the behaviour of married people to each other; that is as though one should lay down rules for forming a friendship or falling in love. Well and good! I will tell you a story or two, and then we shall see whether the matter comes under the head of consideration at all, or whether the usual laws of thought apply in this case."

"Very well."

"One thing more. Don't think because quarantine is mentioned in the story that it is my story. That is buried deeper. Now we will begin."

THE DOCTOR'S FIRST STORY

I

They had gone off, taken the almost matter-of-course flight. An outcry rang through their social circle; people pressed their hands to the region of their heart, shuddered, lamented, condemned, according as each had figured to him or herself the terrible tragedy which had been played; two hearts had been torn asunder, two families raged against each other; there was a lonely husband and a deserted child; a desolate home, a career destroyed, entangled affairs which could not be put straight, and broken friendships. Two men were sitting in a restaurant and discussing the affair.

"But why did they run away? I think it disgusting!"

"On the contrary! I consider that ordinary decency requires that they should leave the field to the irreproachable husband; then at any rate they need not meet in the streets. Besides, it is more honest to be divorced than to form an illicit tie."

"But why could they not keep their faith and vows? We for our part hold out for life through grief and joy."

"Yes, and how does it look afterwards? Like an old bird's-nest in autumn! Other times, other manners."

"But it is terrible in any case."

"Not least for the runaways. Now it will be the turn of the man who took all the consequences on himself. He will be paid out."

"And so will she."

The story was as follows. The now divorced married pair had met three years before in a watering-place, and passed through all the stages of being in love in the normal way. They discovered, as usual, that they had been born for the special purpose of meeting each other and wandering through life hand in hand. In order to be worthy of her he gave up all doubtful habits and refined his language and his morals. She seemed to him an angel sent by God to open his eyes and to point him upwards. He overcame the usual difficulties regarding the publishing of the banns, convinced that those very difficulties were placed in his way in order to give him an opportunity of showing his courage and energy.

They read the scandalous anonymous letters which generally follow engagements together, and put them in the fire. She wept, it is true, over the wickedness of men, but he said the purpose of it was to test their faith in each other.

The period of their betrothal was one long intoxication. He declared that he did not need to drink any more, for her presence made him literally drunk. Once in a way they felt the weirdness of the solitude which surrounded them, for their friends had given them up, considering themselves superfluous.

"Why do people avoid us?" she asked one evening as they walked outside the town.

"Because," he answered, "men run away when they see happiness."

They did not notice that they themselves avoided intercourse with others, as they actually did. He, especially, showed a real dread of meeting his old bachelor friends, for they seemed to him like enemies, and he saw their sceptical grimaces, which were only too easy to interpret.

"See! there he is caught! To think of the old rascal letting himself be hoodwinked!" etc. For the young bachelors were of the opinion then, as now, that love was a piece of trickery which sooner or later must be unmasked.

But the conversation of the betrothed pair kept them above the banalities of everyday life, and they lived, as people say rightly, above the earth. But they began to feel afraid of the solitude which surrounded them and drove them together. They tried to go among other people, partly from the need of showing their happiness, and partly to quiet themselves. But when after the theatre they entered a restaurant, and she arranged her hair at the glass in the hall, he felt as though she was adorning herself for strangers. And when they sat down at the table, he became instantaneously silent, for her face assumed a new expression which was strange to him. Her glances seemed to parry the looks of strangers. They both became silent, and his face wore an anxious expression. It was a dismal supper, and they soon left.

When they came out she asked, somewhat out of humour at being disappointed of a pleasure, "Are you vexed with

me?"

"No, my dear, I cannot be vexed with you. But I bleed inwardly when I see young fellows desecrate you with their looks." So their visits to the restaurant ceased.

The weeks before the marriage were spent in arranging their future dwelling. They had discussed carpets and curtains, had interviewed workmen and shopmen, and in so doing had descended from their ideal heights. Now they wanted to go out to get rid of these prosaic impressions. So they went, but with that ominous silence when the heads of a pair feel empty and someone seems to walk between them. He tried to rally himself and put her in good spirits but unsuccessfully.

"I hang too heavily upon you," she said, and let go of his arm. He did not answer, for he really felt some relief. That annoyed her and she drew nearer the wall. The conversation was at an end, and they soon found themselves before her door.

"Good night," she said curtly.

"Good night," he replied with equal curtness, and they parted obviously to their mutual relief. This time there was no kiss in the passage and he did not wait outside the glass door to watch her slender figure move gracefully up the first flight of stairs.

He went down the street with an elastic gait and drawing a deep breath of relief. He felt released from something oppressive, which nevertheless had been charming for three months. Pulling himself together, he mentally picked up the dropped threads of a past which now seemed strong and sincere. He hurried on, his ego exulted, and both his arms, as they swung, felt like wings.

That the affair was over he felt no doubt, but he saw no reason for it, and with wide-awake consciousness confronted a fact which he unhesitatingly accepted. When he came near his door he met an old friend whom, without further ado, he took by the arm, and invited to share his simple supper and to talk. His friend looked astonished, but followed him up the stairs.

They ate and drank, smoked and chatted till midnight, discussing every variety of topic, old reminiscences and affairs of State, the Reichstag and political economy. There was not a word regarding his betrothal and marriage, or even an allusion to them. It was a very enjoyable evening and he seemed to have gone back three months in his life. He noticed that his voice assumed a more manly tone, that he spoke his thoughts straight out as they came, without having to take the trouble to round off the corners of strong words to emphasise some expressions, and soften down others in order not to give offence. He felt as though he had found himself again, thrown off a strait-jacket, and laid aside a mask. He accompanied his friend downstairs to open the house-door.

"Well, you will be married in eight days," said the latter with the usual sceptical grimace. It was as though he had pressed a button and the door slammed to in answer.

When he came to his room, he felt seized with disgust; he took the things off the table, cleared up, swept the room, and then became conscious of what he had lost, and how low he had sunk.

He felt he had been unfaithful to his betrothed, because he had given his soul to another, even though that other was a man. He had lost something better than that which he thought he had gained. What he had found again was merely his old selfish, inconsiderate, comfortable, everyday ego, with its coarseness and uncleanness, which his friend liked because it suited his own.

And now it was all over, and the link broken for ever! The great solitude would resume its sway, the ugly bachelor life begin again. It did not occur to him to sit down and write a letter, for he felt it would be useless. Therefore he tried to weary himself in order to obtain sleep, soaked his whole head in cold water, and so went to bed. The little ceremony of winding up his watch made, to-night, a peculiar impression on him. Everything had to be renewed at night, even time itself. Perhaps her love only needed a night's rest in order to recommence.

When he awoke the following morning, the sun shone into the room. An indescribable feeling of quietness had taken possession of him, and he felt that life was good as it was, yes, better to-day than usual, for his soul felt at home again after a long excursion. He dressed himself and went to his office, opened his letters, read the newspaper, and felt quite calm all the time. But this unnatural calm began at last to make him uneasy. He felt an increasing nervousness and a feverishness over his whole body. The vacuum began to be filled again with her soul; the electric band had been stretched, and the stream cut off, but it was still there; there had only been a break in the current, and now all the recollections rushed upon him, all their beautiful and great experiences, all the elevated feelings and great thoughts which they had amassed together, all the dream-world in which they had lived, so unlike the present world of prose where they now found themselves.

With a feeling of despair he betook himself to his correspondence in order to conceal his emotions, and began to

answer letters with calmness, order, and clearness. Offers were accepted on certain conditions, and declined on definite grounds. He went into questions of coffee and sugar, exchange prices and accounts with unusual clearness and decision.

A clerk brought him a letter, which he saw at once was from her.

"The messenger waits for an answer," he said.

Without looking up from his desk, the merchant had at once decided and replied: "He needn't wait."

In that moment he had said to himself: "Explanations, reproaches, accusations--how can I answer such things?"

And the letter lay unopened while his business correspondence went on with stormy celerity.

When his fiancee had parted from him on the previous evening her first emotion had been anger--anger to think that he, the merchant, had dared to despise her. She herself belonged to an official's family and had dreamt of playing a role in society. His warm and faithful affection had made her gradually forget this. Since he was never weary of telling her what an ennobling influence she exercised on his life, and since she herself perceived how he became refined and beautiful under her hand, she felt herself to be a higher being. His steady veneration kindled her self-esteem and she grew and blossomed in the sunshine which his love spread around her. When that was suddenly extinguished, it grew cold and dark around her; she felt herself dwindle down to her original insignificance, shrivel and disappear. This discovery that she had been the victim of an error and that his love was the cause of her new life and the enlargement of her personality, aroused her hatred against the man who had given her such clear proof that her existence depended on him and on his love. Now that he was no longer her lover, he became the tradesman whom she despised.

"A fellow who sells coffee and sugar!" she said to herself, as she fell asleep, "I could change him for a better one."

But when she awoke after a good night's sleep, she felt alarmed at the disgrace of being given up. A broken engagement, after two offers, would always cast a shadow over her life and make it difficult to procure another fiance.

In a spiteful mood she sat down to write the letter, in which in a lofty, insulting tone she demanded an explanation, and at the same time asked him to come and see her.

When the messenger returned with the news that there was no answer she fell in a rage, and prepared to go out. She intended to find him in his office, where she had never yet been, and before the eyes of his clerks throw his ring on the ground to show how deeply she despised him. So she went.

She stood outside the door and knocked. But since no one opened or answered she entered and stood in the hall. Through the glass pane of the inner door she saw her betrothed bending over the large ledger, his face intent and serious. She had never seen him at work before. And when at work every man, even the most insignificant, is imposing. Sacred work, which makes a man what he is, invested his appearance with the dignity of concentrated strength, and she was seized with a feeling of respect for him which she could not throw off.

Just then he was inspecting in the ledger the entries of the expenses of furnishing their house.

They had absorbed his savings during the ten years he had been in business, and though not petty-minded, he thought with sorrow and bitterness, how they were all thrown away. He sighed and looked up in order not to see the tell-tale figures. Then, all of a sudden, he noticed behind the glass pane of the door, like a crayon drawing in a frame, a pale face and two large eyes full of an expression of pain and sympathy. He rose and stood reverently, mute in his great, virile grief, interrogative and trembling. Then he saw in her looks how the lost love had returned, and with that all was said.

When after a while they were walking past Skeppsholm, bright with their recovered happiness, he asked: "What happened to us yesterday?" (He said "us" for he did not wish to raise the question whose fault it was.)

"I don't know; I cannot explain it; but it was the most terrible experience I have had. We will never do it again!"

"No! we will never do it again. And now, Ebba, it is for our whole lives, you and I!"

She pressed his arm, fully convinced that after this fiery trial, nothing in the world could separate them, so far as it depended on themselves.

And they were married. But instead of hiding their happiness in their beautiful clean home, they set out on a journey among strange, indifferent, curious, and even hostile people. Then they went from hotel to hotel, were stared at at tables d'hote, got headaches in museums, and in the evening were dumb with fatigue and put out of humour by mishaps.

Tom away from his work and his surroundings, the industrious man found it difficult to collect himself. When his thoughts went back to the business matters which he had left in the hands of others, he was inattentive and tiresome. They both longed for home, but were ashamed to return and to be received with ridicule.

The first week they occupied the time by talking over the recollections of their engagement; during the second week they discussed the journeys of the first. They never lived in the present but in the past. When there was an interval of dullness or silence he had always comforted her with the thought that their intercourse would be easier when they had amassed a store of common memories, and had learnt to avoid each other's antipathies. Meanwhile, out of consideration, they had borne with these and suppressed their own peculiarities and weaknesses as well-brought-up people usually do. This led to a feeling of restraint and being on one's guard which was exhausting; and the time had come for making important discoveries. Since he possessed more self-control than she did, he was careful not to say too much, but concealed one inclination and habit after another, while she revealed all hers. As he loved her, he wished to be agreeable, and therefore learned to be silent. The result was that with all her inherited habits, peculiarities, and prejudices she had so insinuated herself into his life that he began to feel himself attenuated and annihilated.

One evening the young wife was seized with a sudden desire to praise her sister, a hateful coquette, whom her husband disliked because she had tried, from selfish motives, to break their engagement. He listened to his wife in respectful silence, now and then murmuring an indistinct assent. At last his wife's praise of her sister mounted to a paean, and though he thought her affection for her relatives a fine trait in her character, he could not entirely place himself in her skin nor see with her eyes. So he took refuge in the kind of silence which is more eloquent than plain words. This silence was accompanied by a gnawing of the lips and a violent perspiration. All the words and opinions he had suppressed found mute expression in these movements of his lips--he merely "marked time" as actors say--and the breaths which were not used in forming words, he emitted through his nose. Simultaneously the pores of his skin opened as so many safety-valves for his suppressed emotions, and it became really unpleasant to have him at the table.

The young wife did not conceal her annoyance, for she feared no revenge. She made an ugly gesture, which always ill becomes a woman; she held her nose with both fingers, looking around to those present as if to ask whether she was not right!

Her husband became pale, rose, and went out. Several people were sitting close by who witnessed the unpleasant scene. When he came out on the streets of the foreign town, he unbuttoned his waistcoat and breathed freely. And then his thoughts took their own course ruthlessly.

"I am becoming a hypocrite simply out of consideration for her. One lie is piled up on another, and some day it will all come down with a crash. What a coarse woman she is! And it was from her that I believed I should learn and be refined into a higher being. It is all optical delusion and deceit. All this 'love' is merely a piece of trickery on the part of nature to dazzle one's sight."

He tried to picture to himself what was now happening in the dining-room. She would naturally weep and appeal with her eyes to those present as if to ask whether she was not very unfortunate with such a husband. It was indeed her habit so to appeal with her eyes, and when he expected an answer from her, she always turned her looks on those around as if asking for help against her oppressor. He was always treated as a tyrant, although out of pure kindness he had made himself her slave. There was no help for it!

He found himself down by the harbour, and caught sight of the swimming-baths--that was just what he wanted. Quickly he plunged into the sea, and swam far out into the darkness. His soul, tortured by mosquito-stings and nettle-pricks, was able to cool itself, and he felt how he left a wake of dirt behind him. He lay on his back and gazed at the starry sky, but at the same moment heard a whistling and splashing behind him. It was a great steamer coming in, and he had to get out of the way to save His life. He made for the lamp-lit shore and saw the hotel with all its lights.

When he had dressed, he felt an unmeasured sorrow--sorrow over his lost paradise. At the same time all bitterness had passed away.

In this mood he entered his room and found his wife seated at the writing-table. She rose and threw herself into his arms without a word of apology; naturally enough he did not desire it, and she had no idea of having done wrong.

They sat down and wept together over their vanished love, for that it had gone there was no doubt. But it had gone without their will, and they sorrowed over it, as over some dear friend which they had not killed but could not save. They were confronted by a fact before which they were helpless; love the good genius who magnifies every trifle,

rejuvenates what is old, beautifies what is ugly, had abandoned them, and life stretched before them in naked monotony.

But it did not occur to them that they would be separated or were separated, for their grief itself was an experience they shared, which held them together. They were also united in a common grudge against Fate, which had so deceived them in their tenderest emotions. In their great dejection they were not capable of such a strong feeling as hate. They only felt resentment and indignation at Fate, which was their scapegoat and lightning-conductor.

They had never talked so harmoniously and so intimately before, and while their voices assumed a more affectionate tone, they formed a firm resolve to go home and commence their domestic life. He talked himself into a state of enthusiasm at the thought of home, where one could exclude all evil influences, and where peace and harmony would reign. She also dilated on the same topic with similar warmth till they had forgotten their sorrow. And when they had forgotten it, they smiled as before, and behold! love was again there, and not dead at all; its death was also a delusion and so was all their grief.

III

He had realised his youthful dream of a wife and a home, and for eight days the young wife also thought that her dream had come true. But on the ninth day she wanted to go out.

"Where?" he asked.

"Say, yourself!"

No, she must say. He proposed the opera, but Wagner was being performed there, and she could not bear him. The theatre? No, there they had Maeterlinck, and that was silly. He did not wish to go to an operetta, for they always ridiculed what he now regarded as sacred. Nor did he like the circus, where there were only horses and queer women.

So the discussion went on and they privately discovered a great quantity of divergences in tastes and principles. In order to please her, he proposed an operetta, but she would not accept the sacrifice. He suggested that they should give a party, but then they discovered that there was no one to invite, for they had separated from their friends, and their friends from them.

So they sat there, still in harmony, and considered their destiny together, without having yet begun to blame each other. They stayed at home, and felt bored.

Next day, the same scene was repeated. He now saw that his happiness was at stake; therefore he took courage, and said in a friendly way but decidedly, "Dress yourself and we will go to an operetta." She beamed, put on her new dress, and was quickly ready. When he saw her so happy and pretty, he felt a stab in his heart, and thought to himself, "Now she brightens up, when she can dress for others and not for me." When he then conducted her to the theatre, he felt as though he were escorting a stranger, for her thoughts were already in the auditorium, which was her stage, where she wished to appear, and where she could now appear under her husband's escort without being insulted.

Since they could already divine each other's thoughts, this alienation, while they were on the way, changed into something like hostility. They longed to be in the theatre in order to find something to divert their emotions, though he felt as though he were going to an execution.

When they came to the ticket-office there were no tickets left.

Then her face changed, and when she looked at him, and thought she saw an expression of satisfaction, which possibly was latent there, she broke out, "That pleases you?"

He wished to deny it, but could not, for it was true. On the way home he felt as though he were dragging a corpse with him, and that a hostile one.

The fact that she had discovered his very natural thought, which he had self-denyingly repressed, hurt him like a rudeness for one has no right to punish the thoughts of another. He would have borne it more easily if there had been no tickets left, for he was already accustomed to be a scapegoat. But now he lamented over his lost happiness, and that he had not the power to amuse her.

When she observed that he was not angry, but only sad, she despised him. They came home in ominous silence; she went straight to her bedroom and shut the door. He sat down in the dining-room, where he lit the lamps and candles, for the darkness seemed to be closing round him.

Then he heard a cry from the bedroom, the cry of a child, but of a grown one. When he came in he saw a sight which

tore his heart. She was on her knees, her hands stretched towards him, wailing as she wept, "Don't be angry with me, don't be hard; you put out the light round me, you stifle me with your severity; I am a child that trusts life and must have sunshine."

He could find no answer, for she seemed sincere. And he could not defend himself, for that meant arraigning her thoughts, which he also could not do.

Dumb with despair, he went into his room and felt crushed. He had pillaged her youth, shut her up, torn out her joy by the roots. He had not the light which this tender flower needed, and she withered under his hand. These self-reproaches broke down all the self-confidence he had hitherto possessed; he felt unworthy of her love, or of any woman's, and felt himself a murderer who had killed her happiness.

After he had suffered all these pangs of conscience he began to examine himself calmly and with sober common sense.

"What have I done?" he asked himself. "What have I done to her? All the good that I could; I have done her will in everything. I did not wish to go out in the evening, when I had come home after the work of the day, and I did not wish to see an operetta. An operetta was formerly a matter of indifference to me, but now it is distasteful, since through my love for her I have entered another sphere of emotion which I do not hesitate to call a higher one. How foolish of me! I had the idea that she would draw me out of the mire, but she draws me down; she has drawn me down the whole time. Then it is not she but my love which draws upward, for there is a higher and a lower. Yes, the sage was right who said, 'Men marry to have a home to come to, women marry to have a home to go out of.' Home is not for the woman but for the man and the child. All women complain of being shut up at home, and so does mine, although she goes about the whole morning paying visits, and haunting cafes and shops."

He began to work his way out of this slough of despond, and found himself on the side where the fault was not. But again he saw the heart-rending spectacle of his young wife on her knees begging him, with outstretched hands, not to kill her youth and brightness with his severity. Since it was foreign to his nature to act a part, he felt sure that she was not doing so, and felt again like a criminal, so that he was tempted to commit suicide, for the mere fact of his existence crushed her happiness.

But again his sense of justice was aroused, for he had no right to take the blame on himself when he did not deserve it. He was not hard but he was serious, and it was just his seriousness which had made the deepest impression on the young girl and decided her to prefer him to other frivolous young men. He had not wished to kill her joy; on the contrary he had done everything in his power to procure for her the quiet joys of domesticity; he had not even wished to deny her the ambiguous pleasure of the operetta, but had sacrificed himself and accompanied her thither. What she had said was therefore simply nonsense. And yet her grief had been so deep and sincere. What was the meaning of it?

Then came the answer. It was the girl's leave-taking of youth--which was inevitable. It was therefore as natural as it was beautiful--this outbreak of despair at the brevity of spring. But he was not to blame for it, and if his wife perhaps in a year was to become a mother, it was now the right time to bid farewell to girlish joys in order to prepare for the higher joys of maternity.

He had, therefore, nothing to reproach himself with, and yet he did reproach himself with everything. With a quick resolve, he shook off his depression and went to his wife, firmly determining not to say a word in his defence, for that meant extinguishing her love, but simply to invite her to reconciliation without a reckoning.

He found his wife on the point of being weary of solitude, and she would have welcomed the society of anyone, even that of her husband, rather than be quite alone.

Then they came to an agreement to give a party and to invite his friends and hers, who would be sure to come. This evening their need for domestic peace and comfort was so mutual that they agreed, without any difficulty, who should be invited and who not.

They closed the day by drinking a bottle of champagne. The sparkling drink loosened her tongue and now she took the opportunity to make him gentle and jesting reproaches for his egotism and discourtesy towards his wife. She looked so pretty as she raised herself on tiptoe above him, and she seemed so much greater and nobler when she had rolled all her faults upon him, that he thought it a pity to pull her down, and therefore went to sleep laden with all the defects and shortcomings which he had taken on himself.

When he awoke the next morning he lay still in order to think over the events of the past evening. And now he despaired himself for having kept silence and refrained from defending himself. Now he perceived how the whole of their life together was built upon his silence and the suppression of his personality. For if he had spoken yesterday, she would have gone--she always threatened to go to her mother when he "ill-treated" her, and she called it "ill-treatment" every time that he was tired of making himself out worse than he was. Here they were building on falsity, and the building would collapse some day when he ventured on a criticism or personal remark regarding her.

Reverence, worship, blind obedience--that was the price of her love--he must either pay it, or go without it.

The party took place. The husband, as a good host, did all he could to efface himself and bring his wife into prominence. His friends, who were gentlemen, behaved to her in their turn with all the courtesy which they felt was due to a young wife.

After supper music was proposed. There was a piano in the house, but the wife could not play, and the husband did not want to. A young doctor undertook the task, and since he had to choose his own programme, he had resort to his favourite, Wagner. The mistress of the house did not know what he was playing but did not like the deep seriousness of it. When at last the thunder ceased, her husband sat uneasily there, for he could surmise what was coming.

As a ladylike hostess, she had to say something. She thought a simple "thanks" insufficient, and asked what the music was.

Then it came out--Wagner!

Her husband felt the look which he feared, which told him that he was a traitor who perhaps had wished to entice her to praise in ignorance "the worst music which she knew." During the time of their engagement she had certainly listened attentively to her fiance's long speeches in defence of Wagner, but immediately after their marriage, she had declared openly that she could not bear him. Therefore her husband had never played to her, and she feigned not to know that he could play. But now she felt insidiously surprised, and her husband received the beforementioned look which told him what he had to expect.

The guests had gone, and husband and wife sat there alone.

In his father's house he had learnt never to speak anything but good of departed guests, but rather to be silent. She had also heard something of the kind, but here she felt no need of restraint. So now she began to criticise his friends; they were, to put it briefly, tedious.

He gnawed his cigar in silence, for to dispute about likings and taste in this case would be unreasonable.

But she also considered them discourteous. She had been told that young men should say pleasant things.

"Did they venture to say anything unpleasant?" he asked, feeling uneasy lest anyone should have forgotten himself.

"No, not exactly."

Then came a shower of petty criticisms; someone's tie was not straight, another had too long a nose, another drawled, and then, "the fellow who played Wagner!"

"You are not kind," said her husband with a lame attempt to defend his friends.

"Yes! and the friends you trust in! You should only have heard and seen the words and looks which I heard and saw. They are false to you."

He continued to smoke and kept silence, but he thought how low he had sunk to deny his old and tried friends; how despicable it was to plead for forgiveness with his eyes for the performance of Wagner. His thoughts ran parallel with her loud chatter, and he spoke them in silence.

"You despise my friends because they do not court their friend's wife, do not pay her little compliments on her figure and dress; and you hate them because you feel how my strength grows in the circle of their sympathies for me. You hate them as you hate me, and would hate anyone else who was your husband."

She must have felt the effect of these thoughts, for her volubility slackened, and when he cast a glance at her, she seemed to have shrunk together. Immediately afterwards she rose, on the pretext that she felt freezing. As a matter of fact, she was trembling and had red flames on her cheeks.

That night he observed for the first time that he had at his side an ugly old woman who had enamelled her face with bright cosmetics and plaited her hair like a peasant woman.

She did not bother herself to appear at her best before him but was already free and easy and cynical enough to make herself repugnant by disclosing the unbeautiful secrets of the toilet.

Then for a moment he was released from his enchantment, and continued to think of flight till sleep had pity on him.

A couple of weeks passed in dull silence. He could not get rid of the thought that it was a pity about her, and when she was bored, it was his fault for the moment, because he was her husband--for the moment. To seek for others' society was now no longer possible, since his friends had been rejected, and she had no more pleasure in her own. They tried to go out each his own way but always returned home.

"You find it hard to be away from me, in spite of all!" she said.

"And you?" he answered.

She remained compliant and indifferent, no longer angry, so that they could talk, i.e. he ventured to answer.

"My jailor!" she said on one occasion.

"Who is in jail, you or I?" he answered.

When they perceived that they were each other's prisoners, they smiled at the relationship and began to examine the witchcraft of which they were victims. They went back in memory and lived over again the engagement period and their wedding journey. Consequently they lived always in the past, never in the present.

Then came the great moment he had waited for as a liberation--the announcement of her expecting to be a mother. Her longings would now have an object, and she would look forward instead of backward. But even here he had miscalculated.

Now she was angry with him, for her beauty would wither away, and it was no use his trying to comfort her by saying she would get up rejuvenated with recovered beauty, and that the crowning happiness awaited her. She treated him like a murderer, and could not look at him for his mere scent aroused her dislike. In order to obtain light on the matter, he asked their doctor. The latter laughed and explained to him that in such cases women always thought they smelt something;--this was either pure imagination or a physical perversion of the olfactory nerve.

When at last this stage was over, a certain calm succeeded which he was short-sighted enough to enjoy. Since he was now sure of having his wife in the house he perhaps showed that he was happy and thankful for it. But he should not have done so, for now she saw the matter from a new point of view.

"Ah! now you think you have me fast, but just wait till I am up again!"

The look which accompanied the threat gave him to understand what would happen. Now he began a battle with himself whether he should await the arrival of the child or go away first, in order to avoid the wrench of parting from it.

Since the married pair had entered into such a close relationship that one could hear the thoughts of the other, he could keep no secrets from her which she did not seize upon forthwith.

"I know well enough that you contemplate deserting us and casting us on the street."

"That is strange," he remarked; "it is you who have threatened the whole time to go off with the child, as soon as it came. So whatever I do is wrong; if I stay you go, and then I am both unhappy and ridiculous; if I go you are the martyr, and I am unhappy and a scoundrel to boot! That comes of having to do with women!"

How they got through the nine months was to him a puzzle. The last part of the time was the most tolerable, for she had begun to love the unborn child, and love imparted to her a higher beauty than she had before. But when he told her so, she did not believe him, and when she observed that he was lulling himself to sleep with dreams of perpetual happiness by her side she broke out again, saying: "You think you have got me safe now."

"My dear," he answered, "when we vowed to each other to be man and wife, I believed that I would belong to you and you to me, and I hoped that we should hold together so that the child should be born in a home, and be brought up by its father and mother."

And so on *ad infinitum*.

The child came, and the mother's joy was boundless. Ennui had disappeared and the man breathed freely, but he should have done so more imperceptibly. For two sharp eyes saw it and two keen looks said: "You think that I am tied by the child!"

On the third day the little one had lost the charm of novelty and was handed over to a nurse. Then dressmakers were summoned. Now he knew what was coming. From that hour he went about like a man condemned to death, waiting for his execution. He packed two travelling-bags which he hid in his wardrobe, ready to fly at the given signal.

The signal was given two days after his wife got up. She had put on a dress of an extremely showy cut and of the colour called "lamp-shade."

He took her out for a walk and suffered unspeakably when he saw that she whom he loved, attracted a degree of attention which he found obnoxious. Even the street urchins pointed with their fingers at the overdressed lady.

From that day he avoided going out with her. He stayed at home with the child, and lamented that he had a wife who made herself ridiculous.

Her next step to freedom was the riding-school. Through the stable the doors to society were opened for her. By means of horses one made acquaintances in the upper circles. Horses and dogs form the transition stage to the world from which one peers down in order to be able to discover the pedestrians on the dusty highways. The rider on horseback is

sixells high instead of three, and he always looks as though he wished that those who walk should look up to him. The stable also was her means of introduction to a lieutenant who was a baron. Their hearts responded to each other, and since the baron was a clean-natured man, he decidedly refused to go through the stages of guest and friend of the house. Therefore they went off together, or rather, fled.

Her husband remained behind with the child.

IV

The baron jumped into the Stockholm express at Sodertalje where he had arranged to meet her. Everything had been carefully arranged for them to be alone together at last, but Fate had other designs. When the baron entered the railway carriage he found his beloved sitting wedged in tightly among strangers, so tightly that there was no room for him. A glance in the adjoining coupe showed him that it was full also, and he had to stand in the corridor. Rage distorted his face, and when he tried to greet her with a secret and loving smile, he only showed his back teeth, which she had never seen before. To make matters worse, he had, in order not to be noticed, put on mufti. She had never seen him in this, and his spring coat looked faded, now that it was autumn. Some soft summer showers in the former year had caused the cloth to pucker near the seams, so that it lay in many small wave-like folds. Since it had been cut according to the latest fashion it gave him the appearance of having sloping shoulders which continued the neck down to the arms with the same ignoble outlines as those of a half-pint bottle. He perspired with rage, and a fragment of coal had settled firmly on his nose. She would like to have jumped up and with her lace handkerchief wiped away the black smut but dared not. He did not like to look at her for fear of displeasing her, and therefore remained standing in the corridor with his back towards her.

When they reached Katrineholm they had to dine if they did not wish to remain hungry till evening. Here the man and the hero had to show himself, and stand the ordeal or he was lost. With trembling calves and puckered face he followed his lady out of the train and across the railway lines. Here he fell on his knee, so that his hat slipped to the back of his head and remained sticking there like a military cap. But the position which made the latter look smart did not suit the unusual hat. In a word it was not his good day, and he had no luck.

When they entered the dining-saloon, they looked as though they had quarrelled inwardly, as though they despised each other, were ashamed before each other, and mutually wished themselves apart.

His nerves were entirely out of order, and he could not control a single muscle. Without knowing what he was doing, he pushed her forward to the table saying, "Hurry up!"

The table was already surrounded by passengers, who fell on the viands in scattered order and therefore could not open their ranks. The baron made a sally and finally succeeded in seizing a plate, but as he wedged in his arm to get a fork, his hand encountered another hand which belonged to the person he least of all wished to meet just then.

It was his senior officer, a major who presided at military examinations.

At the same moment a whisper passed through the crowd.

They were recognised! He stood there as though naked among nettles. His neck swelled so unnaturally and grew so red that his cheeks seemed to form part of it. He could not understand how people's looks could have the effect of gun-bullets. He was literally fusilladed and collapsed. His companion vanished from his mind; he could only think of the major and the military examination which might destroy his future.

But she had seen and understood; she turned her back on everyone and went out. She got into the wrong coupe but it was empty. He came afterwards and they were alone at last.

"That's a nice business, isn't it?" he hissed, striking his forehead. "To think of my letting myself be enticed into such an adventure! And the major too! Now my career is at an end!"

That was the theme which was enlarged on with variations till Linkoping. Hunger and thirst both contributed their part to it. It was terrible.

After Linkoping they both felt that the mutual reproaches they had hitherto held back must find a vent. But just at the right moment they remembered her husband and attacked him. It was his fault; he was the tyrant, the idiot of course, "a fellow who played Wagner," a devil. It was he who had given the major a hint, no doubt.

"Yes, I believe you," said she with the firmest conviction.

"Do you? I know it," answered the baron. "They meet on the Stock Exchange, where they speculate in shares together.

And do you know what I begin to suspect? Your husband, the 'wretch' as we call him, has never loved you."

The wife considered a moment. Whether it was that her husband's love was indubitable, or that it was necessary to suppose that he loved her, if she was to have the honour of having made a fool of him--enough, he must have loved her, since she was so lovable.

"No! now you are unjust," she ventured to say. She felt herself somewhat elevated by being able to speak a good word of an enemy, but the baron took it as a reproach against himself and recommenced.

"He loved you? He who shut you up and would not accompany you to the riding-school! He----"

The safety-conductor seemed used up, and threatened to deflect the lightning to one side in a dangerous way. So they took up a new thread of conversation--the question of food. Since this could not be settled before Naujo, which was still half a day distant, they soon dropped it again. In her extremity, and carried away by a torrent of thoughts and emotions which she could not resist, she hazarded a conjecture as to how her child was. To this his answer was a yawn which split his face like a red apple to the uvula where some dark molars resembled the core of it. Gradually he let himself slide down into a reclining attitude on the sofa, but remembering that he ought to make some apology for his unseemly behaviour, he yawned and said: "Excuse me, but I am so sleepy."

Immediately afterwards he went to sleep, and after a time he snored. Since she was no longer under the influence of his looks and words, she could reflect quietly again, see who her travelling companion was, and began, involuntarily, to institute comparisons. Her husband had never behaved like this; he was refined compared with the baron, and was always well-dressed.

The baron, who had drunk much punch the day before, began now to perspire and smelt of vinegar. Besides that, he always had a stable-like smell about him.

She went out into the corridor, opened a window, and as though released from enchantment, she saw the whole extent of her loss and the terrible nature of her position. As the spring landscape swept past, a little lake with willows and a cottage, she remembered vividly how she had dreamt of a summer holiday with the child. Then she broke into weeping, and tried to throw herself out but was held back. She remained standing a long time, and stamped with her feet as though she wished to stop the train and make it go backwards. All the time she heard his snoring, like grunts from a pigsty at feeding-time. And for this ... creature, she had left a good home, a beautiful child, and a husband.

The snoring ceased, and the baron began to employ his recuperated thinking faculties in considering the situation and settling his future. He did not know how to be sad; instead of that he became angry. When he saw her holding her handkerchief to her eyes, he got in a rage, and took it as a personal reproach. But quarrelling was tedious and unpleasant; therefore assuming a light tone, and caressing her as one might a horse, he clicked with his tongue and said: "Cheer up, Maja!"

Two such opposite moods, in colliding, cut each other and each fell on its own side of the knife. A dead silence was the result. They were no longer one person, but two, irrevocably two, who did not belong together.

Yet another half-day in wretchedness and boredom; a night with changes of train in the darkness, and at last they were in Copenhagen. There they were unknown and had no need to feel embarrassed. But when they entered the dining-saloon, she began to pass the "searchlight" of her looks, as he called it, over all those present, so that when the baron looked at her he never saw her eye except in profile. At last he became angry and kicked her shin under the table. Then she turned away and appealed with her eyes to the company. She could not look at him--so hateful did he seem to her. Upstairs in their room the corks were drawn out. They reached the stage of recriminations. His spoilt career was her fault ... she had lost her child and home through him. So it went on till past midnight when sleep had mercy on them.

Then next morning they sat at the breakfast-table, silent and ghastly to look at. She remembered her honeymoon journey and very much the same situation. They had nothing to say to each other, and he was as tedious as her husband had been. They kept silence and were ashamed of being in each other's presence. They were conscious of their mutual hatred, and poisoned each other with nerve-poison.

At last the deliverer came. The waiter approached with a telegram for the baron, who opened and read it at a glance. He seemed to consider, cast a calculating glance at his enemy, and after a pause said: "I am recalled by the commanding officer."

"And mean to leave me here?"

He changed his resolve in a second: "No, we will travel back together." A plan suggested itself and he told her of it. "We will sail across to Landskrona; there no one knows you, and you can wait for me."

The idea of sailing had a smack of the adventurous and heroic about it, and this trifle outweighed all other considerations. She was kindled, kindled him, and they packed at once. The prospect of leaving her, for however short a time, restored his courage.

Accordingly, some hours later, he took his seat in a hired sailing-boat with his beloved by the foresail and put off from Lange Linie like a sea-robber with his bride, blustering, ostentatious and gorgeous.

In order to conceal his plan he had only spoken to the owner of the boat of a pleasure-trip in the Sound. His intention was to telegraph from Landskrona and send the money due for the boat and have the boat itself towed by a steamer.

As they were putting off from shore, the boat owner stood near and watched them. But when he saw that they were directing their course to the Island Hven, he put his hands to his mouth and shouted: "Don't go too near Hven," and something else which was carried away by the wind.

"Why not Hven?" asked the baron aloud. "The shore is steep, so that there are no rocks under water."

"Yes, but if he tells us so, he must have had some reason for it," she objected.

"Don't talk nonsense! Look after the foresail!"

The wind blew a light gale on the open sea, and since there was a considerable distance between the foresail and the stern there was no need for conversation, much to the baron's relief.

Their course was directed towards the south-east corner of Hven, though at first not noticeably so. But when she at last saw whither they were going, she called out: "Don't steer for Hven!"

"Hold your----!" answered the baron and tacked.

After an hour's good run they had come abreast of the white island and a light pressure on the rudder turned the boat's prow towards Landskrona, which appeared in the north.

"Saved!" cried the steersman and lit a cigar.

At the same instant a little steamer put out from Hven and made straight for the sailing-boat.

"What is that steamer?" she asked.

"It is a custom-house boat," answered the baron who was at home on the sea.

But now the steamer hoisted a yellow flag and whistled.

"That has nothing to do with us," said the baron, and kept on his course.

But the steamer took a sweep round, signalled with the flag, and let off several short, sharp whistles like cries of distress, increasing speed at the same time. Then the baron jumped up wildly at the stern as though he intended plunging into the sea. He remembered the outbreak of cholera at Hamburg and cried: "It is the quarantine! Three days! We are lost!"

The next moment he sat down again in his place, hauling taut the main-sheet and drifting before the wind, straight towards the Sound. The chase began, but soon the steamer stood athwart the bow of the sailing-boat, which was captured.

The whole carefully-thought-out device of the baron to avoid the gaze of curious eyes was defeated, and as their sailing-boat was towed into the harbour of Hven, the unhappy pair were saluted from the bridge by hundreds of their fellow-countrymen with derisive applause and peals of laughter, though the latter did not know whom they were applauding. But the chagrin of the captured pair was greater than the others guessed, for they believed that people were ridiculing their unfortunate love affair.

To make matters worse the baron had unpardonably insulted the quarantine doctor by upbraiding him on board the steamer. Therefore no special consideration was shown them, but they were treated like all others who come from a cholera-infected port. Since their incognito was bound to be seen through sooner or later, they went about in perpetual fear of discovery. Full of suspicion, they believed every other hour that they were recognised.

No one would have the patience to read the story of the torture of those three days. So much is known, that the first day she spent in weeping for her child, while he walked about the island. The second day she enlarged upon the excellent qualities of her husband as contrasted with the execrable ones of her lover. On the third day she cursed him for having taken her away, and when she ended by calling him an idiot for not having obeyed her own and the boat-owner's advice to avoid Hven, he gave her a box on the ear... On the fourth day when they were really discovered, and newspapers arrived with the whole story, they went into a crevice in the rocks to hide their shame.

When at last two steamers came to fetch the unfortunates, each went on board a different one. And after that day they never saw nor knew each other again.

It was nearly midnight when the reading was ended. An interval of silence followed, but the postmaster felt he must say something. "One generally says 'thanks!'" he remarked. "Meanwhile, after you have said all, there is not much to add: I will only ask myself, you, and everyone a general question: 'What is love?'"

"What is love? Answer: 'I don't know.' Love has been called a piece of roguery on the part of Nature. I don't believe that, for I know that Nature has neither made itself nor can it think out pieces of roguery. But if we accept that proposition, we descend to zoology, and that I do not wish to do. I do not share the theoretical veneration for woman which my contemporaries cherish; on the other hand, I instinctively place her higher than ourselves. She seems to me to be formed out of finer material than we men, but I may be wrong, for she seems to be furnished with more animal functions than we are. If I were a theosophist, I should believe she was only a kind of intermediary chrysalis stage on the way to man, only a temporary manifestation, out of which love, i.e. man's love, creates in, her possibilities of being and seeming. When he finds this really lifeless form of existence and breathes his immortal breath into it, he shares the Creator's joy on the seventh day. The process of refining, which his coarser substance hindered him bringing about in his own soul, he brings about in hers, and through reaction--no! it is too difficult for me to explain; it is like dividing an angle into three equal parts. Anyhow, the fact is certain, and my story is an illustration of it, that when a man is deceived in his love as he always is, his whole being revolts against the government of the world, which seems to him to have condescended to mock at his holiest possession, the holiest thing in all creation. If Providence is consonant with such deceit and such coarse jesting then he discovers a devil where he thought he had seen a good angel. After that what shall he trust, what shall he value, at what shall he not make a grimace? And when after marriage the veil falls, and like Adam and Eve they are naked and ashamed, then even the most unbelieving is conscious of something resembling the Fall. Then comes a fresh error and they think they have deceived each other, which they have not done. So they scourge each other for crimes which neither has committed. A second deception follows the first."

They were again silent. Then the postmaster gave the conversation another turn and descended to the earth. "You can guess that I, at any rate, recognise the lady of your story. She lives in her own little house, here on the island by the shore."

"Yes she does! I know her, and I was quarantine doctor at Hven when she was captured. Now that she is elderly she has renewed her acquaintance with me, and it is from her own mouth that I heard the story. She has been in love countless times, and declares that every time she believed she had found the right man who had been predestined for her from the foundation of the world."

"Does not reason feel its helplessness before such riddles, riddles of every day?"

"Yes and therefore ... yes, next Saturday you shall hear another story, and I think we shall approach the riddle a little more closely, i.e. we shall find its insolubility more strongly proved."

"I shall be glad to hear it. But why don't you have your stories printed?"

"Because I have been a doctor, and a woman's doctor. I have no right to reveal what I have heard in my official capacity. Sometimes I should like to be a writer with a prescriptive right to find material for his art in men's lives and destinies; but that is a calling and a task which is denied to me."

"Very well; good night till next Saturday."

When Saturday evening came round, the two old men sat in the corner room with their toddy and tobacco and a large pile of manuscript on the table. The postmaster looked a little nervously at it, as a child might at a family book of sermons.

"We can give two evenings to it," said the doctor soothingly.

"Ah no! we have the whole evening before us and to-morrow is Sunday. Fire ahead! We will have an interval for refreshments."

The doctor began to read at six o'clock and had finished when it struck eleven.

THE DOCTOR'S SECOND STORY

I

He had left his Christiania full of bitterness because a public injustice had been done him. At forty years of age he had written the best modern drama and had invented a new form of play with a new plot which answered the expectations of the generation which was growing up. But the older generation was still alive, and spectators, actors, and critics felt

that their ideals were leaving them in the lurch, and that they themselves would be involved in their fall. If the public taste took a new direction which they could not follow, they would be regarded as superannuated, and be left behind. Accordingly his masterpiece had been called idiotic and had been hissed off the stage, and it had been suggested to him that he should return to America, where he had already been and left his wife, from whom he was separated.

But, instead of going to America, he went to Copenhagen. In the centre of the city he set up a restaurant where he foregathered with Swedes and Finns. After some months' delay he succeeded in getting his drama performed at a Copenhagen theatre. It was decidedly successful and his reputation was saved. He had felt that he had done with life, but now he began to wake up and to look about him. But when he did enter into life again, he did so with dull resignation and an almost fatalistic spirit which found expression in his favourite motto: "Prepared for everything!"

His dramatic success resulted in his receiving social invitations. One evening he went to a soiree at a distinguished author's, round whom the younger stars in art and literature were accustomed to gather. The supper was long and brilliant, but several unoccupied places were waiting for guests who should arrive after the theatres had closed. At half-past ten there was a stir in the company, for the expected guests came--three ladies and three men all unknown to the Norwegian. But one of the three ladies greeted him as an acquaintance and reached the stranger her hand. Immediately afterwards he asked the hostess in a whisper who it was.

"Who is it? Miss X---- of course! You talked with her at Doctor E----'s supper."

"Really! It is strange that with my good memory I cannot recall her appearance. One evening lately, in a well-lit theatre lobby, I passed her without a greeting."

"Of course you don't see that she is pretty."

"Is she?" He leant forward to look at the young lady who had taken her seat far down the table. "Yes she doesn't look bad."

"Fie! Fie! She is a celebrated beauty of the best Copenhagen type."

"Oh! Formerly I only admired blondes but latterly have confined my admiration to brunettes." Then they talked of something else. After supper the company gathered in the drawing-room and the beautiful Dane and the Norwegian sat so close together that he put her cup down for her. When she asked who would escort her home, he answered: "I of course," and his escort was accepted. When at last the company broke up, he and she found themselves in the same mysterious way so deep in conversation that a group of ladies and gentlemen formed a circle round them with a mischievous air to watch them. The pair, however, did not observe this, but continued to talk. As they went down the steps they heard a "good night!" and a ringing laugh overhead from the young and charming hostess who was leaning over the balcony-railing. They went along the shore, and past the bridges, continuing their conversation without a pause. When they came to X---- Street she invited him to supper the following evening to meet a young female artist. But she prepared him to find her surroundings very simple, as she was staying in a pension kept by a strict old lady. Then they parted as though they had been old acquaintances and colleagues.

As he walked home alone through the night, and tried to recall the events of the evening to his mind, he noticed again the curious fact that he could not remember her appearance. Yet as a former reporter, he had been so accustomed to photograph people and scenes, landscapes and interiors with his eye that he could not understand it. Moreover, he observed that she was quite a different person this evening to what she had been the first time they met. There was now no trace of "independence" about her, only a mild yieldingness, a certain melancholy, which became her well and aroused sympathy. When they talked of the unfortunate fate of a certain person, there were tears in her voice. It was the voice which he remembered more than anything else about her--somewhat deep and melancholy with a slight accent which carried one far away from the great town and awoke memories of wood and sea, the sounds of nature, shepherds' huts, and hay-rakes. He now recollected how they had really treated her like a child the previous evening, had teased her about her writings, and asked her for recommendations, at which she had only smiled. She also had the unfortunate habit of letting fall naive expressions, which were really seriously meant, but sometimes had a repellent effect.

The only one who had taken her seriously was himself, the foreigner. And he had seen that she was no child but a woman with whom he could speak of men and books and all that interested him, without once having to explain his remarks.

When he awoke the next morning, he tried to call to his mind the events and persons of the previous day. It was his habit, when he made a new acquaintance, to seek in his memory for the "corresponding number," as he called it, in order to get a clear idea of his character; i.e. he thought which of his old friends most nearly resembled the person in question. This psychical operation was often performed involuntarily, i.e. when he tried to call up the image of his new acquaintance, the figure of an old one rose up in his mind and more or less obliterated the latter. When he now recalled his yesterday's memories of Miss X---- he saw her with an elderly married cousin, to whom he had always felt

indifferent. This suppressed any sentimental feeling, if any were present, and he only thought of her as a kindly woman-friend. Accordingly, in the evening, he felt perfectly calm and without a trace of that embarrassment which one sometimes feels in attempting to make oneself agreeable to a young lady. He was received with perfect frankness as an old acquaintance and led into a lady's boudoir elegantly furnished with a well-appointed writing-table, flower-plants, family portraits, carpets, and comfortable chairs.

Since the lady painter had been prevented coming, he had to be content with a *tete-a-tete*, and this somewhat jarred on his sense of propriety. But his hostess's simple and unaffected manner caused him to suppress some remarks which might have hurt her feelings.

So they sat opposite each other and talked. Her black silk dress had blue insets and was cut in the "empire style," with dark lace trimmings which hung from her shoulders like a sleigh-net. This gave her a somewhat matronly appearance, and when he noticed her tone like that of an experienced woman of the world, he thought for a moment: "She is divorced!" Her face, which he could now examine in full light, showed a flat forehead which looked as though it had been hammered smooth and betokened a determined will without obstinacy. The eyes were large and well-defined as with Southerners. The nose seemed to have altered its mind while growing, for it took a little bend in the middle and became Roman by degrees. This little unexpected "joy-ful surprise" lent a cameo-like charm to her profile.

Their conversation was still more lively this evening, for they had already amassed a small store of common experiences to discuss, acquaintances to analyse, and ideas to test. They sat there and cut out silhouettes of their friends, and as neither of them wished to seem spiteful, they cut them in handsome shapes, and not with pointed scissors.

During this innocent interchange of thought, he had glanced at a very large flower-basket full of splendid roses. She had divined his thoughts, and just as a servant brought in a bottle of wine and cigarettes, she got up and went towards the roses.

("She is engaged!" he thought and felt himself superfluous.)

"I was given these by a friend on his departure," she said.

But in order to show that she was not engaged she broke off a stem carelessly. It was fastened with wire, and she had to look for her scissors. As these were in her work-basket on the lowest shelf of her work-table, she knelt down and remained kneeling. She remained in that attitude while she fastened two of the finest roses in his buttonhole, and she only needed to stretch out an arm to reach a glass of wine and drink to his health.

"Roses and wine! I have used that as a refrain for a ballad," he said. He thought the situation somewhat strange but insignificant in itself.

"Oh! do repeat the ballad!"

He had forgotten it.

She rose up and sat on her chair, and he persuaded her to tell him something of her life. She had early left her parents, who lived separated without being divorced, for they were Catholics. She had been educated in convent-schools in London, Paris, Italy, and elsewhere. In Paris especially, when with English ladies, she had been bothered with religion, but had finally thrown it all overboard. She certainly felt an emptiness without it, but expected, like everyone else, that some new substitute was coming into the world. Meanwhile, like her contemporaries, she devoted her energies to the deliverance of humanity from pauperism and oppression. She had superficially studied Nietzsche among others and laid him aside again after finding in him a slight corrective to over-strained expectations of universal equality.

While she was talking, he noticed that light fell through a curtain behind her back, which screened a door apparently leading into the interior of the house. Like lightning the thought struck him that he might be the object of a joke, and was to be surprised in the ridiculous position of a woman-worshipper. Or perhaps it was only for propriety's sake that communication was kept open with the main building. This wholesome doubt kept their conversation free from all tincture of flirtation, and when supper was served he reproached himself for having suspected his hostess of evil purposes or a want of trust in him.

About half-past eight he was about to go, but she only needed to express a suspicion that he was longing for the cafe to make him remain. About half-past nine o'clock he was going again but was kept back.

"But," he remonstrated, "it is my part as the elder and more prudent to spare you any unpleasantness."

She understood nothing, but declared that she was independent and that the lady who kept the pension was accustomed to her suppers.

At last his instinct told him that it was a mistake to stay longer; he rose and took his leave. On his way home, he said to himself, "No, people are not so simple, and cannot be labelled by formulas, for I don't comprehend an atom of this

evening or of this woman."

The next time they met it was in a museum. Her outer dress made her look like a young married woman of thirty or more. Her mouth had a tired expression and had fine little wrinkles near it, as is the case with those who laugh often. But she was melancholy, hinted at having had a breach with her father, and spoke of taking her departure shortly. She inquired regarding her friend's relations to theatres and publishers, and offered to help him with advice and influence. To-day she was mere motherly tenderness, and a certain carelessness in her toilet suggested that she did not want to please as a woman.

But when she proposed that they should go to the theatre together he declined, from a feeling that he ought not to compromise her, nor expose himself to danger, for his precarious pecuniary position did not permit him to think of a love affair.

He proposed to her instead that they should go for a stroll together, and she suggested that he should escort her from her new lodging, for she had changed her rooms.

("They have given her notice at the pension, because of me," he thought, but said nothing.)

By this time his curiosity as an author was aroused, and he wished to learn the riddle of this woman, for he had never seen any other change their appearance as she did.

When in the evening he rang at her door, he was shown into a side room and asked to wait. When she was dressed he was let out into the front hall, where they met. This, then, was a new order of things.

They went westward by an empty street which led to the Zoological Gardens, and entered a restaurant which she seemed to know well. In her fur jacket and with a kerchief on her head she looked in the dark like an old woman, and as she stooped somewhat, she seemed to have something witchlike about her. But when they entered the well-lit restaurant, and she laid aside kerchief and jacket she stood revealed all at once in her youthful beauty. A moss-green, tightly fitting dress showed the figure of a girl of eighteen, and with her hair brushed smooth, she looked like an overgrown schoolgirl. He could not conceal his astonishment at this witchery, and looked her all over as though he were seeking a concealed enemy with a searchlight. ("Eros! Now I am lost!" he thought. And from that moment he was indeed.)

She saw quite well the effect she had produced, and seemed to glisten there in a sort of phosphorescent light, sure of victory, with a triumphant expression round her mouth, for she saw that he was conquered. He felt a sudden fear. She had his soul in her pocket, and could cast it into the river or into the gutter; therefore he hated her at the same time. He saw that his only chance of safety lay in awakening a reciprocal flame in her, so that she might be as closely bound to him as he was to her. With this half-conscious purpose, he did what every man in his place would have done--insinuated himself into her confidence, made himself as little as a child and aroused her sympathy, the sympathy of a woman for a lacerated and damned soul which has no more hope of happiness. She listened to him and received his confidence as a tribute, with calm majestic motherliness, without a trace of coquetry or pleasure at hearing of another's misfortune.

When at last, after eating a cold supper, they were about to go, he rose to look up a train in a railway guide. When he returned to the table and wished to pay the bill, the waiter informed him that it had already been paid by the lady! Then he flared up, and wrongly suspecting that she thought he had no money, demanded that at any rate he should pay for himself.

"I don't know the customs of your country," he said, "but in mine a man who lets a lady pay for him is dishonoured."

"You were my guest," she answered.

"No, we went out together, and we cannot come here again. Don't you know what kind of a reputation you will give me, and by what a hateful name this waiter may call me?"

When he recalled the waiter to make good the mistake, there was another scene, so that he rose angrily and laid his share on the table. She was sad, but would not acknowledge herself in the wrong. They were both out of humour, and he noticed that she was thoughtless, just as thoughtless as when she invited a gentleman alone to her room so late in the evening. Or was it an expression of feminine independence demanding to be treated exactly like a man in spite of propriety and prejudice? Perhaps it was the latter, but he felt it to be a piece of presumption, and was angry. There threatened to be an uncomfortable silence between them as they walked home, but she put out her hand and said in a kind, confidential voice: "Don't be cross."

"No I am not that, but, but ... never do it again."

They parted as friends, and he hurried to the cafe. He had not been there for a long time, partly through a certain dislike to the tone prevailing there, which no longer harmonised with his present mood, and partly because he had promised his friend to be moderate. He found the usual company, but felt somewhat out of place, and made a clear resolve never

to bring her there. Accordingly, he soon went home and sank in meditations which were partly gloomy and partly bright. When he recollected the moment of emergence of the youthful beauty from the fur skin of the animal there seemed to him something weird and ominous about it. It was not the youthful beauty which is clothed in reflections from a paradise of innocence, but a dark, demoniac beauty which becomes a man's death, the grave of his virile will, and which leads to humiliation, ruin, and disgraceful bargaining. But it is as inevitable and unescapable as Fate.

The next day he was invited, together with her, to dinner at an art professor's. She then appeared in a new character, talking like a woman of the world in a confident tone, firing off smart sayings and epigrams and never at a loss for an answer. At intervals she seemed indifferent, blase, and cruel.

The professor, who had just been sitting on a jury, told us that he had joined in giving a verdict of guilty against a child murderess.

"I should have acquitted her," said Miss X----. The professor, who belonged to the Danish Academy and had the entree to the Court, was astonished, but did not argue with her. He construed her answer as a burst of caprice and let the matter drop. The conversation at table was somewhat forced. The Norwegian, who had been invited by the lady of the house, did not feel at ease in this circle where everything revolved round the Court. Probably his friend had arranged this invitation with the kind intention of making him known and of investing him, who had the reputation of being half an anarchist, with an air of gentility. The discord was felt when the talk turned upon Art, and the professor was in a minority of one with his opinions and academic ideals.

Therefore, when at dessert time his hostess asked the Norwegian whether he would come to one of her receptions, where he would have the opportunity of meeting many celebrities, she received such a sharp look from her husband, that the Norwegian declined the invitation decidedly. Just then the Scandinavians were in ill favour in the higher circles of society because a Norwegian artist by his new style of painting had caused a schism in the Academy.

Again he had let himself be enticed by his friend's thoughtlessness. She had brought him into a circle to which he did not belong and in which he was not welcome. On the other hand she seemed to notice nothing of it, but was as much at home and at her ease as before.

After dinner there was music. The young beauty behaved as though her friend was not there and never looked at him at all. When the party broke up, she took leave of him as though of a stranger, and let herself be escorted home by someone else.

II

It was a Sunday afternoon in February. They were walking in one of the outer streets of the city towards the west, where they were sure to meet no acquaintances. Finally they entered a restaurant which lay off the road. She spoke of her approaching departure, and he said he would miss her society.

"Come along too," she said simply and openly.

"Yes," he answered, "it is really all the same to me where I stay."

That was an idea which seemed to drive away certain clouds. She now began to speak of Berlin, the theatrical prospects there, and so on.

"But," he objected, "it would be too far from my children."

"Your children! Yes, I have often thought of them. Have you their portraits with you? Do let me see them!"

He really had the portraits with him, and as she repeated her wish, he showed them. The two girls did not interest her much but she was delighted at the eight-year-old fair boy with the upturned look. "What a lovely child's face! Isn't it a happiness to have such a child!"

"To have it to-day, and lose to-morrow!" he replied.

She now examined the photograph more exactly and began to compare it with the father somewhat too closely. He began to feel some of that shyness which a man feels before a woman when she assumes this role.

"It is you," she said, "and not you also."

He asked for no explanation, and she requested that she might keep the portrait by her.

They resumed the discussion of the proposed journey, but she was absent-minded and often let her looks rest on the photograph.

He could not guess what was in her mind but he noticed that there was a struggle of some kind and that she was on the point of forming a resolution. He felt how a network of fine sucker-like tendrils spread from her being and wove itself into his. Something fateful was impending. He felt depressed, longed for the circle of male friends whom he had abandoned, and asked her to release him from his promise not to go any more to the cafe.

"Are you longing to go down *there* again?" she said in a motherly voice. "Think of your little son!"

They went out silent in the dark but starlit evening. He had for the first time offered her his arm and the cape of his coat flapped loose in the wind and struck her face. "I have already dreamt this once," she said. But he gave no answer.

When they came to her door, she took him by both hands, looked him in the eyes and said: "Don't go to your friends." Then she let her veil drop, and before he divined her intention, printed a kiss through the veil on his mouth. As he stretched out his arms to embrace her, she was already behind the door, and closed it. He stood there completely crestfallen without being able to understand how it had happened. Then came the conclusion: "She loves me and has not been playing with me." But what audacity! It is true she let her veil fall, for she was modest, and fled, alarmed at what she had done. It was original, but not bold-faced; other countries, other manners!

But for a man it was somewhat humiliating to receive the first sign of love and not to bestow it. Yet he would never have dared to run the risk of a possible box on the ears and a scornful laugh. It was well that it had happened; now he had certainty, and that was enough.

She loved him! Since he was loved, he could say to himself: "I am not so bad after all if someone can look up to me and believe good of me." This awoke his self-respect, hope, and confidence. He felt himself young again, and was ready to begin a new spring. It was true that he had only shown her his good side, but his habit of suppressing his worse nature for the occasion had brought his better nature into prominence. This was the secret of the ennobling influence of real love. He played the part of the magnanimous till it became a second nature. The fact that he discovered her beauty, and was delighted with her as a woman later on was a further guarantee that the stages of their love affair had developed themselves in orderly progression, and that he had not been merely captivated by a beautiful exterior. He had indeed guessed her defects and overlooked them, for that is the duty of love, and the chief proof of its genuineness, for without forbearance with faults there is no love. He went home and wrote the inevitable letter. It ended with the words: "Now the man lays his head in your lap as a sign that the good in you overcomes the evil in him, but do not misuse your power, for then you must expect the usual fate of tyrants."

The next morning he sent off the letter by a messenger. Ilmarinen his Finnish friend stood by the head of his bed and looked mysterious. "Well!" he said. "Are you going to try once more?"

"Yes, so it appears."

"And you dare to?"

"If it comes to the worst, I only dare to be unhappy, and one is unhappy anyhow."

"Yes, yes."

"It is a change at any rate, and this lonely life is no life."

Instead of an answer to his letter he received a telegram with a request to meet her that evening at the office of an editor who might be useful to them.

In answer to this he sent a message by telegram: "I don't come till I have received an answer to my letter."

Again came a telegram, in which she asked to be allowed to postpone her answer till the next day.

He thought the whole affair nonsensical but went to keep the appointment. She seemed as though nothing had happened; they ate their supper and discussed business. The editor was a married man, and pleasant, nor did he seem to wish his visitors to worship him.

This evening, however, the Norwegian thought her ugly. She was carelessly dressed, had ink on her fingers, and she talked so exclusively of business that she lost all her ideal aspect. He had experienced much in his life, and seen many strange people, but anyone so eccentric as this woman he had never seen. He went home with a feeling of relief, firmly resolved not to follow her to Berlin, nor to link his destiny any closer with hers. The next morning he received her letter; this strengthened him still further in his resolve to withdraw. She wrote that she was one of those women who cannot love. ("What sort of a woman is that? A mere phrase!" he thought.) He believed that he loved her but he was only in love with her love. ("Alexandre Dumas I think!") She still desired, however, to remain his friend and asked him to meet her that day.

He answered this with a farewell letter of thanks.

Then there rained on him telegrams and express messengers.

Towards evening a hotel waiter entered his room and announced that a lady in a carriage was waiting below to see him. At first he thought of declining to go down, but she might come to his room, and then the bond would be made fast. Accordingly he went down, entered the carriage, and without reflection or saying anything they gave each other a kiss, which seemed perfectly natural. There ensued a stormy conversation which was extremely like a quarrel. She asked that he should accompany her that very night on her journey, but he gave a decided refusal. If they were seen together, tomorrow the "elopement" would be in all the newspapers. That he could not bring his conscience to agree to, both on account of her parents and his own children. He also told her that he was dependent on other people's help, and that as soon as he was known as an adventurer all these resources would dry up.

"Then you don't love me!"

"What nonsense you talk, child."

He had to laugh at her. They got out of the cab and continued their contest in a little green lane which led down to the shore.

Now and then he put his arm round her neck and silenced her mouth with a kiss.

"I have seen that you are cracked, but I myself am half-mad, you see, and you won't get the better of me."

"I will jump into the sea!" she shrieked.

"Very well! I will follow, and can swim."

At last he got her to laugh. Then they entered a cafe in order to arrive at a final decision. Now he had the upper hand and treated her like a naughty girl, and curiously enough, as soon as he had assigned this role to her, she took it up and maintained it.

Did these two love each other now? Yes, certainly, for he knew how tied he was, and she had already, as appeared later on, confessed her love in a letter to her mother, adding that he was to know nothing of it, for then she would immediately be brought under the yoke of subjection.

The final decision they arrived at was that she should travel alone, and they made no promises to each other. They were to correspond and see whether they would be able to meet in the summer; when his position was more secure they would think of betrothal and marriage.

They parted, and did not see each other again for a long time.

He went immediately afterwards to look up his old friends in the cafe. There in his own circle he wished to find himself again, for during this month's exclusive living with a woman, he had become loosed from his own environment, lost his foothold, and built up a common life on the shaky foundation of the temperament of a young girl, whom his passion had transformed into a mature woman. Her last outbreak of anger had revealed a fury who believed that she could compel him to blind obedience. During this her face had exhibited all possible changes from the broad grin of Punch to the hissing of the cat which shows its white claws. He breathed more lightly, experienced a sensation of relief, and entered the cafe feeling as though he had left something oppressive behind him, something happily over and done with!

The Swede sat there, and probably the gossip regarding the Norwegian's engagement had caused him to bring his lady friend with him. She was a tall fragile-looking Swede who seemed to be emaciated by illness; she had a mournful, despairing sort of voice, a drawling accent and drooping eyes. As an artist, although obscure she was "emancipated" as the phrase is, but not free from the feminine vanity of being able to appear with a number of male hangers-on, whom she boasted of having made conquests of. Her thoughts had long turned upon the Norwegian. When they met, she found him novel and full of surprises. At the same time he brought with him the fire of his newly kindled flame. Within half an hour she had neither eyes nor ears for her old friend. When at last she snapped at him, he stood up and asked her to come with him. "You can go," she answered. And he went.

In less than an hour she had broken with her friend of many years and formed a tie with the Norwegian who an hour and a half before had kissed his fiancee at parting. He asked himself how that was possible, but took no time to reflect on it. She possessed the advantage of being able to understand him completely; he was able to speak out his thoughts after a long imprisonment; he needed only to give a hint in order to be understood. She drank in the eloquence of his words, seemed to follow the sudden leaps of his thought, and probably received answers to many questions which had long occupied her mind. But she was ugly and ill-dressed, and he sometimes felt ashamed at the thought that he might be suspected of being her admirer. Then he felt an unspeakable sympathy with her which she interpreted to mean that she had made a conquest of him.

They went out into the town and wandered from cafe to cafe, continually talking. Sometimes his conscience pricked him, sometimes he felt a repulsion to her, because she had been faithless to her friend. Faithlessness indeed was the link which united them, and they felt as if Destiny had driven them to commit the same wrong on the same evening. She

had at once inquired about his engagement and he had at first given an evasive answer; but as she had continued to ask with comrade-like sympathy he had told her the whole story. But in doing so he spoke of his love, he became enthusiastic; she warmed herself at the glow and seemed to be a reflection of "the other." So the two images coincided, and the absent maiden, who should have been a barrier between them, was the one who brought them near each other.

The next day they met again, and she never seemed tired of discussing his engagement. She was in a critical mood and began to express doubts whether he would be happy. But she went carefully to work, showed indulgence, and only attempted purely objective psychological analysis. She also understood how to withdraw a severe expression at the right time in order not to frighten him away.

Now as ill-luck would have it, he received at noon a letter from his fiancée which was the answer to the stormy one he had written when they parted. In her letter she only wrote of business matters, gave good advice in a superior tone, in a word was pedantic and narrow-minded. Not a trace of the pretty young girl was to be found in the letter. This put him out of humour and aroused his disgust to such a degree that when he met his new friend, with a ruthless joy in destruction he proceeded to analyse his fiancée under the microscope. The Swede was not backward with her feminine knowledge of feminine secrets to put the worst interpretation on all the details which he narrated. He had cast his lamb to the she-wolf, who tore the prey asunder while he looked on.

At the beginning of April, that is three weeks later, the Norwegian sat in the café one afternoon with Lais, as she was called, after she had become the friend of the company in general, not of anyone in particular. He sat there with a resigned air, "prepared for everything" as usual. It had been difficult to keep his engagement alive by means of the post, and it had become still more uncertain after the news had reached her father's ears and brought him to despair. He was a Minister of State, lived at Odense, went to Court when he was in the capital, and wore twelve orders. He would rather shoot himself than be the father-in-law of a notorious nihilist. In order to put an end to the affair the old man had dictated his conditions, which were of course impossible.

The Norwegian must pay all his debts and give a guarantee that he would have a regular and sufficient income. Since a writer of plays has nothing guaranteed, but is dependent on popular favour, the wooer considered his proposal withdrawn, and regarded himself as unfettered, and indeed he was so. Moreover, thus humiliating correspondence about pecuniary matters had cooled his devotion, for love letters which were full of figures and motherly advice, practical items of information about publishers and so on, were not inspiring to read for a literary free-lance. And as the correspondence slackened, and finally ceased, he considered himself entirely free.

With her usual vanity, Lais had ascribed to herself the honour of having dissolved his engagement, although there was no reason for her doing so. Moreover, in the last few days a circumstance had happened which was fortunate for his future. Another friend of Lais had arrived from the north, and as he was one of her admirers she had such assiduous court paid to her that she did not notice how the Norwegian was slackening in his attentions.

In order to celebrate the arrival of the newcomer, the last few days had been a continual feast, and now they were in that strange condition, when the soul is, so to speak, loosed from its bearings and utters its thoughts without distinction and without regard.

Lais was possessed by the not unusual idea that she was irresistible, and liked to produce the impression that all her male friends, even those who had dropped her, were dismissed admirers. Now she wished to show her newly arrived friend how well she was provided with them and began to skirmish with the Norwegian. Since he had long cherished towards her the hate which is born of imprudently bestowed confidences, he seized the opportunity to bring about the breach without scandal, in a word to dispose of her without disgrace to either of them. Under some pretext, or perhaps with a foreboding that something was about to happen, he took his leave and left the other two together. But Lais pressed him to remain, probably to gain an opportunity of leaving him alone, when she went out with her friend. Here, however, she had made a miscalculation. Making a gesture of invitation to the new-comer, the Norwegian went out after saying the last word: "Now I leave you alone!"

When he came out on the street, he had a certain uneasy suspicion that he had left something unfinished behind him, and had something unexpected before him. He thought he heard the hissing voice of the woman he had left. She never opened her lips, which were sharply defined, like those of a snake, when she spoke, but brought the words straight out of her throat, which was always hoarse through her sitting up at night drinking and smoking. Such a voice in women he called a "porter voice" because it always reminded him of that black drink and its concomitants.

Such is friendship with women--either it ends in love or in hatred just like love!

When he came to his hotel, the waiter handed him a local telegram. "That is what brought me home," he said to himself. His experiences had made him believe in telepathy to such a degree that he was in the habit of saying when in company and there was talk of sending for some absent person: "Shall we telepath to him?"

Before he opened the telegram he believed he knew the contents, and when he had read, he felt as though he had done

so before, and was not surprised. The telegram ran thus: "I am here; look me up at Doctor ----'s. Important news."

He stood still for two minutes in order to form a resolution. When the waiter came he asked him to telephone to the friendly doctor, who had a private hospital of his own and enjoyed a very good reputation. The doctor came at once and explained the situation: "Are you thinking of drawing back?" he asked.

"No, but I must collect myself, and sleep for twelve hours, for my nerves are out of control. I will send a telegram to say that I am not well. She will not believe that, but will come herself; I beg you therefore to wait for half an hour."

The telegram went off, and in half an hour steps were heard along the corridor. She entered, dressed in black and at first full of suspicion. But to be able to consult with the doctor gave her an advantage which pleased her. She said she would come next morning together, with the doctor, and then she went, after secretly imprinting a kiss on the patient's hand.

"You must not play with your feelings," said the doctor who remained behind. "This woman loves you and you love her. That is as plain as a pikestaff."

The Norwegian lay alone all the evening and sought to find some guiding thread through all this chaos, but in vain. What a tangled thicket was the human soul! How could one bring it into order? It passed from hate to contempt over esteem and reverence and then back again with one bound sideways and two forwards. Good and evil, sublime and mean, uniting treachery with deathless love, kisses and blows, insulting reproaches and boundless admiration. Since he knew the human soul he had adopted it as one of his fundamental principles never to balance accounts, never to go backwards, but always forwards. When in the beginning of their acquaintance she had wished to refer to something which he had said on a previous occasion he interrupted her: "Never look back! Only go forwards! One talks a lot of nonsense on the spur of the moment. I have no views but only speak impromptu, and life would be very monotonous if one thought and said the same things every day. It should be something new! Life is only a poem, and it is much jollier to float over the marsh than to stick one's feet in it and to feel for firm ground which is not there."

This must have suited her own ideas of life, for she was immediately ready to adopt this role. Therefore they found each other always novel, and always full of surprises. They could not take each other too seriously, and often when one of them attacked his or her own discarded views with the other's opinions of the day before, they were obliged to laugh at their own foolishness. Thus they were never clear about each other, and in really serious moments they would exclaim simultaneously: "Who are you? What are you really?" and neither of them could answer.

As he was on the point of falling asleep, he thought, "I shall make no resolve, for I have never seen a resolve lead to anything. The course of events may guide my destiny as it has done hitherto."

The next morning she came without waiting for the doctor. She had put on a wise air, as if she understood the illness thoroughly but did not wish to descend to trifles. She took a rod out of a basket she had brought with her.

"What is that?"

"That is 'the Easter rod'; to-day is Good Friday." She set up the rod at his feet, and adorned the edge of the bed with willow-branches in bloom. Like a little housewife she bustled about the room, surveying and putting it in order. Finally she sat down in an easy chair.

"Well! What is the great news?" he asked.

"We must enter on an engagement, for the papers have announced it."

"Have they, indeed? What about the old man?"

"Father has resigned himself, because the matter cannot be altered; but he is not happy. Now won't you congratulate me?"

"You should congratulate me first, for I am the elder."

"And the less intelligent."

"I have the honour to congratulate you. And what a man you have got!"

So they chatted, and soon came to the subject of their prospects. He dictated and she wrote. Such and such plays of his accepted for the stage.... That would be a thousand pounds.

"Discount thirty per cent for disappointments," she said.

"Thirty! I also reckon ninety or a hundred per cent."

"Be sober! It is serious." And then they laughed.

Divine frivolity! To look down on the ugly earnestness of life as if all one had to do was to blow at it. The poet's light-hearted way of treating economy like poetry.

"How could one bear the miseries of life, if one did not treat them as unrealities? If I took it seriously, I should have to weep the whole day, and I don't want to do that."

Dinner-time came; she laid the sofa-table, fed him, and was especially sparing with the wine.

"You have drunk enough now, and you must promise never to go to the cafe again, especially with Thais."

"Lais," he corrected her, but coloured. "You know that then?"

"A woman of twenty-three knows everything."

Glad to avoid a troublesome confession, he promised never to visit the cafe again and kept his word, for that was the only penance he could offer for his sorry behaviour. Thus they were engaged. His only social intercourse consisted in her company, while she continued to go to families which she knew, to visit theatres, and so on, for this belonged to her work as a newspaper correspondent. In case of an eventual struggle for power, she had all the advantages on her side, as she moved in an environment from which she derived moral support and fresh impulses, while he was thrown back on himself and his previous observations. They lived really like playfellows, for he never read what she wrote in the newspapers, while she had read all his writings but never referred to them. There was no consciousness shown on either side that he was a mature and well-known author and she a young critic of books and plays. They met simply as man and woman, and as her future husband he had placed himself on the same level with her, not above her.

Sometimes while they were together, he felt a prisoner, isolated and in her power. If he were to break with her now he would stand alone in the world, for he had got quite out of touch with his old friends and come to dislike the life of the cafe. Moreover, he felt so grown together with this woman, that he thought he would pine away if parted from her. In spite of her love she could not hide the fact that she thought she had him absolutely in her power, and sometimes she let him feel it. But then he raged like a lion in a cage, went out and sought his old friends, though he noticed he did not thrive among them and his conscience pricked him for his faithlessness. She sulked for half a day, then crept up to him, fell on her knees and was pardoned.

"At bottom," he said once, "we hate each other because we love each other. We fear to lose our individualities through the assimilating force of love, and therefore we must sometimes have a breach in order to feel that I am not you, and you are not I."

She agreed, but it was no remedy against the spirit of revolt, the struggle of the ego for self-justification. She loved him as a woman loves a man, for she thought him handsome, although he was ugly. He, for his part, demanded neither respect nor admiration but only a measure of trust, and a friendly demeanour. She was generally sparkling and cheerful, playful, without being teasing, yielding and gracious.

Once when he reflected over the various types of woman he had observed in her during the beginning of their acquaintance, he could scarcely understand how she had been able to play so many different parts. The literary independent lady with Madame de Stael's open mouth and loquacious tongue had entirely disappeared; the grand, pretentious woman of the world and the *fin-de-siecle* lady with morbid paradoxes were also both obliterated. She saw how unpretentious he was and she became like him.

April came and it was high spring-time. At the same time his prospects had brightened; some of his plays had been accepted; a novel sold for a considerable sum; and one of his dramas was acted in Paris. An untrue report was spread that the engaged pair had gone off together. Her parents in Odense were disturbed and urged on the marriage.

"Will you marry now?" she asked.

"Certainly I will," was his reply.

So the matter was settled! But then came difficulties. She was a Catholic and could not marry a divorced man as long as his first wife lived. In order to circumvent this difficulty he devised the plan of being married in England. And so it was settled. Her sister came as a witness to the ceremony. She was married to a famous artist, was herself an authoress, and therefore understood how to value talent, even when unaccompanied with earthly goods.

Thus they began their wedding journey.

III

It was a May morning on an island off the English coast. He had gone with her to the extreme end of a promontory where the cliff descends sheer into the sea. He wished to ask her something privately but did not dare to; therefore they stood there silently staring into the blue emptiness, seeking an object where there was none.

They had stayed there six days without being able to marry because through carelessness the notice of his divorce had not been published till some months after he had obtained a decree. Accordingly it bore so late a date that the time allowed for challenging it had not yet elapsed. He had exchanged telegrams with the authorities; confusion and misunderstanding caused further delay, and his fiancee's sister became impatient.

"Do you trust me?" he asked her.

"Yes, I believe in your honesty, but you are an unlucky creature."

"And your sister?"

"What is she to believe? She does not know you. She only knows that your assurances that the documents were valid, were incorrect."

"She is right, but it is not my fault. What does she mean to do?"

"She returns to-morrow, and I must go with her."

"So then we shall be parted before we are married, and I return to life in hotels, restaurants, and night cafes."

"No, not that," and after a pause she added: "Let us jump into the sea."

He put his arm round her: "Have you ever seen a destiny like mine? Wherever I go, I bring unhappiness and destruction with me. Think! Your parents!"

"Don't talk so! With patience we shall also get out of this."

"Yes, in order to fall into something else."

"Come! shall I blow at it?" And she blew the cloud away. There was an outbreak of divine frivolity again and they raced home through the fortifications and over the mines.

In the evening the decisive telegram came, and the wedding was fixed for the next day. It took place at first at the registry office. While the oaths were being taken the bride fell into hysterical laughter which nearly rendered the whole ceremony abortive, since the registrar did not know what to make of a scene which resembled one in a lunatic asylum.

It was not a brilliant wedding-party which assembled in the evening in the clergyman's house. Besides the bride's sister, four strangers --pilots--were present as witnesses when they plighted their troth "before God."

Fourteen days of May had passed. Both were sitting outside the comfortable little house and watching how the migratory birds rested in the garden before continuing their journey north-ward.

"So quiet?"

"How long?"

"Eight days more. But I had not thought that marriage was such a splendid arrangement."

"Although they call me a woman-hater," he said, "I have always loved woman, and although they call me a friend of immorality, I have always held by marriage."

"Can you imagine yourself leading a lonely life after this?"

"No, the thought chokes me."

"Do you know I am so happy that I am afraid?"

"Yes, so am I. I feel as if someone were lying and spying on us. She is called Nemesis, and follows not only guilty but also happy men."

"What are you most afraid of?"

"That we should part."

"But that depends on us, I suppose."

"Would that it did! But discord comes from without with the wind, with the dew, with too long-continued sunshine, with the rain. Try to explain which of us two was to blame for our last quarrel."

"Neither!"

"Neither of us two, then it was a third. Who is this third? In order to give it a name people call it 'misunderstanding'; but both of our understandings were completely clear, not disturbed at all."

"Don't frighten me."

"No, but be sure that the same event will happen again and that we shall blame each other as on the last occasion."

"Shall we not go and write now?" she broke in.

"I cannot write."

"Nor can I; my editor is angry because he has had no article from me for two months."

"And I have not had a single new idea for a whole year. What will be the end of it?"

The fact was that they had neutralised each other, so that there was no more reaction on either side. Their life together now consisted of a comfortable silence. The need to be near each other was so great that one could not leave the room without the other following. They tried to shut themselves in their rooms in order to work, but after a short time one would knock at the other's door.

"Do you know, all this is very fine, but I am becoming an idiot?" she complained.

"You also?"

"I can neither read, think, nor write any more, and can hardly speak."

"It is too much happiness, and we must seek some society, or we shall both become silly."

The fact was that they had both ceased to converse; they were apparently so harmonious in all questions and predilections and knew each other's opinions so well that there was no further need to exchange thoughts. The same tastes, the same habits, the same naughtinesses, the same superficial scepticism had brought them together, and now they were welded into one like two pieces of the same metal. Each had lost individuality and they were one. But the memory of independence and one's own personality was still present, and a war of liberation was impending. The sense of personal self-preservation awoke, and when each wished to resume their own share, there was a strife about the pieces.

"Why don't you write?" he asked.

"I have tried, but it is always you and about you."

"Whether it is I, or someone else, it all comes to the same thing."

"You mean I have no self?"

"You are too young to have a self."

He had better have left that unsaid, for by saying it, he woke her.

One morning there came a paper containing a notice to the effect that a volume of his poems had appeared with a London publisher.

"Shall we go to London?" she suggested.

"Yes, gladly, though I don't believe these notices which I have read so often. Anyhow, as a business journey, it can be made to pay its own expenses."

The resolve was carried out. They saw the little island^[1] disappear with the same joy with which they had before seen it rise out of the mist.

In Dover they had to stay one day at an hotel. As he returned from a walk, he found his wife sealing up six packets, all of the same shape and size.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"It is the account of your American journey, which I am sending to some papers I know in Denmark."

"But you should not cut it up into sections; you know that it forms a complete whole. Have you read it?"

"No, I have only glanced through it; but at any rate it will bring in some money."

"No, it will not; for no one will print it piecemeal. Only in a single volume would it have any value."

She paid no attention. "Come now," she said commandingly; "we will go to the post."

She meant well, but was foolish; and although experience had taught him what a dangerous adviser she was, he let her

have her way, and followed.

On the stairs, he noticed that she limped, for she had bought too tight boots with high heels, such as were then only worn by cocottes.

When they reached the street, she hurried on to the post, and he followed. As he noticed how the symmetry of her little figure was impaired by the many packages which she insisted on carrying, and how she limped on the boot heel which she had trodden down, he was seized with a sort of repulsion.

It was the first time that he viewed her from behind, and he thought involuntarily of the wood-nymph of legend, who in front was a charming fairy, but behind quite hollow.

The next moment he felt a remorseful horror at himself and his thoughts. In this cruel heat the little woman was carrying the heavy load, and had already written six long letters to editors all for his sake. And she limped! But her brutal way of treating his work and cutting a manuscript to pieces without having read it; treating a literary work as a butcher does a carcass!...

Again he felt repulsion, and again remorse, mixed with that indescribable pain which a man feels when he sees his beloved ugly, badly dressed, pitiful, or ridiculous. People in the street looked after her, especially when the wind blew out her thin serge mantle, which resembled a morning coat; it swelled out like a balloon and spoiled her fine figure. He hurried forward to take the packets from her; but she only waved him off, and hastened on, cheerful and undismayed.

When she came out of the post office, she wanted to go and buy larger boots. He followed. Since the purchase of them would occupy half an hour, she told him to wait outside. When at last she came out, she walked quite comfortably for a time, but then discovered that the new boots also were too tight.

"What do you think of a shoemaker like that?" she said.

"But *he* did not make the boots too tight for you! There were larger ones also."

That was a dangerous commencement of the conversation, and as they sat down at a table in a cafe, the silence was uncomfortable. They sat opposite each other and had to look one another in the eyes; they sought to avoid doing so, but could not, and when they were obliged to look at each other, they turned away.

"You would like now to be in Copenhagen with your friends," she said. It was a good guess. But even if he could have transported himself thither for a second, he would have wished himself back again at once.

Her nervousness increased, and her eyes began to sparkle, but since she was intelligent, she understood that neither of them was to blame.

"Go for a walk," she said; "we must be away from each other for a while, and then you will see it will be better."

He quite agreed with her, and they parted without any bitterness.

As he walked along by the side of the harbour, he felt his nerves become settled and quiet. He became once more conscious of himself as a separate and independent being; he no longer gave out emanations but concentrated himself; he was once more an individual in his own skin. How well he knew these symptoms, which signified nothing, but which in spite of all attempts to explain them, persisted as a constant phenomenon.

Meanwhile, since he felt a positive satisfaction in her absence, the thought stole into his mind that perpetual freedom from her would be attended by yet greater satisfaction, and as he approached the steam-boat pier the thought passed through his mind like a flash of lightning: "If I go off now, I shall be in Copenhagen in two days."

He sat down, ordered a glass of beer, lighted a cigar, and considered.

"If I go to London," he thought, "she will get the upper hand, because she can speak the language. I shall be led about by her like a deaf and dumb man and shall have to sit like an idiot among my literary friends whom she will get under her thumb. A pleasant prospect! Being patronised by her in the Danish newspapers was already sufficiently humiliating. I incurred an obligation to her..."

But in the midst of his meditations he broke off, for he knew that no character could stand such close and critical analysis. He knew also that no one could endure being gazed at from behind and judged in absence. Then a feeling of loneliness came over him and a consciousness of being faithless and ungrateful. He was drawn back to her, stood up and went quickly to the hotel. When he entered in an elevated mood and not without sentimental feelings he was greeted by a laugh, long-lasting and cheerful like the song of the grasshoppers. Dressed in silk she lay there, coiled up like an Angora cat, eating sweetmeats, and smelling of perfume.

Then they laughed both together, as though they had seen something comic in the street, which had nothing to do with them.

Now they were in Pimlico, between Westminster and Chelsea. They had paid one visit and that was all. Everyone was away, all the theatres were shut, and a perfectly tropical heat prevailed. One's soul felt as if it would gladly shake off its fleshly husk in order to seek for coolness up in the air. From morning to evening one felt only half alive.

The pressure of need had forced him unwillingly to set to work and write. But as he had already utilised most of his experiences, he was obliged to make use of some material which should, properly speaking, not have been employed. However, he did violence to himself, overcame his scruples, and began.

"Now I am writing," he told her triumphantly, "we are saved!"

His wife came and saw how he had filled the first sheet with letters. After an hour she came again. He was lying on the sofa lamenting: "I can do nothing! Let us then perish!"

She left the room without saying a word, and when she had shut the door, he bolted it. Then he took out of his portmanteau a green linen bag containing a quantity of sheets of paper covered with dates. These had been often spoken of by his friends and nicknamed the "Last Judgment." It was an historical work, in which, from a new and bold point of view, he treated the history of the world as a branch of natural science. He had planned it carefully, but perhaps it was destined never to be printed and would certainly never bring in any money.

After working for some time, he felt the usual restlessness which he experienced in the absence of his second self, and went down to seek her.

She sat reading a book which she made a lame attempt to hide, as he entered. By her strange manner he saw that some fateful element had entered into their common life.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"Your last book," she answered in a peculiar tone.

"It has appeared then! Don't read it; you will poison yourself."

It was a ruthless description of his first marriage, written in self-defence and as a last testament, for he had intended, after completing it, to take his life. For years the manuscript had remained sealed up in the care of a relative, and he had never intended to print it. But in the last spring and under the pressure of necessity, after he had been assailed most unjustly by gossips and in the newspapers, he had sold the book to a publisher.

And now it had appeared and fallen into the hands of the very last person who should have seen it. His first impulse was to snatch the book from her, but he was restrained by the thought: "It has happened; well, let it happen!" And with perfect calm, as though he had assisted at his own inevitable execution, he left the room. At lunch, he noticed the strange transformation which had taken place in his wife. Her face wore a new expression; her looks searched his whole person, as though she were comparing him with the man described in the book. He took for granted that his sufferings there described would not arouse her pity, for a woman always takes sides with her own sex. But what he could not understand was that she seemed to recognise herself in certain of her predecessor's characteristics. Perhaps her mind was occupied by some still unsolved problems in the question which married people instinctively avoid—the woman question. Certain it was, however, that she had learnt what her husband's views were on the subject of her sex, and they were so cynically expressed that they must give her mortal offence.

She did not say a word, but he saw in her face that now all chance of peace was gone and that this woman would never rest till she had destroyed his marriage and compelled him to shorten his life. Against this he could only oppose his motto: "Be ready for everything," and resolve to bear everything as long as possible, and finally when nothing else remained, to go his own way. Then she would devour herself in solitude for want of food for her hate.

The next day she had hatched her egg, which proved to contain a basilisk.

With an air which would fain have seemed innocent, but did not, she told him, that since he could not work, they must think of retrenching.

"Very well," he answered.

First of all they had to content themselves with one room. This meant that all possibility of being his own master, of withdrawing himself, and of collecting himself was precluded. For the future he would be confined with his tormentress in the same cage, have no more power over his own thoughts and inclinations, and above all, not be able to work at the "Last Judgment."

"You know you cannot work!" she remarked.

When midday came, a plate with some cold bacon and bread was set before him.

"You don't like soup," she said; "and hot food isn't nice in this heat."

Then she sat down to watch him.

"Won't you eat?" he asked.

"No, I am not hungry," she answered, and continued to watch him.

Then he stood up, took his hat, and prepared to go out.

"Are you going out?" she asked; "then I will go too, and we will keep each other company."

He went forward with long strides and she followed him. In order to vex her he chose the sunny side of the street by a long white wall, where the heat was intense, and the reflected light blinded the eyes. Then he dragged her out to Chelsea, where there was no house that could give shade.

She followed like an evil spirit.

When they came to the river, he thought for a moment of pushing her into the water, but did not. He went along the bank where lime-ships unloaded, steam-cranes puffed out coal-smoke, and chains hindered their walking. He hoped that she would fall and hurt herself, or be pushed down by a workman, and wished that a coal-heaver would embrace and kiss her--so boundless was his hate and hers.

It was in vain that he mounted over barrels and wheel-barrows and threaded his way through heaps of lime. He thought of jumping into the river and swimming to the other side, but was withheld by the thought that she perhaps could swim also.

At last he made a wide circuit like an ox persecuted by a gadfly, and went down to Westminster. There the back streets swarmed with the strangest figures, like shapes seen in a nightmare. He entered the abbey, as if to shake off a pest, but she followed, silent and unweariable.

Finally he had to return home, and when he got there, he sat down on one chair, and she seated herself opposite him.

Then he understood how a man can become a murderer, and determined to fly, as soon as he had written for money.

The night came, and he hoped now to be able to collect his thoughts, and be master of himself.

She pretended to be asleep, but he could tell by her breathing that she did not really sleep.

"Are you awake?" she asked.

He was still unwise enough to answer "Yes." Now they lay there watching which should first go to sleep. At last he did so.

In the middle of the night he awoke, listened, and heard by her breathing that she was asleep.

Then his soul stretched itself, wrapped itself up in the darkness, and enjoyed being able to think without being watched by those cold, threatening eyes.

She had not, however, really gone to sleep, but in the darkness he heard her voice as before: "Are you asleep?"

He felt the vampire which had fastened on to his soul and kept watch even over his thoughts. Why did she spy on him except that she feared the silent workings of his mind? She felt perhaps how he lay there, and worked himself gradually out of the meshes of her net. He only needed a few hours' quiet, but that he was not to have. So she denied herself sleep in order to torment him. She would not allow herself the pleasure of going to the city, or of visiting the libraries and museums, because she did not wish to leave him alone. The next day he asked her whether she wished to continue to translate his worlds, or whether he should have recourse again to his old translators.'

"Shall I translate *you*?" she said contemptuously. "There are better writers to be done."

"Why will you not rather translate me than your rubbishy authors?"

"Take care!" she hissed. "You over-value yourself and a terrible awakening awaits you from the dream of your imagined greatness." She said that in a tone as if she were supported by the public opinion of all Europe. That made a certain impression on him, for an author, even when recognised, often seems nothing to himself but is entirely dependent on the opinion others cherish regarding his talents. Now he felt the bond between them snap. She hated and despised his work, which was his only means of support, and when she sought to rob him of courage and confidence, she was the enemy. And in dealing with an enemy there are only two methods--either to kill him, or not to fight him but to fly. He determined on the latter.

He had still to wait a few days till the money came, and these days were enough to develop his aversion. He had opportunities of witnessing more cold, calculating malice, mischievous joy at successful thrusts, all the feminine small-mindedness, meanness, and duplicity, but on a larger scale. Since she knew that he could not get away for want of

money, she gave him to understand that he was her prisoner; but he was not, however.

The room looked like a pigsty, and the meals were so prepared as to be purposely repulsive. Dirt and disorder prevailed to such a degree that he felt himself in hell. With longing he thought of his lonely attic which had always been tidy, however careless he had been about expenses.

Two months had passed since their marriage. All smiles and even conversation had ceased; love was changed into unreasoning hate, and he began to find her ugly.

On the last day before his departure, he felt obliged to speak out in order not to explode. "You were beautiful as long as I loved you; perhaps my love made you so, not only in my opinion. Now I find you the ugliest and meanest character which I have met in my life."

She answered: "I know that I have never been so malicious towards anyone as towards you, without being able to give any reasons for it."

"I can, though," he said. "You hate me because I am a man, and your husband."

He had packed his portmanteau and she was prepared for his departure. When now the time of separation approached and she believed it would be for ever, her hatred vanished, and behold! love was there again!

Her tenderness and care for him knew no bounds. They spoke of the future as though they would soon meet again. She gave him good advice in a motherly way, but resignedly, as if in face of an unalterable destiny which demanded their temporary separation. As they drove to the station in an open carriage, she kissed him repeatedly in broad daylight in the main streets. The passers-by laughed, but when the police began to look attentively at the caressing pair, he felt the need of caution.

"Take care," he said, "in this country we might be imprisoned for making love openly."

"What do I care for that?" she answered. "I love you so much."

He thought her again sublime in her all-defying tenderness, and they planned to meet again in a week. His intention was to go to his colleague Ilmarinen in the Island of Rugen. The latter would help him to order his affairs; then he would rent a house and they would meet again in a fortnight at latest.

"You see now, one cannot trust in the permanence of this hatred."

"No, one must trust love."

"It looks as if that had conquered."

Their parting at the station was heart-rending, and, as he sat alone in the railway carriage, he felt the pain of longing for her. He did not find the sense of freedom and happiness of which he had dreamt. All the recollections of her malice seemed to have been obliterated.

Heligoland.

IV

He went from London to Hamburg in the hope of finding acquaintances on his arrival who would help him on to Rugen. But he found the place as though under a spell of enchantment; everyone had gone to the country or somewhere else. He had to take a room in an hotel and telegraph first to Ilmarinen in Rugen, but the latter answered that he had no money. Then he telegraphed to Copenhagen and Christiania and received similar answers.

He felt now as though he had been enticed into a trap and overpowered. Since there had been an outbreak of cholera the previous year in Hamburg, they expected another when the heat returned, and that was the case just now. Therefore, if he did not get away soon, he had to expect, not death, to which he felt indifferent, but the quarantine.

The days passed slowly with terrible monotony, for he had no one to talk to, and with the threatened cholera outbreak hanging over his head. Helpless and in a perpetual rage against some invisible foe who seemed to have a grudge against him, he felt paralysed. He dared not move a finger in order to alter his destiny, for he feared failure and renewed disappointment of his hopes.

In order to pass the time he studied historical tables and wrote dates from morning to evening. But the days were still terribly long, and after four days he conceived a fixed idea that he would never get away from this infernal town where nothing but buying and selling went on. This impression became so strong that he determined to end his life in his uncanny bedroom. He unpacked his things and put out the photographs of his children and other relatives on the

writing-table.

Loneliness and torment made the time seem double its real length. He began to be under the illusion that he was a native of Hamburg; he forgot for a while his past and the fact that he was married or had lived anywhere else than here. He regarded himself as a prisoner with the weird feeling that he did not know what crime he had committed, who had condemned him, or who was his jailer. But the black spectre of cholera haunted invisibly the dirty water of the canals and watched for him. Three times a day he asked the waiter about the cholera and always received the same answer: "They are not sure yet."

Then at last came a letter from his wife. She cried aloud from longing, fear, and unrest, and wished to know where he was. He answered in the same tone and felt wild with rage at the destiny which separated them.

On the morning of the fifth day he discovered in a newspaper that his Danish friend lived only half an hour's journey by rail from Hamburg.

If he had known that before, he would not have been obliged to undergo all these sufferings. Now, since he could not pay the hotel bill, he resolved to depart at once and not to return. His friend would give him money which he would send to the hotel, and he would have his things sent after him. He took his seat in the railway carriage with the feelings of a liberated prisoner, cast a pitying look on Hamburg and forgave the injuries it had done him, but vowed never to honour it with another visit, unless compelled.

His half-hour's journey put him in a good humour, and his mouth watered at the prospect of being able to give expression to all his vexation and perhaps to make light of his martyrdom, and give it a comic aspect. His divine frivolity returned, and he thought that he must be after all a lucky fellow to find one of his friends so unexpectedly. He stopped before the comfortable little house; the landlord stood in the doorway; he greeted him and asked if Mr ---- were at home.

"No; he went off this morning."

"Where?"

"To Denmark."

During the three hours which he had to wait for the train he had time to get over the blow. When he took his seat again in the train, he thought: "There is something wrong here; it is not the natural logic of events. It is certainly something else."

Then the spires of Hamburg reappeared and his hatred to the place awoke again, and rose to an incredible height when he saw a coffin at the station. "Now the cholera is here," he thought, "and I shall be in quarantine for fourteen days!"

But it was not the cholera, which was something to be thankful for. He did not feel so, however, for he felt sure it would break out on the same day that he received the money. And he calculated that he would never get away from Hamburg in this way. The money would delay so long till the hotel bill, which grew in geometrical progression, swallowed up the whole amount, and nothing would be left for his travelling expenses. In this way there would be a sort of perpetual movement which might last till the end of the world.

That his calculations were about correct was proved two days later when the money really came. He paid the bill, left the hotel in a cab, and drove to the station; then a hotel servant who had followed him expected a tip, and had, besides, a little additional bill, probably falsified, as usual. When he came to the booking-office and inquired the price of the ticket, he was two marks short. Accordingly he returned to the hotel.

It is not necessary to linger over details in order to give the reader a lively idea of what he suffered. In short, his silence cure still lasted some days; then he got away, and the cholera had not yet broken out.

His object in going to Rugen was partly to seek masculine society in order to get rid of the feminine atmosphere which had enveloped him, and partly to settle matters with Ilmarinen; but his chief purpose was probably to talk himself out. That was precisely why, he thought, destiny or whatever it was had relegated him to absolute silence in Hamburg, for "destiny" always sought out his secret wishes in order to frustrate them.

When at last he reached Rugen, hoping to have a good talk for half a night, he found Ilmarinen altered, chilly in demeanour and embarrassed. The latter had heard that his friend had married a lady from a rich family, as indeed was the fact, and therefore could not understand this sudden come down. When the new-comer asked whether they could have supper together, the Finn excused himself by saying that he had been invited to a birthday feast.

"I live, you know," he said, "with Lais's oldest friend, the Swede, who was in love with her, and who came last."

"Is he here?"

"Yes, he lives here, since Lais engaged herself to the Russian who left his wife and children."

"He hates me then also?"

"Yes, to speak the truth, your presence will certainly annoy him."

So he remained alone the first evening. Alone after a long double loneliness with his wife and with himself!

He felt as though he were under some curse, to be so treated by this insignificant, uncultivated Ilmarinen whom he had lifted up from nothingness, introduced to his own circle, fed and lodged, because he executed business matters for him with the theatres and publishers. This employment was partly an honour for the young unknown author, and partly an advantage, for it helped him to find openings for his own work. Now the pupil abandoned the teacher, because he thought there was nothing more to be gained from him, and because he considered he could now help himself.

The days which followed were now so dreadful, that again the thought occurred to him that this could not be natural, but that a black hand was guiding his destiny.

Since there was only one restaurant in this third-class watering-place, he had to sit at the same table with his countryman, who attributed to him the loss of Lais, and with Ilmarinen, who assumed a superior tone, because he regarded him as lost. Then the food resembled hog's flesh from which all the goodness had been cooked out. One rose hungry from table, and was hungry the whole day. Everything was adulterated, even the beer. As regards the meat, the restaurant keeper's family first cooked all the goodness out of it for themselves; the customers only got the sinews and bones, and were fed, in fact, just like dogs. Bitter looks, which his unfortunate fellow-countryman could not quite suppress, did not increase the imaginary pleasures of the table.

He spent a week in Rugen without hearing anything from his wife in London. At first he had found life on the island tolerable in contrast to that in the Hamburg hotel; but when he woke one day and reflected on his situation, it seemed to him simply hellish. He had hired an attic room and the sun beat fiercely on the iron plates of the roof, which was only a foot above his head. Sixteen years previously he had, as a young bachelor, left his garret at the top of five flights of stairs, in order to enter a house as a married man. Since that time it had been one of his nightmares to find himself crawling up the five flights of stairs to his old garret, where all the wretchedness and untidiness of a bachelor's room awaited him. Now he was again in an attic and a bachelor, although married. That was like a punishment after receiving warnings. But what crime he had committed he could not say.

Moreover, the whole surrounding soil consisted of light, loose sand, which had been so heated by the suns of midsummer that it did not become cool at night. It made one think at first of the hot sand-girdles which peasants use to cure inflammation of the lungs. Later on, after searching in his memory, he thought of the scene in Dante's Inferno where the blasphemers lie stretched out on hot sand. But as he did not think he believed in any good God, it seemed to him that blasphemies might be left unpunished.

After walking about for a week in the deep sand, it seemed to him really a hellish torture to have to take half a step backward for every one forward, and to be obliged to lift the foot six inches high in walking. Worst of all was the feeling of sinking through the earth like the girl in the fairy story who trod on bread. Never to find a firm foothold, nor to be able to run a race with one's thoughts, but to drag oneself about like an old man--that was hell. Besides this, there was a heat in the air which never abated. His attic was burning hot by day, and when he lay in bed at night with nothing on, he was scorched by the iron plates of the roof. The nearness of the sea would naturally have helped to relieve the heat, but that possibility had been carefully guarded against, like everything else. From his boyhood he had been accustomed to cast himself head foremost into the water because he did not like creeping into it. In connection with this also, he was persecuted by a frequently recurring nightmare, i.e. he used to dream that he was overheated and must plunge into the sea. The sea was there but was so shallow that he could not plunge into it, and when he did crawl into it, it was still so shallow that he could not duck his head. That was precisely the case here. "Have I come here for the fulfilment of all my bad dreams?" he asked himself.

And with reason. Ilmarinen grew more inquisitive every day; he asked when the Norwegian's wife was coming, and when a fortnight had passed, believed that she had quite abandoned him. This, naturally, pleased Lais's friend, and nothing was wanting to complete the Norwegian's hell. For there was something very humiliating in his position as a discarded husband. His correspondence with England had assumed such an ominous character that he did not know himself whether he was still married or separated. In one of his wife's letters, she dwelt on her inextinguishable love, the pain of separation, and the martyrdom of longing. They were, she said, Hero and Leander on opposite sides of the sea, and if she could swim, she would fly to her Leander, even at the risk of being washed up on his island a corpse. In her next letter she announced that she intended opening a theatre in London, and was trying to raise sufficient capital. At the same time she could not find enough capital to buy a steamer-ticket. A third letter contained the news that she was ill, and was full of complaints that the husband had left his sick wife in a foreign land. A fourth letter said that she was in a convent kept by English ladies, where she had been educated, and where she found again her youth and innocence; in it she also denounced the wickedness of the world and the hell of marriage.

It was impossible to give reasonable answers to these letters, for they poured on him like hail and crossed his own. If

he wrote a gentle reply he received a scolding letter in answer to a previous sharp one of his, and vice versa. Their misunderstandings arrived at such a pitch that they bordered on lunacy, and when he ceased to write, she began to send telegrams.

This imbroglio lasted for a month, and during that time he looked back with longing to the hours he had spent in Hamburg; they seemed to him like memories of an indescribably happy time when compared with this.

At last he was cut down from the gallows. A letter came from his sister-in-law inviting him to his father-in-law's villa at Odense. His wife had also been invited; and it was arranged that they should meet again there.

V

Prepared for everything, even the worst, he entered on this new stage of running the gauntlet. The most curious of all his changes awaited him. After having been a husband and father he was to become a child again, be incorporated into a family, and find another father and mother many years after losing his own. The situation was rendered more confused by the fact that his father and mother-in-law had lived separate for seven years, and now wished to come together again on the occasion of their daughter's marriage.

He had thus become a bond of union between them, and since the daughter had also been at variance with her father, the family meeting promised to take the shape of a manifold reconciliation.

But his own past was not exactly associated with family reconciliations, and since he himself had not a clean record the prospective idyll by the Areskov Lake began to loom before him like a cave of snakes. How was he to explain this strange parting from his bride after only eight weeks of marriage? To allege pecuniary embarrassment would be the worst of all excuses, because a son-in-law with money difficulties would be regarded as an impostor or a legacy-hunter.

As he approached the meeting-place, he became nervous, but at the last hour he saved his courage, as usual, by reverting to the stand-point of the author: "If I get no honour thereby, I will at any rate get material for a chapter in my novel."

He also regarded what happened to him from another point of view--that of the innocent martyr. "I will see how far Destiny can go in its meanness, and how much I can bear." When the train stopped at the pretty little branch-line station, he looked out, naturally enough, for faces which sought his own. A young lady leading a delicate-looking child by the hand approached, asked his name, and introduced herself as his father-in-law's French governess. She had been sent, she said, to meet him.

A pretty white village whose houses had high, tent-like roofs and green shutters lay in a valley surrounded by small hills, and enclosing a beautiful lake, on the bank of which, outside the village, stood his father-in-law's house. On the road under the lime-trees a bare-headed, white-haired lady met him, embraced him and bade him welcome. It was his wife's mother. He was immediately conscious what a strange transmission of feelings such a simple transaction as marriage had seemed to him, might bring about. She was his mother and he was her son.

"I have known you long before you saw my daughter," said the old lady, with the quavering voice of a religious fanatic. "And it is as though I had expected you. There is much evil in your writings, but your immorality is childish, your views of women are correct, and your godlessness is not your fault for He did not wish to make your acquaintance, but now you will soon see Him come. You have married a child of the world, but you will not long remain with her when you see how she pulls you down into the trivialities of life. When you find yourself alone, you will re-discover the first vocation of your youth."

This she said in the solemn and unembarrassed manner of a sibyl, as though someone else spoke through her and therefore she did not fear to have said too much.

When the conversation returned to mundane things, he asked after his father-in-law, whose absence surprised him. She answered that he was not here, but would come to-morrow. His sister-in-law now appeared but she was chilly, gloomy and conventional in demeanour. He had thought her his friend and had hoped to find a support in her presence, but perceived now that that hope was vain, especially as she was going to leave before her father came. Nothing more was said about his own wife, and no one knew whether she was coming or not.

Had he been enticed into a trap? he asked himself, and was a court martial about to be held here? Had his wife written complaints against him from England? How was he to interpret the situation? A mother-in-law who almost advised him to be divorced, and spoke ill of her child--that was something very original!

Meanwhile he was conducted into the villa. It was a handsome stone building of two stories, with many large rooms

filled with ancient furniture, tapestries, and ornaments. And this house, which could easily contain two large families, was occupied for only six weeks in the year by the owner during his holidays; the rest of the time it stood empty. This suggested wealth, and gave the son-in-law the impression that here, at any rate, one need not discuss poverty--its causes and its cure.

The day passed in conversation with his mother-in-law, who was unwearied in showing him attention and kindness. She was inclined on every occasion to lead the conversation to high subjects; as a religious mystic she was disposed to see the guiding hand of Providence everywhere. That led her to look at things in general from a tolerant point of view, since she regards people's actions as predestined.

In order to make himself agreeable in the most usual way he placed himself at her point of view and searched in his past for some premonitions of coming events.

"Yes," answered the old lady, "I said already that I had expected you; one of those wild Northmen was to come and take my daughter. But as you can guess, my husband was not delighted at the prospect; he has a very violent temper but is good at heart. You will have a hard tussle with him at first, but it will soon be over, if only you do not answer him. It is certainly fortunate that your wife has not come, for he has a bone to pick with her also."

"Also?"

"I don't mean anything bad; don't misunderstand me. It will be all right when his angry fit is over."

"He will be angry then, anyhow, but I don't understand why. I have acted in good faith, but every man may sometimes fairly plead unmerited misfortune."

"Oh, it will be all right!"

At last the evening ended and he went up to his room. It had windows on three sides; there were no outer blinds and the curtains could not be drawn together. He felt himself under observation, like a patient in quarantine.

When he lay in bed he had his father-in-law's bust to contemplate; the face did not look friendly but quite the reverse, and being lit from below, it assumed all manner of unpleasing expressions.

"And to-morrow I am to be lectured by this stranger who I have never seen; scolded like a schoolboy because I have had misfortunes. Well, I must put up with it, as with everything else."

The next morning he woke up with a distinct impression that he found himself in a pit of snakes, into which Satan had enticed him. Therefore it was impossible to flee, so he went out to botanise and survey the landscape. He screwed himself up into a frivolous, poetic mood and thought what a thrilling situation it was; a dramatic scene which no one had hitherto passed through. "It is my own," he said to himself, "even though it should scorch my skin."

Lunch-time came; it was not exactly cheerful at table and his father-in-law's empty place seemed to threaten him. After lunch he went up to his room to quiet his nerves and immediately afterwards the Councillor's arrival was announced.

The Norwegian went down smiling, while a chill ran through him at intervals. In the veranda stood a man who looked about forty, dressed like a young man, with laughing and youthful eyes. What the Norwegian's own demeanour was, he himself could not see, but it must have made a favourable impression, for his new relative greeted him respectfully, apologised for the lateness of his arrival, said kind things about his books, and asked him to sit down.

However, he always addressed him with "you" instead of the more intimate "thou." Then he talked of politics; he had just come from Fredensborg. He spoke at length of this and that person, apparently with the object of observing his son-in-law, who sat mute and attentive. Then he turned to his wife, asked if she had anything to entertain their guest with, and finally came back to him, asking if he wished for anything. Without hesitating he stood up, went near his father-in-law and said: "I have only one wish, that my wife's father should call me 'thou.'"^[1]

There was a sudden gleam in the other's eyes, he opened his arms and now the doubter felt the same as he had when meeting his mother-in-law. The invisible family-tie had been knit; he was genuinely moved, and stood there transformed into a child.

"You are a good fellow," said his father-in-law, "I have looked into your eyes." Then he kissed him on both cheeks. "But," he continued, "you have got Maria, and you know what you have got, as I hear. Be good enough never to come and complain to me. If you cannot tame her, you must let yourself be drawn along by her. You have had your way; much good may it do you!"

Then they drank coffee and talked like relatives and old acquaintances. Then the Councillor went to change his clothes in order to go fishing. He returned in a summer suit of white cashmere which made him look still younger than before. The trousers had certainly belonged to his Court uniform, and traces of gold thread were still visible upon them, but that made an impression on the Bohemian. Moreover, his father-in-law offered him cigars which he had been presented with by princes.

The Councillor had dined at Court and was now going fishing with the anarchist. The latter felt his conscience slightly uneasy as he had not long previously admired the cleverness of some anarchists in forcing open money-safes. It was strange! But the Councillor spoke sympathetically of modern movements and of Scandinavian literature in general. He was also thoroughly acquainted with the terrible activity of his son-in-law, so that the latter had no need to feel embarrassed. He especially approved of his views on the woman question and expressed his opinion thus, "You have written all that I wished to write."

He was perhaps not quite serious, but he said it at any rate.

Then they reached the stream.

"Have you ever fished for perch?" asked his father-in-law.

"No," he replied.

"Then you had better help me."

The help consisted in placing the fish in a basket and clearing the hook without injuring the artificial fly.

Since everything requires practice, the son-in-law showed himself somewhat clumsy and got scolded. But he had become so accustomed to his new position that he found it quite natural, just as natural as when he used to go fishing formerly with his children.

At sunset the sport ceased, and the son-in-law had the honour of carrying the fishing-rods, basket, and fish home.

The evening was cheerful, and the Councillor sent a telegram to London with travelling expenses, telling the young wife to come at once.

"That is for your sake," he said to his son-in-law. In other words she had not been sent for before, and he had therefore been enticed, as one captures singing-birds.

"I have got well over it," he said to his mother-in-law as he bade her good night.

"The worst is over, but it is not finished yet."

"Do you think we shall both get a whipping?"

It was not the end yet by a long way. The next morning he received a letter from London in which she said farewell to him for ever (Lord Byron!) because in the choice between her and her parents, he had preferred the latter. Since there was no choice in question, this was a piece of nonsense which concealed something. Another letter, addressed to her mother, was to the same effect but expressed more violently and concluded by wishing her "good luck." Her mother explained it thus. "She is jealous, fears that you tell tales against her and find support here; she is so self-willed that she cannot bear even her parents over her. If you become good friends with her father and mother, she feels herself in a child's position with regard to you also!"

This was possible but not quite natural, for she ought to have rejoiced that he had made a conquest of her parents, and thus brought about a reconciliation between her and them.

Her father became angry and serious; he telegraphed an ultimatum and demanded an answer. Now the sky was clouded and there were no more smiles. The Norwegian feared a collision if he remained here, and telegraphed to his wife: "I am going to Copenhagen; if you do not come, I will seek for a divorce." But he had to wait for an answer, and therefore he remained. That night he could not sleep, for the situation was grotesque enough to drive one to despair. Suppose she agreed to a divorce, how could the family-tie which had just been formed be broken in a moment? What would he be then, who had just entered into the family and received their confidence? What would the old people think? Such a hasty breach could not take place without some reason.

The next morning a telegram came from his young wife who was in Holland. Since everything was fated to go crazily this telegram was so badly worded that it might mean "I am coming to you," or "I am going to Copenhagen to meet you there."

This telegram became a bone of contention, and for three whole days the old pair and their son-in-law disputed over its interpretation. But the young wife did not come. They listened to the whistles of the steamboats, went down to meet the trains, came back and discussed the telegram again. They had no more quiet, and could not carry on a conversation without turning their heads and listening.

The next day the father's patience was exhausted, for a collateral circumstance came in view, of great importance in his eyes--the unavoidable scandal. The whole village knew that the son-in-law was there, but that his wife had been lost and was sought for by telegram. Her father therefore shut himself up all day, and when he emerged began a ruthless discussion of the economic problem.

"Have you a sure income?" he asked.

"As sure as authors generally have," was the answer.

"Very well, then you must do like others, and write for the papers."

"No paper will print my articles."

"Then write them so that they can be printed."

That was more than a sceptic and quietist ought to have borne, but he bore it and kept silence, firmly resolved rather to take a guitar on his arm and go about as a wretched streetsinger rather than sell his soul.

The old man had himself been a novelist and poet in his youth, but had been obliged to give up the struggle in order to provide for his family. He, therefore, had the right to say: "Do as I have had to do." But on the other side he knew by experience how hard such a sacrifice is. He immediately felt sympathy with his son-in-law and spoke friendly, encouraging words. The next moment, however, his justified suspicions awoke, and the memory of the sacrifice he had once made made him bitter; he felt he must trample on an unfortunate who had fallen under his feet. When he saw how the other kept silent and took everything quietly, an evil spirit probably whispered to him that this man could only bear everything so patiently because he hoped some day to be heir in this house. Then he spoke of King Lear and his ungrateful daughters who left the old man alone, waited for his death, and robbed him of honour. So the day passed, and when the son-in-law withdrew, he was sent for to be whipped again. Since he could put himself in other's places, and understood how to suffer with them, he made no attempt to defend himself. He could easily imagine himself old and set aside, despised and neglected by his children. "You are right," he said, "but still I feel myself innocent."

On the evening of the third day after the dispatch of the London telegram his mother-in-law came to him. "You must go early to-morrow morning," she said, "for he cannot bear to see you any more!"

"Very well, I will go."

"And if Maria comes now, she will not be received."

"Have you ever seen a man in such a position as mine?"

"No; my husband grants that too; it makes him suffer to see such a worthy man as you in such a position; he suffers on your account, and he does not want to suffer. You know my thoughts about it; it is no one's fault and not the fault of circumstances; but you are fighting against another who pursues and pursues you till you are so weary that you will be compelled to seek rest in the only place where rest is to be found. In me you will always have a friend, even if you are divorced from my daughter, and I shall follow the course of your destiny with my good wishes and my prayers."

When alone in his room, he felt a certain relief to think that to-morrow there would be an end of this wretchedness which was among the worst things he had experienced. In order to think of something else, he took up a paper which proved to be the official Court news. His eye flew over the first page down to the feuilleton, where a literary essay attracted his attention. He read it, thinking that his father-in-law had written it. At the first glance the article showed great familiarity with literature, but it contained over-confident judgments and was written in too artificial a style. Moreover, it surprised him by displaying hostility to all modern literature (including Scandinavian), while German literature was pointed to with special emphasis as that which set the tone to, and stood highest in the civilised world. Germany always at the head!

When he reached the end of the article, he saw that it was signed by his wife! Now he had promised her never to read her articles and he had kept this promise in order to avoid literary discussions in his married life. The only reason that her written sentiments were different from those which she expressed in daily conversation must be that she had to write so "in order to be printed." What a double life this woman must lead, appearing in Radical circles as an anarchist, and in the Court paper as an old-fashioned Conservative! How one could so change about he did not understand, and he was too tired to try to understand it. But that explained why she could not understand his being without occupation while there were plenty of pens and paper.

This worldly wisdom, this old-fashioned style seemed to suggest a bald head and spectacles rather than a young, beautiful, laughing girl who could lie on a sofa and eat sweetmeats like an odalisque.

"To think that people should be so complicated!" he said to himself. "It is interesting at any rate! I shall remember it next time!" And he fell asleep, thinking himself considerably wiser after these experiences.

At seven o'clock he got up, called by a man who was to take his things to the station. As his mother-in-law had told him the train did not start till nearly eight, he made no hurry, but dressed quietly and went down into the garden where he met her. They were standing and talking of what lay before him when a rough, thundering voice was heard from a window of the first story. It was his father-in-law.

"Haven't you gone yet?"

"No; the train doesn't go till quarter to eight!"

"What idiot told you that?"

That he could not say, as it was his mother-in-law.

"Well, hurry on to the station and see when the next train goes."

As the Norwegian hesitated, there came a sharp "Now!" like the crack of a whip over a horse. It was quite clear to him what he had to do now; he pressed his mother-in-law's hand and went. His firm steps must have shown that they were the opposite to those leading to the lion's cave,^[2] going out and away but never returning, for he heard immediately the old man's voice in a caressing, lamenting tone: "Axel!"

It felt like a stab in the departer's breast, but he had begun to move, and went on without looking round.

He went down to the station, looked ostensibly at the railway guide, asked about the next train without listening to the answer, saw by the position of the sun which direction was north-east, and struck into the nearest highway. He did this all so quietly, as though he had long considered the plan. Soon he found himself out in the country, alone without a home, without baggage, without an overcoat, and nothing but a walking-stick in his hand. He felt angry with no one; his father-in-law was right, and his last call sounded like an appeal for forgiveness for his bad temper. Yes, he only felt guilty with regard to this man, on whom he had brought shame and sorrow. But in himself he felt innocent, for he had only acted according to his obligations and possibilities.

Meanwhile he was free and had left the worst hell behind him; the sun shone, the landscape lay green and open, he had the whole world before him. He shook off the child's clothes which he had worn for eight days, felt himself a man again, and marched on. His plan was to reach a certain place on foot; there to take a steamer, to telegraph for his baggage and so to travel to Copenhagen.

"The affair is really ludicrous," he said to himself; "if it were not tragic for the old people. It looks bad, but I have survived worse things. I am a tramp! Very good! Then all claims to honour and respect have ceased. It is soothing at all events to have nothing more to lose. Hurrah!"

He marched into the next village like an old soldier and ordered wine and tobacco. He felt hilarious, and chatted with the innkeeper. Then he went on again. But at intervals he became sentimental; thought of his mother-in-law's words about the wild chase; had to admit that there was something uncanny about it, for he had never yet experienced such a misfortune; and if other people noticed it, it could not be mere imagination. But that was nothing strange, for he had had bad luck ever since he was a child. But fancy placing a man in such a position! He would not even have treated an enemy with such hellish cruelty.

Meanwhile he reached Odense, came to Korsor and soon afterwards to Copenhagen. It was evening and he sent a messenger to the family where his wife generally stayed. Since she had not come to the Arreskov Lake, she must be in Copenhagen. On the visiting-card which he sent he only wrote: "A somewhat strange question: where is my wife?"

The man who has not waited for an hour and a half on a pavement does not know how long this time can be. But this interval of waiting was abridged by the hope that after a silence-cure of eight days in Hamburg, five weeks of simple imprisonment at Rugen, and a week of the nethermost hell at Funen, he would see his wife again. After an hour and a half the messenger returned with another visiting-card on which was written: "She left this morning for Funen in order to meet you."

A miss again! "I begin to find this monotonous even when regarded as a plot," he said to himself.

If one had used it for the plan of a novel, the reader would throw the book away and exclaim: "No! that is too thick! And as a farce it isn't cheerful enough!"

Nevertheless, it was a fact! The next minute he thought: "My poor, unfortunate wife is going straight into the lion's den. Now she will get blows." For her father's anger was now unbounded, and his mother-in-law had said during the last days of his stay: "If she comes now, he will beat her." Therefore he telegraphed to the old lady to say that his wife was coming, and asked indulgence for her.

It would take four days for her to return. In order not to remain in Copenhagen where his wedding journey had been reported in the papers, he stayed in a village outside the town where an old friend of his lived with his family. In the boarding-house where he stayed the same hog's-wash regime prevailed as in Rugen. In two days he lost as much strength as though he had had an attack of typhus. One chewed till one's jaws were weary, went hungry to table, and rose again tired and hungry.

His friend was not the same as before. Rendered melancholy by disappointments he seemed to find this a favourable opportunity to display a visible satisfaction at seeing the well-known author in such a sorry plight. His sympathy took the heartiest, and at the same time the most insulting forms. When the Norwegian related his adventures on the

wedding journey, his hearer stared at him in such a way that he made a hasty end of his narrative in order not to be stigmatised as a liar.

The village was on marshy ground, and over-shadowed by very old trees; one became melancholy there without knowing why. When he walked down one of the streets of the village he was astonished to see people at the windows regarding him furtively with wild, distracted looks, and immediately afterwards shyly hiding themselves behind the curtains. This disquieted him and he wondered whether a false report had been spread that he was mad. When he asked his friend about it, the latter answered: "Don't you know where you are?"

The question sounded strangely, and might mean: "Are you so confused that you have lost consciousness?"

"I am in X----" he answered, in order not to betray his suspicion.

"And don't you know what X---- is?"

"No!"

"It is simply a lunatic asylum; the inhabitants make a living by taking care of mad people." And he laughed.

The Norwegian inquired no further, but he asked himself: "Have they enticed me into a trap in order to watch me?"

He had grounds for such a suspicion, for such an occurrence had already happened in his life.

His whole existence now became a single effort to show himself so ordinary in his way of thinking and normal in his behaviour, that nothing "unusual" might be noticed in him. He did not dare to give vent to an original thought or to utter a paradox, and whenever the temptation came to narrate something of his wedding journey he pinched his knee.

This continual fear of being watched depressed him so much that he saw watching eyes everywhere, and thought he noticed traps laid for him in questions where there were none. Sensitive as he was, he believed that the whole village exhaled the contagious atmosphere of the lunatics; he became depressed and feared to go mad himself. But he did not attempt to go away, partly because he feared being arrested at the station, and partly because he had told his wife to meet him at this village.

He had received letters from Arreskov, in which his mother-in-law informed him what disquiet and anxiety his disappearance had caused them. His father-in-law, who well knew what he would have done in the unfortunate man's place, had immediately foreboded his suicide and wept aloud. They had searched for him by the banks of the lake and in the wood.... He stopped reading the letter and felt his conscience prick him. The good old man had wept! How terrible his lot must be, when the sight of it had that effect on others! The letter went on to say that Maria had arrived, and that they would soon meet again, if he only kept quiet, for she loved him. This was a ray of light and it gave him strength to endure this hell, where everyone looked askance at his neighbour to see whether he were in his senses.

But the two last days brought new tortures. The Swede whom he had met in the Copenhagen cafe had accepted an invitation to come to dinner. The Norwegian went gladly to the station to meet his best friend, who understood him better than anyone else, and who, though poor himself, had tried to make interest for him with rich people, and to procure the help for him which he himself could not obtain. But now he met a stranger who looked at him coldly and treated him as a stranger. There was no smile of recognition on his part, no inquiry after the Norwegian's health and especially no allusion to the past.

After dinner he took the host aside and asked: "Is the Swede angry with me?"

"Angry? No! But you understand he has now married Lais."

"Married?"

"Yes, and therefore he does not like to be reminded that she was your friend."

"I understand that, but it is not my fault that I was her friend before she knew that the Swede was in existence."

"No, certainly not; but you have gossiped about her."

"I only said what everyone else said, since it was no secret. She herself so boasted of her conquests that they were bound to become public."

"Yes, but the fact is as I say."

The Swede remained in the hotel, and therefore the Norwegian was relegated to solitude. In order to while away the time he made use of the flora of the neighbourhood in order to study the biology of plants. For this purpose he carried about with him on his walks a morphia syringe, intending to see whether the plants were sensitive to this nerve poison. He wished to prove by experiment that they possess a sensitive nervous system.

One afternoon he sat drinking a glass of wine at a garden restaurant on the outskirts of the village. Over his table hung the branches of an apple-tree, laden with small red apples. These were suitable for his purpose. Accordingly, he stood

on his chair, made an insertion with the morphia syringe in the twig which bore the apple, but pressed too hard, so that it fell. At that instant he heard a cry and halloo from the wooded slope behind him, and saw an angry man, followed by his wife and child, come rushing towards him with uplifted stick. "There! I have him at last!" he cried.

Him! He was mistaken for an apple stealer for whom they had been watching.

The Norwegian summoned all his Buddhistic philosophy to his aid, got down from the chair, and sat expecting to be led off by gendarmes as he had been caught in the act. It was impossible to explain his conduct, for none of the authorities could approve such an eccentric act as the inoculation of an apple-tree with morphia.

Meanwhile a minute passed while the angry man was running along by a fence and entering the enclosure. Like one condemned to death, the Norwegian sat there awaiting a blow from the stick as an earnest of what was to follow. He was firmly resolved to die like a warrior, and did not trouble to devise useless explanations, but only thought: "This is the most devilish experience I have had in my whole terrible life."

Sixty seconds are a long time but they pass at last!

Whether it was the Norwegian's carefully groomed exterior and expensive suit, the wine and the best kind of cigarettes, or something quite different which had a mollifying effect, the angry man, who had certainly not had such a stylish customer before, bared his head, and only asked whether the gentleman had been attended to. The Norwegian, answering politely, noticed how the restaurant keeper stared at the morphia syringe, the powder box and the glass of water.

With the free-and-easy tone of a man of the world, the Norwegian explained the embarrassing situation: "I am a botanist, and was just about to make an experiment when you surprised me in a very suspicious position."

"Pray, doctor, do as though you were in your own house, and be quite at your ease," was the reply.

After exchanging some remarks about the weather, the restaurant keeper went indoors; he muttered something to the waitress which the Norwegian thought he overheard. It caused him to take his departure, but in a leisurely way. "He thought I was one of the lunatics," he said to himself. "That was my deliverance. I can't come here again, however."

Several hours passed, but the impression of the sixty seconds of humiliation and the lifted stick still remained. "That is not mischance; that is something else," was his conclusion, as usual.

The next morning he took his walk and meditated on his destiny. "Why haven't you shot yourself?" Let him say who can. One view was that, finally, all difficulties are disentangled and experience shows that the end is good. This used to be called "hope," and by means of it one warped one's ship half an ell farther, as with a kedge anchor. Others maintained that it was curiosity which supported people. They wanted to see the sequel, just as when one reads a novel, or sees a play.

The Norwegian, for his part, had never found an aim in life. Religion certainly said that one should be improved here below, but he had only seen himself forced into situations from which he emerged worse than before. One certainly became a little more tolerant towards one's brother-men, but this tolerance strongly resembled moral laxity. Those who smile indulgently at others' crimes are not far from being criminals themselves. When in conversation it was alleged that one should love one's fellow-men, he used to deliver himself of his final sentiment as follows: "I neither love them nor hate them; I put up with them as they put up with me."

The fact that he was never entirely crushed by a sorrow sprang from his having an indistinct suspicion that life had no complete reality, but was a dream stage, and that our actions, even the worst of them, were carried out under the influence of some strong suggestive power other than ourselves. He therefore felt himself to a certain extent irresponsible. He did not deny his badness, but knew also that in his innermost being there was an upward, striving spirit which suffered from the humiliation of being confined in a human body. It was this inner personality which possessed the sensitive conscience, which could sometimes, to his alarm, press forward and become sentimental, weeping over his or her wretchedness--which of the two, it was hard to say. Then his second self laughed at the foolishness of the first, and this "divine frivolity," as he called it, served him better than morbid brooding.

When he came home from his work, he found his door shut. Full of foreboding, he knocked and uttered his own name. When the door opened, his young, wild wife fell on his neck. It seemed to him quite natural and simple, as though he had left her two minutes before. She spoke not a word of reproach, inquiry, or explanation, but only this: "Have you much money or little?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I have much, and want a good dinner in Copenhagen."

In this they were agreed, and such was their reunion. And why not? Two months of torture were forgotten and obliterated as though they had never been; the disgrace of a separation about which people had perhaps already

gossiped, had vanished.

"If anyone asked me," he said, "about what we had quarrelled I would not be able to remember."

"Nor I, either. But, therefore, we will never, never part again. We must not separate for half a day, or everything goes crazy."

This was certainly the wisest plan, he thought, and so did she. And yet one recollection came into his mind of Dover and another of London, when they were not apart for a moment, and just for that very reason everything went quite crazy. But they must not be too particular.

"And how is the old father?" he asked.

"Ah, he was so fond of you that I became jealous."

"I have noticed that. How did he receive you?"

"Well, I won't talk about that. But it was for your sake, so I forgave him." Even at that she could smile, as indeed she could at everything.

Well then, we will feast to-day, and work to-morrow.

Intimate friends thus address each other in Swedish.

Vide Horace.

VI

The autumn brought what the spring had promised, but not fulfilled. They lived in a good boarding-house, high up certainly, but with a view over the sea. Each of them kept up a slight intercourse with former friends so that they were not always *tete-a-tete*. The sun shone, money came in, and life was easy. This lasted for two unforgettable months without a cloud. There was boundless confidence on both sides, without a trace of jealousy. On one occasion, when she had tried mischievously to arouse his, he had said to her: "Don't play with madness! Be sure that with such play you only arouse my abhorrence and my hatred at the same time, when you introduce into my mental pictures of you the image of another man."

But she herself was jealous, even of his male friends, and drove Ilmarinen away. There were ladies at the table d'hote, and each time that he addressed one of them, she became so indisposed that she had to get up and go. There was no occasion to mistrust his faithfulness to her, but her imperiousness was so boundless, that she could not endure his imparting his thoughts to another, man or woman. When she conducted some business transactions for him with publishers she exceeded her authority and acted rather as his guardian than as his helper. He had to warn her: "Remember what I said! If you misuse the power I have given you, I will overthrow you like a tyrant." He did not doubt her goodwill but her want of insight and exaggerated ideas of his capacities caused him inconvenience, and even loss of money. When he took away from her the authority to act for him, she behaved like a naughty child, brought everything into confusion and threw it away as worthless. Accordingly, the way was prepared for the inevitable result.

One Sunday morning they had a disagreement on an important subject, and at last he had shut the door between their two rooms. Then he went out. On his return, he found a letter from his wife saying she had gone to a family which they knew in the country, and would be back in the evening. In order to let her feel what solitude is like he made an engagement for the evening with some friends. The evening came. He went out, but about ten o'clock, thinking it cruel to remain longer, he returned home. When he tried to open his door, he found it shut from within.

"Aha!" he thought. "This is her plan to make me listen to a curtain-lecture in her room." He rang for the servant. "Is my wife at home?"

"No, she came home at nine, but went out again, in order to meet you, sir."

"Very well, open the door of my wife's room." That was done, but the door of his room remained locked, as he had locked it himself in the morning. Then he made his decision, closed the outer door of the flat, and took possession of his wife's room. After an hour she came and knocked. Her husband answered through the closed door: "You can take my room; I hope you can open it."

When she found she could not she began to form suspicions and thought he had shut himself in with someone. She naturally would not endure the scandal but sent for the police, on the pretext that a thief had been there, and perhaps was still in the room. The police came; the Norwegian dressed himself and admitted them, and they broke open the door between the two rooms. At the same time the door leading to the corridor was opened. A servantmaid said she thought

she had heard steps inside the room. Before the open window stood a chair so placed as though someone had stood on it in order to climb on the roof. A thief then (or a woman) had clambered on the roof. The police went on it with lanterns, and some of the inmates of the boarding-house followed. A shadow moved by a chimney. A cry rose: "There he is!" The police declared that they could not climb the steep slate roof, and advised them to send for the fire brigade. "But that costs fifty crowns," objected the Norwegian. His wife signed a requisition for it, but her husband tore it in two. Meanwhile a crowd had collected in the street; the neighbouring roofs were also full of spectators. A cry was raised: "There he is!" They had seized a fellow who had joined the searchers with the good intention of catching the thief. A maid recollected that in the afternoon a traveller had arrived and was sleeping in a neighbouring attic from which he could have easily got into the room. The police made their way into the attic, searched through his papers and found nothing. All the attics were ransacked without result, and at midnight the police departed.

Then the young wife wished to begin with a whole series of explanations, but her husband was tired of the whole nonsense and could explain nothing. Therefore, since nothing more was to be done, he carried his wife into her room and shut the door between them for the second time that day!

This demoniacal adventure was never cleared up. The Norwegian did not believe there had been a thief, for nothing was missing from the rooms; he thought that his young wife, who had seen many plays, had stuck something in the lock, and that then devils had continued the performance of the comedy. He did not try to elicit what his wife thought, for then he would have been entangled in a web of necessary lies. He therefore made a stroke of erasure through the whole affair. The next morning they were again good friends, but not quite so good as before.

How disunion between a married pair arises has not yet been explained. They love one another, only flourish in each other's society, have not different opinions, and suffer when they are separated; their whole united self-interest enjoins them to keep the peace, because it is they especially who suffer when it is not kept. Nevertheless, a little cloud arises, one knows not whence; all merits are transformed into faults, beauty becomes ugliness and they confront each other like two hissing snakes; they wish each other miles away, although they know that if they are separated for a moment there begins the pain of longing, which is greater than any other pain in life.

Here physiology and psychology are non-plussed. Swedenborg in his "Conjugal Love" is the only one who has even approached the solution of the problem, and he has seen that for that purpose higher factors must be taken into consideration than come into the mental purview of most people.

This is why a married pair who love each other are obliged again and again to wonder why they hate one another, i.e. why they flee one another although they seek one another. Married people who are slightly acquainted with Ganot's "Physics" may note the resemblance of this phenomenon to that of the electricised elder-pith balls, but this will not make them either wiser or happier. Love indeed presents all the symptoms of lunacy, hallucination, or seeing beauty where none exists; profoundest melancholy, varying with extreme hilarity without any transition stage; unreasonable hate; distortions of each other's real opinions (so-called "misunderstandings"); persecution mania, when one believes the other is setting spies and laying snares; sometimes indeed attempts on each other's life, especially with poison. All this has reasons which lie below the surface. The question arises, whether through a married pair's living together, the evil thoughts of one, while still unripened, are not quite clearly apprehended and interpreted by the other, as though they had already entered into consciousness, with the express purpose of being carried into action. Nothing annoys a man more than to have his secret thoughts read, and that only a married pair can do to each other. They cannot conceal their dark secrets; one anticipates the other's intentions, and therefore they easily form the idea that they spy on each other, as indeed they actually do. Therefore they fear no one's look so much as each other's, and are so defenceless against one another. Each is accompanied by a judge who condemns the evil desire while yet in the germ, although no one is answerable for his thoughts to the civic law.

Accordingly, in marrying, one enters into a relation which stands a grade higher than ordinary life, makes severer demands, more exacting claims, and operates with more finely developed spiritual resources. Therefore the Christian Church made marriage a sacrament, and regarded it rather as a purgatory than a pleasure. Swedenborg in his explanation of it, also inclines this way.

A married pair are ostensibly one, but cannot be really so. As a punishment they are condemned to feel thorns when they wish to gather roses. According to the proverb: "Omnia vincit amor" the power of love is so boundless, that if it were allowed uncontrolled sway, the order of the universe would be endangered. It is a crime to be happy, and therefore happiness must be chastised.

Our frivolous friends must have felt something of this, for when they had had a tiff, they reconciled themselves without explanations and without alleging reasons, as though it was not they who were to blame for the discord but a third unknown person who had brought about all the confusion.

They did so on this occasion also, but the peace did not last long. Some days afterwards an indisputable fact was apparent, which in ordinary marriages is accepted with mixed feelings, but in this one met with decided disapproval.

The wife was beside herself: "Now you have ruined my career; I shall sink down to the level of a nurse and how shall we support ourselves?"

There awoke in her a personal grudge against her husband which degenerated into hatred. She was an example of the "independent" woman who protests against the supposed injustice of Nature in assigning all the discomfort to her. She forgets that this brief period of pain is followed by an extreme and long-lasting joy which is quite unknown to men.

Here reasonable considerations were naturally of no avail, and when there were no more smiles, the situation became serious. The scenes between them assumed a tragic character, and just at this crisis an action was brought against him for his last-published book, which was confiscated at the same time. Autumn passed, and one felt that the sun had gone. The cheerful top-floor room changed into a never-tidied sick-room—became narrow.

Her hatred increased continually; she could not go into society, nor to theatres, and hardly on the street. What most annoyed her was the fact that the doctor who had been summoned to declare that she had a dangerous disease, hitherto unknown, only smiled, saying that all the symptoms were normal, and ordered soda-water. Instead of an intelligent friend, the Norwegian found a malicious, spoilt, unreasonable child at his side, and longed to be out of all this wretchedness. All conversation ceased, and they only carried on communications by writing. But there is a kind of malice bordering on the disgraceful and infamous, which is hard to define but easy to recognise. That is the original sin in human nature, the positive wish to injure without cause, and without being justified in taking vengeance or exacting retribution. This kind of malice is hardly forgivable.

One day he received a scrap of paper on which something was written which prevented him going to her room again. Then came her ultimatum; she resolved to go to her relations the next day.

"I wish you a happy journey," he answered. In the dusk of the early morning a white form stood by his bedside stretching out its arms pleadingly for forgiveness. He did not move but let it stand there. Then she fell to the ground, and he let her lie, like an overthrown statue.

Whence the soft-hearted man, who was always ready to forgive, derived this firmness, this inhuman hardness, he could not understand, but it seemed to him to be imposed on him from without like a duty, or a fiery ordeal which he must go through. He went to sleep again. Then he awoke and dressed. He entered the empty room and was conscious of the void. Everything was irrevocably at an end!

A severe agitation was needed to bring his ego uppermost, and he resolved to drain a draught which was unsurpassed for bitterness. He went back to his native land, from which he had been banished.

When he got on the steamer for Christiania, he wrote a farewell letter to the captain, went on deck with his revolver, and thought of finding his grave in the Kattogat. Why did he not carry out this intention? Let him say who can! At last he found himself in a small provincial hotel. But why had it to be precisely the one in which Lais's friends and relations lived and dominated the social circle in which he must move? He could only regard that as a mean stroke on the part of Destiny, for on this occasion he was not to blame at all.

Meanwhile he sat as on an ant-heap in an alien and hostile environment. For three days long he asked himself: "What have I got to do here?" And he answered: "What indeed have you to do anywhere?" So he remained. For three days he asked himself: "What have you to do in life?" and questioned of the where, whence and whither. As an answer, the revolver lay on the table.

Hamburg, London, and Rugen began to shine like pleasant memories in comparison with this place of exile. It was so dreadful that he was astonished at the inventiveness of Destiny in devising new tortures which ever increased in severity. His room in the hotel was a suicide's room, i.e. a combination of discomfort and uncanniness. He was again haunted by the old idea he used to have: "I shall not get alive out of this room; here I must end my days." His capacity for hoping was exhausted. He seemed to be dropping downwards towards the empty void which began to close round him like the last darkness.

On the fourth day he received a letter from his sister-in-law in which she told him that his little wife was going on well. At the same time she proposed that he and his wife should spend the winter in a little town in Alster, so that her relations could now and then visit his wife who, in her present condition, needed help and advice.

It was, then, not at an end! And these pains of death had been endured in vain; he had not needed them in order to be taught to miss his wife. It was not over yet, and he began to live again.

As a proof that he had completely come to the end of himself it may be mentioned that the papers in those days contained a notice of his death. He wrote to contradict this in a vein of gloomy irony. He was tormented for three days more by having to run about to collect the journey money.

When the train at last stopped at the little station, he saw first of all his wife's pale face. It looked certainly somewhat exhausted by suffering, but beamed at the same time with some of that glorifying radiance which motherhood bestows.

When her eyes discovered him, her face lit up.

"She loves me," he said to himself. And he began to live again literally not figuratively.

"Are you well?" he asked almost shyly.

"Yes I am," she whispered, burying like a child her face in his great cloak and kissing the edge of it.

"What are you doing? What are you doing?"

And she hid her face in his mantle in order not to show the emotion, of which she was always ashamed.

They had engaged two very inferior rooms; one was dark and the other uncomfortable, looking out on a factory. His wife worked in the kitchen and resigned herself to her fate, for her maternal feelings were aroused, though not yet completely. He suffered when he saw her toiling the whole day at the kitchen-range and in the scullery, and sometimes felt a twinge of conscience.

When he wished to help her to carry something heavy, she refused to be helped, for she insisted strongly that he should not be seen engaged in any feminine occupation, nor would she allow him to wait on her or to do her any small service. All storms were over now; a quiet stillness prevailed; the days passed one after the other in unvaried monotony. They lived alone together and had no social intercourse nor distractions.

But poverty came. The trial about his book had frightened the publishers and theatres. But the worst of all was that he could not write.

And what he could write, he did not wish to, for the plot of the story affected a family to whom he owed a debt of gratitude. Now when he would soon have two families to provide for, he trembled before the future with its increased duties, for a growing dislike to exercise his calling as an author had finally culminated in disgust.

What an occupation--to flay his fellow-creatures and offer their skins for sale. Like a hunter who, when pressed hard by hunger, cuts off his dog's tail, eats the flesh, and gives the bone--its own bone--to the dog. What an occupation to spy out people's secrets, expose the birth-marks of his best friend, dissect his wife like a rabbit for vivisection, and act like a Croat, cutting down, violating, burning, and selling. Fie!

In despair he sat down and wrote from his notes a survey of the most important epochs of the world's history. He hoped, or in his need imagined that he might in this way strike out a new path for himself as an historian, which had been the dream of his youth, before he became an author.

His wife knew what he was writing and that it would bring in no money, but controlled herself; perhaps his ardent conviction had persuaded her that there was something in it. She did not complain, but on the contrary cheered him up and offered to translate the work into English.

A month passed, quiet, peaceful but melancholy. They felt that they were not enough for each other in this absolute loneliness. They lamented it but sought for no society. He, with wider experience than hers, hoped that the child on its arrival would be satisfying company for them both.

Meanwhile poverty approached nearer. None of his plays were performed or sold, and not one of the hopes of spring had been realised. His children by his first marriage clamoured for money, and food began to be scarce in the house. Then came deliverance in the form of an invitation to spend the winter with his wife's grandparents.

One evening in December they alighted at a little station in Jutland, and drove through woods and wild heath. Everything was new and strange. In this house he was now to live as a grandchild, just as during the past summer in her father's house he had been for eight days a child.

They reached the ferry in the twilight. The drifting of the ice had begun, but the water had also sunk so low that a sand-bank lay in the middle of the stream, and there a new boat waited for them. From thence a large, white, three-storied house was visible; it looked unfriendly, almost weird, with its projecting wings and high, illuminated windows.

They reached the land and found themselves immediately in the ghostly castle. They were conducted up whitewashed stairs over which hung dark oil-paintings in black frames. Then he found himself in a warm, well-lighted room, among her relatives, of whom he only knew his mother-in-law.

With his incredible pliability, he immediately adapted himself to his position, and behaved like the young relation who under all circumstances must show reverence to his elders.

Here in the house his right of self-determination ceased; he must conform to other people's views, wills, and habits. In order to spare himself unpleasantness, he had resolved beforehand to have no more likes and dislikes of his own, but to accept all that was offered to him, however strange or repulsive it might appear.

The old grandfather was a notary and barrister who had retired with considerable wealth, and only managed his estate

as far as was necessary for domestic purposes and for his own amusement. Most of his property consisted of hunting-ground and was in that state of neglect which a townsman finds picturesque. He and his wife were both over seventy, and seemed only to be waiting for their end with the cheerful resignation of good-natured, orthodox Catholics who are free from care. They had already built for themselves a mausoleum in the garden where their bodies were to repose, and they were accustomed to show it as other people show a summer-house. It was a little whitewashed chapel, with flowers planted round it, which they used to tend as though they already stood there in memory of them.

In the house there was a superfluity of good things. After having been half-starved in Alster here they found it difficult to avoid gluttony, without vexing their host. Pheasants, hare, venison were regular standing dishes which at last became a weariness. "This is our punishment," he said, "because we complained of the manna; now we are stuffed with quails like the murmuring Israelites so that it comes out at our throats."

A stillness like that of old age supervened; there was no need of care or anxiety in this house where there were as many servants as members of the family. It was easy to live with the old people, who had outgrown special interests, views and passions, and the young pair, who had their own rooms apart, only needed to appear at meal-times.

The young wife was now altogether a mother, talked of and with the unborn child as though she knew it well; she was mild and womanly, humble and even thankful towards her husband, whose affections remained unaltered though her shape was disfigured and her beauty faded.

"How beautiful life is!" she said.

"Yes it is; but how long will it last?"

"Hush!"

"I will be silent! But you know that happiness is punished."

No one asked what he was working at; on the contrary all that he heard was: "You should do nothing but take a thorough rest after your wild rushing about."

Accordingly he sent for some books which had been given him some years previously by a rich man and which he had been obliged to send back home. Then he began a series of systematic investigations, studied and made notes. He felt a new life and fresh interests awaken; and when he now found his former hypothesis and calculations verified by synthesis and analysis he became certain that he was working by a sure method, and in the right way. This gave him such confidence that he felt justified in pursuing his investigations, but because he could not explain their significance to the uninitiated, his position became somewhat insecure. People had to take him on good faith; they did that so long as peace prevailed, but at the first sign of antipathy he would be helplessly exposed to the ridicule or contemptuous pity of the bystanders.

The grandfather was a cultivated man, and therefore curious to know what was going on in the young pair's rooms. When he inquired, he received evasive answers, but since he had been a magistrate and barrister, he required definiteness. When he heard what the Norwegian's investigations were concerned with, he confuted them with the authority of the text books. In order to put an end to fruitless strife, his young relative let him believe he was right. But the old man tried to provoke him into contradiction, assumed a superior air and became intrusive. He was allowed to be so for the present.

"Nothing for nothing!" thought the Norwegian. His wife thanked him for his yieldingness and admired his self-control. But discord was fated to come, and it came.

The lawsuit in Copenhagen about his book extended its operations here also, and one day a court officer came to summon him to appear as defendant in the court of the nearest town. Since he had from the beginning challenged the jurisdiction of the Copenhagen court, because as a Norwegian writer he was not responsible to a Danish court, on account of a translation; and since he regarded the whole proceedings as illegal, which indeed they were, he refused to appear. The old man on the other hand insisted that he should do so, especially, perhaps, because he did not like to see gendarmes coming to his house.

To put an end to the matter, the Norwegian really resolved one morning to go and present his challenge personally in court.

He therefore went at eight o'clock and followed the beautiful walk along the river. But about half-way he met the postman and received, by paying cash on its delivery, a long-expected book. This book was extremely expensive, and since he had no money, he had been obliged to devise a plan in order to secure it. After thinking about it for a month, he remembered that he had some valuables stowed away in a box in an attic in Norway. He therefore wrote to a friend and asked him to sell the things for a price equivalent to the purchase of the expensive book, to change the money into notes and to send them in an unregistered letter so that no one might know of it. He did this because he felt he was stealing from his wife and family, but it had to be done, as he wished to solve an important problem. As he now held the

long-desired means for doing so in his hand, he felt a lightning flash in his soul, and turned home without thinking.

"Now, I will finish the business," he said to himself; "the gendarmes can come afterwards."

As he entered the courtyard the old man stood there, cutting up a deer which he had shot. The Norwegian sought to slip past him unperceived, but did not succeed.

"Have you already been to the judge?" asked the old man sceptically.

"No," answered the Norwegian curtly, and hurried through the house-door. He ran up the stairs to his room and bolted the door. Then he sat down to study. After half an hour he said to himself: "Is the greatest problem of modern times solved?" There was a knock at the door, and then another hard and decided. He was obliged to open it in order to get quiet.

"Why don't you go to the judge?" asked the old man.

"That's nothing to do with you," he answered and slammed the door to with a sound like a shot.

But now there was no more peace for him! He felt that a crisis had come in his destiny, and he heard voices below. His hand trembled, he felt as though paralysed and closed the book which contained what he sought. At the same moment he lost confidence and dared not face what seemed a contradictory proof of his theory.

After some minutes his mother-in-law came. She was not angry, but found it unpleasant to have to tell him that he and his wife must leave the house at once, before dinner. They could have her little one-storied cottage at the bottom of the garden and have their meals sent from the house. His little wife appeared and danced with joy at the thought that they would have a little house of their own, especially with a garden and park round it.

The change took place, and now in this cottage began the two happiest months in the life of the married pair. Their cottage of grey stone, with little iron-barred windows framed in sandstone, was quite idyllic. It was built in convent style and covered with vine-creepers. The walls of the rooms were painted white, without any hangings, and the low ceilings were supported by thick beams black with age.

He had a little room constructed like a real monk's cell, narrow and long with a single small window at the end. The walls were so thick that flower-pots could stand outside in front of the window, as well as inside on the window-ledge. The furniture was old-fashioned and suited its surroundings. Here he arranged his library, and never had he felt so comfortable before.

But now they had to prepare for the coming of the child. Husband and wife painted the window-sills and doors. Roses and clematis were planted before the cottage. The garden was dug up and sown. In order to fill up the blank spaces of the great white walls, he painted pictures on them. When all was ready they sat down and admired the work of their hands. "It is splendid," they said; "and now we can receive the child. Think how pleased it will be, to see so many pictures the first day!"

They waited and hoped; during the long spring evenings they only talked of him or her, guessed which it would be, discussed what name it should have, and speculated on its future. His wife's thoughts for the most part were occupied in wondering whether it would be fair and resemble his boy, whom she loved. She and her family were especially fond of fair people, whether because they resembled light, while the dusky-complexioned reminded one of darkness, would be difficult to say. They believed everything good of fair people and spoke ill of the Jews, although the little wife's grandmother on the paternal side was a Jewess; among her maternal relations who sprang from Schleswig-Holstein peasantry the word "Jew" was used as a term of reproach. The Norwegian's father-in-law was an anti-Semite but when he joked at the paradox involved in this, his wife said: "You must not joke at it; we will do that ourselves."

At last one day in May as the sun rose, the coming of the unknown traveller was heralded, and after twelve terrible hours it proved to be a girl who at any rate was not dark-haired.

This ought to have completed the idyll, but it seemed, on the contrary, to put an end to it. The little one did not seem to thrive in this vale of tears, but cried day and night. Nurses were engaged and nurses were dismissed. Five women filled the house and each had different views as to the rearing of the child. The father went about like a criminal and was always in the way. His wife thought that he did not love the child and this vexed her so much as to make her suffer. At the same time she herself was completely transformed into a mother to the exclusion of everything else. She had the child in her own bed, and could spend the greater part of the night sitting on a chair absorbed in contemplation of its beauty as it slept. Her husband had also to come sometimes and join in her admiration, but he thought the mother most beautiful in those moments when she forgot herself and gazed ecstatically at her child with a happy smile.

But a storm approached from without. The people of the neighbourhood were superstitious, and the child's continual crying had given rise to gossip. They began to ask whether it had been baptised.

According to law the child should be baptised in the father's religion, but since both he and the mother were indifferent

in the matter, the baptism was postponed as something of no importance, especially as there was no Catholic priest in the neighbourhood.

The child's crying was really not normal, and as the popular opinion of the neighbourhood began to find expression, the grandmother came and asked them to have it baptised. "People are murmuring," she said; "and they have already threatened to stone your cottage."

The young unbelievers did not credit this, but smiled. The murmurings, however, increased; it was alleged that a peasant woman had seen the devil in the garden, and that the foreign gentleman was an atheist. There was some foundation for this report, for people who met the two heretics on the roads turned away. At last there came an ultimatum from the old man. "The child must receive Catholic baptism within twenty-four hours or the family will be deported across the Belt."

The Norwegian answered: "We Protestants are very tolerant in our belief, but if it is made a financial matter, we can be as fanatical as some Catholics." The position was serious, for the young pair had not a penny for travelling expenses. His letter was answered with a simple "Then go!"

The Norwegian replied: "To be a martyr for a faith which one does not possess is somewhat fantastic, and I did not expect that we should play the Thirty Years War over again down here. But look out! The Norwegian will come and take his daughter off with his baggage, for he is a Norwegian subject."

The grandees in the large house began to take a milder tone, but consulted and devised a stratagem. The child was announced to be ill and became worse every day. At last the grandmother came with her retinue and told the father that the child could live no longer, but he did not believe it. On his return from a long walk in the woods the same day he was met by his wife with the news that the child had received discretionary baptism at the hands of the midwife in the presence of the doctor.

"Into which faith has the child been baptised?" asked the father.

"The Protestant, of course."

"But I don't see how a Catholic midwife can give Protestant baptism." But as he saw that his wife was privy to the plot, he said no more. The next day the child was well, and there was no more talk of expelling the family. The grandees had conquered. Jesuits!

The child, which had been expected to unite the pair more closely to each other, seemed to have come to separate them. The mother thought the father cold towards the little one. "You don't love your child," she said.

"Yes I do, but as a father," he replied. "You should love her as a mother. That is the difference."

The fact was that he feared to attach himself too closely to the newly born, for he felt that a separation from the mother was in the air, and to be tied to her by means of the child he felt to be a fetter.

She on her side did not know exactly how she wished to have it. If he loved the child, it might happen that he would take it from her when he went away; if he did not love it, he would simply go by himself. For that he would go she felt sure. He had had a dramatic success at Paris in the spring, and another play of his was announced for the autumn. He therefore wished to go there, and so did she, but the child hindered her movements, and if he went alone to Paris, she felt she would never see him again. Many letters with French postmarks came for him now, and these roused her curiosity, for he burnt them at once. This last circumstance, which was quite contrary to his habit, aroused her suspicion and hatred.

"You are preparing for a journey?" she said one evening.

"Yes, naturally," he answered. "I cannot live in this uncertainty; I might be put out on the high road at any time."

"You think of deserting us?"

"I must leave you in order to do my business in Paris. A business journey is not desertion."

"Yes, then you can go," she said, betraying herself.

"I shall go as soon as I get the money for which I am waiting."

Now the Fury in her reappeared. First of all he had to move up into an attic, and although she and the child had the use of two rooms, she deliberately spoilt the remaining third room which was the dining-room and contained specially good furniture. She tore down the curtains, took away the pictures, choked up the room with child's clothes and milk bottles with the sole purpose of showing him who was master in the house. The rooms looked now as though demons had dwelt in them; crockery, kitchen utensils, and children's clothes were strewn on the beds and sofas.

She dished up bad meals and the food was often burnt. One day she set before him a plate of bones which the dogs

seemed to have gnawed, and a water bottle. This last was an expression of the greatest contempt, for the cellars were full of beer, and no servant ever engaged himself without stipulating that he should have beer at meals. Accordingly he was reckoned beneath the men and maidservants. But he kept patient and silent, for he knew that the journey money would arrive. This, however, did not prevent his disgust rising to an equal height with her hatred.

He lived now in dirt, destitution, and wretchedness; heard nothing but scolding and shrieking between his wife and the nurse, his wife and the maidservant, his wife and her mother, while the child cried continually. He had an attack of fever and inflammation of the throat, and lay on his bed in the attic. She did not believe that he was ill and let him lie there. On the third day he sent for the doctor, for he could not even drink water. Then his Fury appeared in the doorway. "Have you sent for the doctor?" she asked. "Do you know what that costs?"

"Anyhow it will be cheaper than a funeral, and it may be diphtheria, which is dangerous for the child."

"Do you think of the child?"

"Yes, a little."

If she could now have dropped him into the sea, she would have done it. But she treated him as though he had the plague. The child, her child, was in danger!

"I have experienced much," he said in a whisper, "but never have I seen such intense malice in anyone." And he wept, perhaps for the first time in twenty years; wept over her unworthiness, and perhaps also over his fate and his humiliation. When he regarded his position objectively it seemed monstrous that he, a distinguished man in his own line, should, without fault of his own, lead such a wretched life that even the maidservant pitied him. Since he had entered his relative's house, his behaviour; had been unimpeachable. He did not even drink, if only for the reason that there was nothing to drink. Since his arrival, his plays had met with success, but instead of making him more respected, as success generally does in the case of ordinary mortals, it only tended to deepen hatred and studied contempt. The fact that he had accepted hospitality from very rich relatives was not bound to weigh heavily on his mind, for he was now legal heir to half the property. But as hate now raged, he was told what his expenses were, and mention was made of payment.

Again the idea he had formerly had recurred to him, that there was something more than natural in all this, and that an unseen hand was controlling his destiny. The inexplicable non-arrival of the journey money seemed especially designed to prolong his sufferings. When other letters, which he looked for, did not come, he began to suspect that his wife had a finger in the matter. He began to watch the mail-bag which the postman brought, and to write to the post office; naturally, the only result was further ignominy.

Without having any definite belief, he found himself in a kind of religious crisis. He felt how he sank in this environment where everything hinged on the material and only the animal side of things was prominent--food and excrement, nurses regarded as milch cows, cooks and decaying vegetables; then endless discussions and the display of physical necessities which are usually concealed. At the same time excessively heavy rain had flooded a corridor and two rooms; the water could not be drained off but stagnated and stank. The garden went to ruin as no one looked after it.

Then he longed that he could get far away, somewhere where there was light and purity, peace, love, and reconciliation. He dreamed again his old dream of a convent within whose walls he might be sheltered from the world's temptations and filth, where he might forget and be forgotten. But he lacked faith and the capacity for obedience.

Literature at that period had been long haunted by this idea of a convent. In Berlin the suggestion had been made to found a convent without a creed for the "intellectuals." These at a time when industrial and economical questions took the first place, were uncomfortable in the dense atmosphere of a materialism which they themselves had been seduced into preaching. He now wrote to a rich friend of his in Paris regarding the founding of such a convent; drew up a plan for the building, laid down rules, and went into details regarding the coenobitic life and tasks of the convent brothers. This was in August, 1894. The object proposed was the education of man to superman through asceticism, meditation, and the practice of science, literature, and art. Religion was not mentioned, for one did not know what the religion of the future would be, or whether it would possess one at all.

His wife noticed that he was becoming separated from her, but she believed that he was thinking of Paris with its vanities and distractions, its theatres and cafes, gallant adventures and thirst for gold. His possible plans excited her fear and envy. As regards his historical studies, her supercilious smiling had ceased after he had received words of encouragement from a great German and a famous French authority, and naturally had been obliged to show their letters in order to protect himself. Since she could no longer criticise his ideas she carried the strife on to another ground and began to plague him with insidious questions as to how much he earned by his historical studies.

When his wife was angry she went to the old people and narrated all the small and great secrets which a married pair have between themselves; she also repeated what he in moments of irritation had said about them. She was sorry

afterwards, but then it was too late. The spirit of discord was aroused, and the storm could no longer be allayed.

When he happened to have money and offered to contribute towards domestic expenses, they were annoyed at his want of tact in wishing to pay rich relatives for inviting him; when he had no money then they uttered jeremiads over the dearness of everything and sent him the doctor's bill. In a word, nothing could be done with such uncontrolled and incorrigible people.

He often thought of going on foot and seeking some fellow-countrymen with whose help he might proceed farther. But every time he made the attempt he turned back, as though he had been enchanted and spellbound, to the little stream where the cottage stood. He had spent some happy days there, and the memory of these held him fast. Moreover, he was thankful for the past and felt love to the child, though he dared not show it, for then the little one would have become a lime-twig to fetter his wings.

One day he had taken a longer walk than usual among the picturesque flooded meadows where the deer sported; the pheasants shot out of the bushes like rockets, their feathers shining with a metallic gleam; the storks fished in the marsh and the loriot's piped in the poplars. Here he felt well, for it was a lonely landscape where no one ventured to build a house for fear of the great floods.

For three-quarters of a year he had come here alone every morning. He did not even let his wife accompany him, for he wished to have this landscape for himself, to see it exclusively with his eyes, and to hear no one else's voice there. If he ever saw this horizon again, he did not wish to be reminded of anyone else.

Here, accordingly, he was accustomed to find himself again himself and no one else. Here he obtained his great thoughts and here he held his devotions. The incomprehensible events of the last weeks and his deep suffering had caused him to change the word "destiny" for "Providence," meaning thereby that a conscious personal Being guided his course. In order to have a name, he now called himself a Providentialist--in other words he believed in God without being able to define more distinctly what he meant by that belief.

To-day he felt a pang of melancholy shoot through him as though he were saying farewell to these meadows and thickets. Something was impending which he foreboded and feared.

On coming home, he found the house empty; his wife and child were gone. When he at last discovered the maidservant and asked where his wife was, she answered impertinently: "She has gone away."

"Where?"

"To Odense."

He did not know whether he believed it or not. But he found a great charm in the silence and emptiness. He breathed unpoisoned air, enjoyed the solitude, and went to his work with the imperturbable calm of a Buddha. His travelling-bag was already packed, and the journey money might come any day.

The afternoon passed. As he looked out of the window, he noticed an unusual stillness round the great house; none of the family were to be seen. But a maidservant was going to and fro between the cottage and the house as though she were giving information. Once she asked if he wished for anything. "I wish for nothing," he answered. And that was the truth, for his last wish to get out of all this misery had been fulfilled without his having taken a step towards it. He ate his supper alone and enjoyed it; then remained sitting at the table and smoked. His mind accepted this fortunate equipoise of the scales, ready to sink on whichever side it pleased. He guarded himself from forming any wish, fearing lest his wish might be crossed.

But he expected something. "If I know women rightly," he said to himself, "she will not be able to sleep to-night without sending a messenger to see whether the victim is suffering according to her calculations."

And sure enough his mother-in-law came. "Good evening," she said; "are you sitting here alone, my son?"

With the stoicism of an Indian before the fire which is to roast him, he answered: "Yes, I am sitting alone."

"And what are you thinking of doing now?"

"Of going, naturally."

"You seem to take this matter very quietly."

"Why not?"

"Maria intends to seek for a separation."

"I can imagine it."

"Then you don't love her."

"You wish that I should love her in order that I may suffer more."

"Can you suffer--you?"

"You would be glad if I could."

"When are you thinking of going?"

"When I get the journey money."

"You have said that so often."

"You don't want to put me out on the high road to-night?"

"Grandmother is much excited."

"Then she should read her evening prayers attentively."

"One doesn't get far with you."

"No, why should I allow it?"

"Good night." Then she went.

He slept well and deeply as if after an event which he had long expected.

The next morning he woke up with the distinct idea: "She has not gone; she is keeping somewhere in the neighbourhood."

When he went out, he saw the maid getting into the ferry-boat with some of the child's things.

"Ha, ha," then he understood. She was waiting on the other side of the stream. The maid came back soon, after he had watched her manoeuvres on the other side through his opera-glass. "If I only keep quiet now," he thought, "the imperialists are routed."

His mother-in-law came and looked uneasy but yielding. "Well, now you are alone my son and will never see her any more."

"Is she then so far away?"

"Yes."

He laughed and looked over the water.

"Well," said the old woman, "since you know it, go after her."

"No, I won't do that."

"But she won't come first."

"First or last, it is all the same to me."

The boat went to and fro with messages the whole day.

In the afternoon his mother-in-law came again. "You must take the first step," she said. "Maria is desperate and will be ill if you don't write to her and ask her to come again."

"How do you know that I want to have her again? A wife who remains a night out of her house has forfeited her conjugal rights and injured her husband's honour."

This was an expected parry, and his mother-in-law beat a sudden retreat. She crossed over in the ferry-boat and remained there till evening.

He was sitting in his room and writing when his wife entered with an air as though she were sorry for his trouble and came in response to his pressing call. He could have laid her prostrate but did not do so, being magnanimous towards the conquered. When he had his wife and child back in the house he found it just as good as when they were away, perhaps even a little better.

In the evening the journey money came. His position was now altered, and he had the keys to the dungeon in his hand. At the same moment his wife saw the matter from another point of view. "Do you know," she said, "this life is killing me; I have not read a single book since the child came, and I have not written an article for a year. I will go with you to Paris."

"Let me go in front," he said, "and spy out the land."

"Then I shall never get away."

He persuaded her to remain, without having formed any distinct purpose of leaving her; he only longed to feel himself free for a time at any rate.

But she was now ready to leave her child, "the most important person of all," as she called it, in order to come out into the world and play a part there. She knew well that he was not going to seek an uncertain fortune but to reap the fruits of a success which he had already gained. The ambitious and independent woman again came into view, perhaps also the envious rival, for she had moments in which she regarded herself as an author, superior to him. That was when her friends in a letter had called her a "genius"; this letter she left lying about that it might be read.

Fortunately it was not possible for her to travel just now, because her parents held her back; she had to content herself with the fact that he, who might be considered as expelled, was leaving her. She became mild, emotional, and sensitive, so that the parting was really painful.

So he went out into the world again. As the steamer in the beautiful autumn evening worked its way up the river, he saw again the cottage, whose windows were lit up. All the evil and ugliness he had seen there was now obliterated; he hardly felt a fleeting joy at having escaped this prison in which he had suffered so terribly. Only feelings of gratitude and melancholy possessed him. For a moment the bond which united him to wife and child drew him so strongly that he wanted to throw himself into the water. But the steamer paddles made some powerful forward strokes, the bond stretched itself, stretched itself, and broke!

"That was an infernal story," exclaimed the postmaster when the reading was over. "What can one say about it, except what you yourself have said in it? But do you think, generally speaking, that marriage will continue to exist?"

"Although I regard wife, child and home as desirable objects," answered the doctor, "I do not think lifelong marriages will be long possible" for in our days the individual--man or woman--is too egotistic and desirous of independence. You see yourself the direction which social evolution is taking. We hear of nothing but discontent and divorce. I grant that conjugal life demands consideration and yieldingness, but to live suppressing one's innermost wishes in an atmosphere of contradiction and contrariety, can only end in producing Furies. You have been married?"

The question came somewhat suddenly and the answer was only given with hesitation: "Yes, I have been married but am not a widower."

"Divorced then?"

"Yes! and you?"

"Divorced."

"If anyone asked us why, neither you nor I could give a reason."

"A reason--no. I only know that if we had continued to live together, I should have ended as a homicide, and she as a murderess. Isn't that enough?"

"Quite enough."

And they took their supper.

HERR BENGT'S WIFE

"What is love? Desire, of course," the young Count answered his old preceptor, as they both sat below in the cabin and beguiled the time by talking while waiting off Elfsnabben for a favourable wind for their journey to the University of Prague.

"No, young sir," answered Magister Franciscus Olai. "Love is something quite different and something more, which neither high theology nor deep philosophy have been able to express. Our over-wise time believes too little, but that is because our fathers believed too much. I was present at the beginning of this period, young sir; I helped to pull down old venerable buildings, ancient, decayed temples of pride and selfishness; I tore pages out of the holy books and pictures from the walls of the churches; I was present, young sir, and helped to shut up the convents, and to announce the abolition of the old faith, but, sir, there are things which all-powerful Nature herself has founded, and which we had better not attempt to pull down. I wish to speak now of Amor or Love, whose fire burns unquenchably when it is rightly bestowed, but when wrongly, can soon be quenched, or even turn to hate when things go quite wrong."

"When then is it rightly bestowed? It cannot be so very often," answered the Count, settling himself more comfortably on the couch.

"Often or not, love is like a flash from heaven when it comes, and then it surpasses all our will and all our understanding, but it is different with different people, whether it lasts or not. For in this respect men are born with different dispositions and characters, like birds or other creatures. Some are like the wood grouse and black cock who must have a whole seraglio like the grand Turk; why it is so we know not, but it is so, and that is their nature. Others are like the small birds which take a mate for each year and then change. Others again are amiable like doves and build their nests together for life, and when one of them dies, the other no longer desires to live."

"Have you seen any human beings corresponding to doves?" asked the Count doubtfully.

"I have seen many, dear sir. I have seen wood cocks who have paired with doves, and the doves have been very unhappy; I have seen male doves who have wedded a cuckoo, and the cuckoo is the worst of all birds, for it likes the pleasure of love, but not the trouble of children, and therefore turns its children out of the nest; but I have also seen wedded doves, sir."

"Who never pecked each other?"

"Yes, I have seen them peck when the nest was narrow, and there was trouble about food, but still they were good friends, and that is love. There is also a sea-bird called 'svart,' sir, which always flies in pairs. If you shoot one, the other descends and lets itself be shot too, and therefore the 'svart' is called the stupidest of all birds."

"That is in the pairing time, venerable preceptor."

"No, young sir, they keep together the whole year round and their pairing time is in spring. In the winter when they have no young ones with them, but are alone, they eat together, hunt together, and sleep together. That is not desire, but love, and if this charming feeling can exist among soulless creatures, why can it not among men?"

"Yes, I have heard of its being found among men, but that it departs after marriage."

"That is mere sensual pleasure, which partly goes, but then love comes."

"That is only friendship when there is any."

"Quite right, noble sir, but friendship between those of opposite sex is just love. But there are so many things and so many sides to everything. If you like, I will relate a story which I have seen myself, and from which you may learn something or other. It happened in my youth, forty years ago, but I remember every detail as though it happened yesterday. Shall I relate it?"

"Certainly, preceptor. Time goes slowly when one waits for a favourable wind. But bring a light and wine before you begin, for I think your story will not keep one awake."

"Very likely not you, sir, but it has kept me awake many nights," answered Franciscus, and went to fetch what was required. When he had returned and they sat down again on their berths, he began as follows:

"This is the story of Herr Bengt's wife. She was born of noble parentage at the beginning of this century. She was strictly brought up, and, when her parents died, her guardian placed her in a convent. There she distinguished herself by her intense religious zeal; she scourged herself on Fridays and fasted on all the greater saint's days. When she reached the age of puberty, her condition became more serious, and she actually attempted to starve herself to death, believing it consistent with the duty of a Christian to kill the flesh and to live with God in Christ. Then two circumstances contributed to bring about a crisis in her life. Her guardian fled the country after having squandered her property, and the convent authorities changed their behaviour towards her, for it was a worldly institution which did not at all open its gates for the poor and wretched. When she saw that, she began to be assailed by doubts. Doubt was the disease of that time and she had a strong attack of it. Her fellow-nuns believed nothing and her superiors not much.

"One day she was sent from the convent to visit a sick person. On the way, a beautiful lonely forest path, she met a Knight, young, strong, and handsome. She stood and stared at him as though he had been a vision; he was the first man she had seen for five years, and the first man she had seen since she was a woman. He stopped his horse for a moment, greeted her, and rode on. After that day she was tired of the convent, and life enticed her. Life with its beauty and attraction drew her away from Christ; she had attacks of temptation and outbreaks, and had to spend most of her time in the punishment cell. One day she received a letter smuggled in by the gardener. It was from the Knight. He lived on the other side of the lake and she could see his castle from the window of the cell. The correspondence continued. Faint rumours began to be circulated that a great change in ecclesiastical affairs was about to take place and that even the convents were about to be abolished and the nuns released from their vows.

"Then hope awoke in her, but at the same time that she learnt that one could be released from vows, she lost faith in the sanctity of the vow itself, and at one stroke all restraint gave way. She believed now rather in the everlasting rights of her instincts in the face of all social and ecclesiastical laws!

"At last she was betrayed by a false friend, and the discovery of the correspondence led to her being condemned to

corporal punishment. But Fate had ordered otherwise, and on the day that the punishment was to be carried out a messenger came from the King and estates of the realm with the command that the convent was to be closed. The messenger was no other than the Knight. He opened for her the doors of the convent in order to offer her freedom and his hand. That closed the first part of her career."

"The first?" remarked the Count, as he lifted the jar of Rhine wine. "Isn't the story over? They were married."

"No, sir. That is how stories usually end, but the real beginning is just there. And I remember the day after the marriage. I had married them and was her domestic chaplain. The breakfast-table was laid and she came out of her room, beaming as though the whole earth danced on her account, and the sun was only set in the sky to give them light. He was full of courage and felt capable of bearing the whole world on his shoulders. All his thoughts were intent on making life as kind and beautiful for her as he could; and she was so happy that she could neither eat nor drink; she wished only to forget, the existence of the sinful earth. Well! she had her fancies, springing from the old time when heaven was all, and earth was nothing; he was a child of the new age who knew that one must live on earth in order to be able to enter heaven afterwards."

"And so things came to a crisis?" interrupted the Count.

"They came to a crisis, as you say. I remember how he ate at the breakfast-table like a hungry man, and she only sat and watched him; but when she talked of birds' songs he talked of roast veal. Then he noticed how she had thrown her clothes the evening before on a chair in the dining-room, and reminded her that one must be orderly in a house."

"Then of course there was hell in the house."

"No, it was not so dangerous as that. But it brought a cloud over her sun, and she felt that a breach was opened between them. Still she shut her eyes in order not to see it, as one does when near a precipice. Then the sky clouded over again. He had secret, melancholy thoughts for his harvest-sheaves were on the field, and he knew that his income depended on them. He wished to take her out to see them, but she begged him to stay at home and not to talk of earth on that day."

"Earth! What an idiot!"

"Yes, yes! She was brought up like that; it was the fault of the convent which had taught her to despise God's creation. So her husband remained with her, and proposed that they should go hunting; she accepted the proposal with joy."

"A proposal to kill! That was nice!"

"Yes, according to the views of the period, sir; every period has its own views. But the sky clouded over once more, for this day was not a lucky one for the young Knight. The King's bailiff called and desired a special interview with him. The interview was granted and the Knight was informed that he would lose his rank as a noble if he did not supply the quota of arms due from him as the King's vassal, which he had neglected to do for five years. The Knight had no means of meeting this demand but the bailiff offered to procure him an advance in money in exchange for a mortgage on his estate. So the matter was arranged. But then the question arose how far he should take his wife into his confidence with regard to this matter. He summoned me in order to hear my advice. I thought it was a pity that the young wife should be torn so suddenly out of her dreams of happiness and joy, and I was short-sighted enough to advise that she should not be told the real state of affairs till the first year was over."

"In that you were right! Why should women mix in business? It would only lead to trouble and confusion and their poor husbands would never have peace."

"No, sir, I was wrong, for in a true marriage husband and wife should have full confidence in each other and be one. And what was the result in this case? During the year they grew apart from one another. She lived in her rose-garden and he in the fields; he had secrets concealed from her and worked desperately without having her as his adviser; he lived his own life apart and she, hers. When they met, he had to pretend to be cheerful, and so their whole life became false. Finally he became tired and withdrew into himself and so did she."

"And so it was all over with their love."

"No, sir; it might have been so, but true love goes through worse fires than these. They loved each other still and that was destined to be proved by the tests which they were to pass through."

"Her child came, and with it commenced a new stage of their life journey. She needed her husband less now for her time was occupied by looking after the child, and her husband felt freer, for so many claims were not made on his tenderness as before. She threw herself heart and soul into the new occupations which absorbed her; she watched through the nights and toiled through the days and would never give up the child to a nurse. The contact with reality and the little affairs of life seemed at first to have an intoxicating effect upon her empty soul and she began to find a certain satisfaction in talking with her husband about his fields and their cultivation. But this could not last long. Education lies behind us like the seeds of weeds which may remain in the ground for a year or two, but which only need proper

cultivation in order to spring up again. One day she looked in the glass and found that she had become pale, thin, and ugly. She saw that the bloom of her youth was past, and her charms decayed. Then the woman awoke in her or rather one side of the mysterious being which is called a woman: and then came the longing to be beautiful, to please, to feel herself ruling through her beauty. She was now no longer so eagerly occupied with the child as before, and she began to spend more care on her own person. Her husband saw this change with joy, for strange to say although he had at first been glad to observe her desperate zeal about the child and the house, yet when he saw his heart's queen dressed negligently, and marked how pale and wretched she looked, it cut him to the heart. He wished to have back again the charming fairy who had waited with longing at the window for his return home, and at whose feet he wished to worship. So strange is man's heart, and so much heaven does it still retain from the old times of chivalry when woman was regarded as a Madonna.

"But now came something else. During the first period of her confinement he had become a little tired and careless in his habits; he came and went with his hat on, ate his meals at a corner of the table, and took no pains about his dress. And when his wife began to return to the ways of everyday life he forgot to follow her, and to alter his habits. His wife, who was still somewhat sickly, thought she saw in the relaxing of these courtesies a want of love, and an unfortunate chance afforded her an apparent proof that he was tired of her.

"It was an unlucky day! The year was approaching its end when the chief payments would be made. The harvest promised to be bountiful but its overplus could not cover everything. The Knight had to find other means of raising money, and he found them. He ordered some fine timber-trees round the courtyard to be cut down, but in so doing, they came too near the house, so that his wife's favourite lime-tree was also cut down. The Knight did not know that she had a special liking for it, and the act was quite unintentional. His wife had been ill for a week or two, and when she came into the dining-room she saw that the lime-tree had disappeared; she at once believed that it had been cut down to annoy her. She also noticed that her rose-bushes had withered, for no one had had time to think of such trifles amid all the bustle of bringing in the harvest. This seemed to her another act of unkindness and she sent all the available horses and oxen to fetch water.

"Now there intervened a new circumstance to hasten the coming misfortune. The bailiff had come to the castle to wait for the bringing in of the harvest, and had an interview with the Knight's wife just after she had made the two above-mentioned discoveries. They found that they had known each other as children, and a confidential chat followed, which afforded her some amusement. She liked her visitor's rustic but courteous manners, and the comparison she made between his politeness and her husband's boorishness, was not to the advantage of the latter. She forgot that her husband could be as polite as the bailiff when paying a formal visit, and that the bailiff could be as brusque as he in everyday business.

"Thus everything was in train for what should happen when her husband came home. The bailiff had gone and left her alone with her thoughts. When her husband came in, he was cheerful, being pleased to see his wife up again, and because the continued dry weather was good for the harvest, which was all now ready cut and could be brought in in a single day. But his wife, depressed by her thoughts, felt annoyed by his cheerfulness, and now the shots went off, one after the other. She asked about her lime-tree, and he said he had cut it down because he required timber; she then asked why he must cut down 'just' the lime-tree which shaded her window; he answered that he had not cut down just that one, but all of them together.

"Then she began about the rose-bushes. He replied that he had never promised to water them. She, having no answer to this, discovered that he was wearing greased boots, and immediately remarked upon it. He acknowledged his inadvertence and was about to repair it on the spot by drawing them off, but she became furious at such an act of discourtesy. Hard words passed between them and she declared that he loved her no more. Then the Knight answered somewhat in this way: 'I don't love you, you say, because I work for you and don't sit and gossip by your embroidery frame; I don't love you because I am hungry through neglecting food; I don't love you because I don't change my boots when I come for a minute into the room. I don't love you, you say! Oh, if you only knew how much I loved you!'

"To this his wife replied: 'before we married you loved me and at the same time gossiped by my embroidery frame, took off your boots when you came in, and showed me politeness. What has happened then, to make you change your behaviour?'

"Her husband answered: 'We are married now.' His wife thought he meant that marriage had given him a proprietary right over her, and that he wished to show this by his free-and-easy demeanour, but this last was simply due to his unshakeable trust in her vow to love him through joy and sorrow, and in her forbearance, if, in order to avoid loss of time, he dropped a number of little empty ceremonies. He was on the point of telling her that it was in order to stave off ruin that he worked in the fields, thought only of crops, tramped in the mud, and brought dirt into the house, but he kept silence, for he thought that in her weak state, she could not bear the shock, and he knew that in twenty-four hours all danger would be passed and the house would be saved. He asked her to forgive him, and they forgave one another, and spoke gently together again. But then came a shock! The steward rushed in and announced that a storm was

approaching. The Knight's wife was glad that the roses would get rain, but he was not. It seemed to him like the finger of God, and he told his wife everything but bade her at the same time be of good courage. He then gave orders that all the oxen should be yoked and the harvest brought in at once. He was told that they had been sent to fetch water. Who had sent them? 'I did,' answered his wife. 'I wanted water for my flowers, which you allowed to be dried up, while I was ill.'

"Aren't you ashamed to say you did?" asked the Knight.

"She answered: 'You plume yourself on having deceived me for a whole year. I have no need to be ashamed of telling the truth, since I have committed no fault, but only met with a misfortune.' Then he became furious, went to her with upraised hand, and struck her."

"And served her devilish right!" said the Count.

"Fie! Fie! young sir! To strike a weak woman!"

"Why should one not strike a woman, when one strikes children?"

"Because woman is weaker, sir."

"Another reason! One cannot get at the stronger, and one must not strike the weaker: Whom shall one strike then?"

"One should not strike at all, my friend. Fie! Fie! What sentiments you utter, and you wish to be a soldier!"

"Yes! What happens in war? The stronger strikes and the weaker is struck. Isn't that logic?"

"It may be logic, but it is not morality. But do you want to hear the continuation?"

"Wasn't it over then, with their love at any rate?"

"No, sir! not by a long way! Love does not depart so easily. Well! she believed now just as you do, that it was all over with love, and she asked the bailiff, who came in just then, to make an appeal for separation in her name to the King."

"And she wanted to leave her child?"

"No, she thought she could take it with her. Her pride was wounded to the quick, and she felt crushed under the ruins of her beautiful castle in the air."

"And her husband?"

"He was pulverised! His dream of wedded love was over, and he was ruined besides, for the rainstorm had carried away and destroyed the whole of his harvest. And when he saw that it was she whom he loved who was the cause of his misfortune he felt resentment in his heart against her, but he loved her still? when his anger had been allayed."

"Still?"

"Yes, sir, for love does not ask why. It only knows that it is so. The Knight was ruined, and left his house to look after itself while he rode about in the woods and fields. His wife, on the contrary, awoke to a life of energy and diligence and took in hand the whole management of the house; necessity made the little, tender being who never had worked, strong; she sewed clothes for herself and the children; she made payments and looked after the servants, and this last was not the easiest, for the latter had grown accustomed to regard the little spoiled lady as only a guest, but she took hold of affairs with an energetic hand and kept them in order. When money was insufficient she pawned her jewels, and by that means paid wages and cleared off debts. One day when the Knight awoke to reflection and came home anxiously to look after the condition of affairs which he regarded as hopeless, he found everything in proper order. When he made inquiries, he was told that his wife had saved everything. Then remorse and shame awoke in him and he went to ask her on his knees to forgive him for not having understood and valued her. She forgave him and declared that she had not formerly deserved to be more highly valued, since she did not then possess the qualities which she afterwards acquired. They were reconciled as friends, but she declared that her love was dead, and that she did not intend to be his wife for the future.

"Their conversation was interrupted by the bailiff, who during this time had lived in the house and helped the wife by his advice and service. Her husband felt himself put aside and his place occupied by another; jealousy raged in him, and he forbade his wife to receive a stranger in her rooms. His wife thereupon declared that she would visit the bailiff in his rooms but her husband reminded her that he had rights over her person, since she was still his wife according to the law. But she had that day received by post the decree of separation and told him that she was free and could go where she liked. Then when he saw that it was all over, he collapsed and begged her on his knees to remain. When she saw the proud Knight crawling on the ground like a slave she lost the last remnants of respect for him, and when she remembered how once in her weakness and misery, she had looked up to him as the one who could carry her in his arms over thorns and stones, she wished to fly from this spectacle. Being no more able to find in him, what he had once been to her, she simply went away."

"Well now," interrupted the Count, who began to be bored, "it really was over."

"No, no, young sir, it only looked so, but was not. But here I must make a confession. I saw everything with my own eyes, sir, for I was her friend and honoured her in my heart. How foolish I was, I will also confess. We of the old school, who were brought up at the end of the age of chivalry, had learnt to see in woman a creature above the ordinary level of humanity; we revered the outward part, and that which was beautiful and useless; in our ideas that which pleased the eye took the first place. You can well imagine that I, though a seeker of the truth, was so misled by these old ideas, that I thought she was sinking just when she showed the greatest energy and courage. Yes, on the very day that the decree of separation came, I had a conversation with her which I can remember as clearly as though I had written it down. I said: 'If you knew how idolatrously high you once stood in my sight. And I saw the angel let her white wings fall, I saw the fairy lose her golden shoe. I saw you the morning after the marriage when you rode on your white horse through the wood, it carried you so lightly over the damp grass and lifted you so high over the mud of the marsh without a spot coming on your silver-bright clothing. For a moment I thought as I stood behind a tree; "Suppose she fell!" and my thought turned into a vision. I saw you sink in the mire; the black water spirited over you; your yellow hair lay like sunshine over the white blossoms of the bog of myrtle; you sank and sank till I only saw your little hand; then I heard a falcon scream up in the air and mount up on its wings till it was lost in the clouds.' But then she answered me so well. 'You said once long ago that reality with all its dirt and sordidness was given us by God, and that we should not curse it, but take it as it is. Very well! But now you hint that I have sunk because I am on the way to reconcile myself with this life; I have changed the garment of the rich for that of the poor, since I am poor; I lost my youth when I obeyed the law of nature and became a mother; the beauty of my hands is spoilt by sewing, my eyes are dim with care, the burden of life presses me to the earth but my soul mounts--mounts like the falcon towards the sky and freedom, while my earthly body sinks in the mud amid evil-smelling weeds.'

"Then I asked if she really believed she could keep the soul above while the body sank, and she answered 'No!' This was because she, like myself, had the delusion that something sank. The body, however, did not sink through work; on the contrary, it was hardened and strengthened; it improved and mounted but did not sink. However, we were both so foolish that we both imagined it did, having been indoctrinated with this view from our youth upwards. We considered white hands, though they might be weak and sickly as more beautiful than those which were hardened and embrowned by toil. So perverse were people's ideas in my youth, sir, and so they are still, here and there. But in my perversity I went farther and advised her to commit a crime. 'Loose the falcon and let it mount, I said.'

"I have already thought of that,' she answered, understanding my thought, 'but the chain is strong.'

"I have the key to it,' I replied.

"She asked me to give it her, and received from me a bottle of poison.

"Now I return to the story where I left it off. It was where she had left her husband's room to seek the bailiff in the upper story. When she came there she had to wait, for the bailiff had visitors. She also received a lesson, for none of her married friends would greet her, because she had dissolved her marriage. One of these friends had been unfaithful to her husband and had a lover but she thought herself too good to take Frau Margit's hand. What is one to say to that? At that time it was considered one of the greatest crimes to dissolve a marriage, but now, thank Heaven! our ideas have changed. She came, as I have said, to the bailiff to ask his advice as she had done all the time when difficulties arose.

"Did she love him? Probably not; but the heart is never so likely to deceive itself as in such cases. She imagined that she did, because she thought she had lost her husband and by birth and upbringing she was not adapted to stand alone.

"But the bailiff was another sort of man. He was like one of those birds with a seraglio which I spoke of, and if he had not been so cowardly, he would have already enticed the Knight's wife. But he did not do it, for he saw that this fruit would drop when it was ripe enough. Therefore he waited. But he had another characteristic; he was as vain as a cock in a hen-house, and thought that he was a terrible fellow whom no woman could resist. So when he overheard Frau Margit say that she intended visiting him in his room, he believed that the time had come, and made elaborate preparations to receive her. She came quite unsuspectingly, for she trusted his friendship and devotion to her interests. She wished to speak of the serious prospect which lay before her; he spoke of his love and she did not wish to listen. She was legally free but still felt herself bound. The might of memory held her and perhaps the old love had a word to say in the matter. The bailiff became bolder and begged for her love on his knees. Then she despised him. His vanity was wounded, he forgot himself, threw the mask aside, and wished to use force. I came accidentally there and was able to give him the *coup de grace* by telling Frau Margit that he was engaged to be married. There was nothing left for him but to withdraw.

"But she had already, when her last hope collapsed and her last dream vanished, used the key to open the gate of eternity; I who knew that the poison required an hour to produce its effect, used the opportunity to speak to her, as

one speaks to the dying. Ah! certainly the love of mortals for this wretched life is great, and at such moments the human soul is turned upside down; what lies at the bottom comes uppermost, old memories revive; old beliefs, however absurd and however rightly they may have been rejected, arise again, and I woke up in her the old ideas of duty, foolish perhaps, but necessary now. I brought her so far that she wished to live and commence again a life of renunciation and reflection in the convent. But since the convent no longer existed I persuaded her to be willing to exchange it for the imprisonment of home, where there is plenty of opportunity for penance in mutual self-denial, for devotion in the fulfilment of duties and in obedience. She fought against her pride and regretted her surrender, she raged against life, which had deceived her, and against men who had lied and said that life was a pleasure-garden. In this matter I agreed with her, for the unhappiness in most marriages arises from the fact that people persuade the married pair that they will find absolute happiness in marriage, whereas happiness is not to be found in life at all.

"She was frantic, but an accident came to my aid. Her child, whose room was underneath us, began to cry. She was shaken to her depths, and said that she was willing to live for her child's sake, in order to teach it that life is not what people describe it to be. She did not wish to leave it to the same fate which she had escaped. She did not speak of her husband; whether she thought of him or not, I cannot say. I who had given her the poison, knew where the antidote was; but as I still wished to keep her in fear, I gave her less hope than I myself possessed.

"I went away, and when I returned, I found her in her husband's arms. He had found her on the stairs, where she had fallen down in a swoon. All was forgiven and all was forgotten. You think that strange? But have you not forgiven your mother although she chastised you, and does not your mother love you, although you have deceived her, and caused her grief and anxiety. This last agitation had convulsed her soul so that the old love lay uppermost like a clear pearl, which has been fished up from the miry bottom of the sea where it lay hidden in a dirty mollusc. But she still struggled with her pride and said she would not love him, although she did love him. I never forget his answer, which contains the whole riddle, 'You did not wish to love me, Margit,' he said, 'for your pride forbade it, but you love me still. You love me, although I raised my hand against you, and although I was shamefully cowardly when the trouble came. I wished to hate you when you left me; I wished to kill you, because you were willing to sacrifice your child, and still I love you. Do you not now believe in the power of love over our evil wills?'

"So he said; and I say now like the fabulist: this fable teaches that love is a great power which passes all understanding and against which our wills can do nothing. Love bears all things, gives up all things, and of faith, hope, and love, sir, love is the greatest."

"Well, how did they go on afterwards?" asked the Count.

"I was no longer with them."

"They probably continued to quarrel."

"I know that they have disagreements sometimes, for these must happen when there are different opinions, but I know also that neither wishes to domineer over the other. They go their way, making less demands on life than before and therefore they are as happy as one can be when one takes life as it is. That was what the old period with its claim of being able to make a heaven on earth could not do, but what the new period has learnt."

THE END