

## VIII

It might have been about half past eight when Kitty entered the factory. The little gate was the only one that was unlocked and the caretaker, watched her from his glass cubicle as she walked across the courtyard towards the staircase, wondering to himself about the hard-working young girl who even came in to work on a Saturday. He knew that a few of the engineers were still working in the laboratory and assumed that the girl had been asked to assist them. It was quiet in the building, even the monotonous thumping of the hydraulic press had ceased. Kitty almost took fright when she heard a door creak in the stairwell. Steps echoed from one of the floors above, then she heard again the sound of a door opening and closing. Then it was quiet once more. She listened for any sound from the floors above. Not a peep. In the large assembly hall there was utter silence. The stools on which the women usually sat were all lined up on top of the benches, their long legs spread upwards, a long row to the left and right of the belt. The glass booth where foreman Feuchtinger sat was empty and the door locked, and from the end of the hall there came a distant clattering and scraping, and she saw two long sticks swinging to and fro, and next to them, the bottoms of the cleaning women covered in faded blue overalls. The two women neither saw nor heard her as she hurried off to the laboratory. When she opened the door she noticed to her dismay that Pohanka was not alone in the room. Two other gentlemen were sitting at their desks, bent over papers.

The men took no notice of her entrance. Herr Pohanka was sitting at the end of the room, at Leidemit's desk, Kitty hesitated to approach him. She almost turned back. But what if he had already seen her? What would she say then? What was she going to say anyway? Going to say? Her steps became more and more hesitant. On the other side of the street, where the red and white trams rattled past, where the sad lonely trees stood, sniffed at and peed on by countless dogs - they seemed almost to exist for the sole purpose of attracting the countless dogs of the district, those trees - the large and the small ones and the

mongrels, on the other side, the two old women were peering out the window with their cat and the old man with his pipe was there too, and it seemed to her as if all those people were looking at her, watching her, as if they knew that she'd only come because of Pohanka, and that she had no choice but to go to him now. But he didn't even look up until she was right beside him. Again his glance was drawn to the neckline of her dress and he noticed that the skin above was more tanned than last time. But he wasn't conscious of observing it, his eyes alone did the observing, and a bundle of nerves not under the control of his conscious mind. His thoughts were occupied by so many other things that he noticed nothing else.

He didn't notice the pretty summer dress either. Instead he said, "Good of you to come. You could be a lot of help to me this morning, how did you know I needed you?"

Of course she wanted to help him, but in a way different to any he had imagined and she wanted to explain this to him. But she couldn't get a word in. He pushed a stack of papers towards her and explained which ones she had to pick out, and when she told him that she had to tell him something in private, he told her to wait until later and even the fact that she had to take the time to go to the cloakroom to fetch her lab-coat seemed to be an inconvenience as far as he was concerned. She ran through the room and across the assembly hall, with hair flying round her face, and returned quickly, and worked almost silently all morning next to the man without wasting another thought as to what had made her come here in the first place. For a few hours, her entire world consisted of connecting points for cables with outlandish names, and files which she had to mark, and some measurements she didn't understand which she had to collate with Albert, and the seventy or eighty numbers which she read out to him for him to check against his notes were virtually the only words she spoke to him that whole morning. The other two engineers took not the slightest bit of notice of her presence, perhaps they assumed that she'd been half an hour late and had been apologising to Pohanka when she first arrived.

It was ten past twelve. They were in the washroom and Pohanka was standing alone opposite Kitty, the two engineers had left somewhat earlier, the lather was dripping from the girl's hands and winding its bubbling foamy way towards the plug hole, the sun was shining through the window glorious and warm, (Where would she

have been by now? At the Semmering with Heini!) when the man finally asked her, his eyes following the ephemeral foam while the flies hummed and a motorbike roared, what it was that Kitty had wanted to know.

For a start Kitty didn't quite know where to begin. She had prepared herself that morning on her way to the factory. And then had come the connecting cables and all those numbers whose purpose and sense she found unintelligible, but which she had to make sure she read out in their proper order, and the folders for the assembly teams who, as Albert had assured her, would be starting work tomorrow, Sunday morning, not here in the factory, but out there at the station on the mountainside and so she had forgotten her plan. All she could manage was a simple: "It's the chief engineer."

"Herr Leidemit?" asked the man and thought about the telephone call from Rubnicek, wondered whether he shouldn't report it after all, wondered whether it wasn't his duty to the firm, but then he thought about his promotion, about the fact that he had Josef to thank for it, and he thought of the tin of malt extract and suddenly it seemed to him that it would look like a personal attack, like petty revenge.

"Yes," said the girl. Then she asked: "Are you friends?"

"Yes." The years of study, his first fishing expedition, and then their holidays with the farmers; helping with the harvest, bonfires and baked potatoes, little adventures, ridiculous and harmless, thunderstorms at night in the huts in the mountains and those long rides on bicycles, many kilometres, and last time, the outing in the boat. Conversations like that, it wasn't often you found another person you could talk to that intimately. They were friends.

But why was she asking? What did a girl like that know about Rubnicek? No, she couldn't know anything, nothing at all.

"Why do you ask?" he asked, still looking at her hands as she dried them on a towel.

But Kitty took no notice of his question. Yes, this is how I'll handle it, this is the way. She'd found her bearings again and could find her way out of the labyrinth into which she had strayed and in the centre of which sat Albert's wife, or was it Leidemit? She couldn't tell them apart anymore, maybe they were both at the centre, yes, it was both of them. "Does he have a summer house out by the river too?"

"What do you mean, out by the river?" Kitty had his full attention at last. Hadn't he given her his full attention yet today? No, obviously

not, otherwise he would have noticed. She looked different, her face was different to the one he had seen only days ago, so very close to his, the face he saw daily, scurrying about in the laboratory, there was an expression he was not familiar with, there was a knowledge in that face which made him see her in quite a different light. This was the same slender young girl with the mop of red hair and the summer dress in front of him, yet it was not the same as it had been several days ago.

“By the Old Danube,” said Kitty, closing her locker and walking with Pohanka to the exit.

“No,” he said, “what gave you that idea?” They passed the clock. “Don’t forget, will you!” he said and pointed at the clock.

“Oh,” she said, “I didn’t clock in when I came.”

Pohanka took her card, wrote eight o’clock with his fountain pen, signed it, and punched in the time for the end of work. As he did so he asked again: “What gave you that idea?”

Now was the time, now was the time to tell him, and she told him, and he was quiet for a while. They went down the stairs and when they went across the courtyard he asked her whether she wanted some lunch. The doorkeeper waved in a friendly fashion as the two of them passed through the gate. No, she couldn’t, her mother had been expecting her for a while and she still didn’t know whether she should tell him about tomorrow. They arranged a time, later that afternoon.

Pohanka went to the inn where he ate lunch on weekdays, and Kitty hurried off home.

The man stared into his soup when it arrived. He couldn’t remember having ordered it, but he must have, after all, he came here to have his lunch and not because of the National Labour Service girls sitting at one of the nearby tables. National Labour Service girls? Yes, of course, he was back in the large bright dining hall and a group of young girls were rushing past him towards their dormitories, giggling and gossiping, until only the five leaders remained at one of the tables and he sat down opposite them at a table laid out specially for him. Of course, it was known all over the camp, the leaders included, that he was the engineer who was drawing up the plans for the installation of the loudspeaker system or something technical like that. Of course, everything had to be ready by the 20th of April and there were already rumours that there was going to be a grand speech by the *Führer* and

that all the girls were going to be able to listen to it, even if there were some who would have preferred to go out, dancing, to the cinema, to see the city or simply just out. But it was his task to make sure that all of them could hear the voice from the loudspeaker, so it was hardly surprising that the leaders started talking to him immediately after his stew arrived. He was finding it hard to get used to this stew, with its fatty pieces of bacon swimming around amongst other, unidentifiable bits and pieces, he was used to quite different cuisine at home. But he consoled himself by observing the girls, buxom, healthy German girls of course, almost all of them blond, but that Eveline Matejka, she was something special, well-endowed with all those attributes of her noble race, even if he suspected that there might be some Czech blood in there somewhere, especially when he heard that she was from his home town. The large, firm breasts and the pink face with the cheeky little turned-up nose and her love of music, yes, that was what really brought them together, she loved it as much as he did, the serious music and the light stuff, on the dance floor too, where they danced a polka or two together, where he squeezed her strong arms and quite a few other things besides, of course their desire was soon awakened, but a service-group leader was straight in body and in mind, she had learnt a lot in all those instruction sessions, not just how to sing pretty songs, she was ready to erect monuments, she used expressions like 'we are above animals', 'we are not at the mercy of our desires' in her speech, yes, she received philosophical instruction too, and once, during one of their long discussions together, she had asked him whether he knew if this Nietzsche fellow had been a party member? On the wall of her locker was a maxim which praised woman as the eternal mother of the nation and the fellow combatant of man. He had read it, (of course it was a saying of the *Führer*) and when all the other girls had marched off to some engagement that afternoon and he'd found himself alone with her in the room, they decided to do their bit for the survival of their species, their race, that's what they called it afterwards anyway, he was still very young and by no means immune to the content of some of the slogans when they were repeated often enough. From his parents - though somewhat decadent perhaps, and tired, and unwilling to take any active role in politics - he had inherited a traditional liberal outlook, and he formed his own quiet opinions, which in this case were certainly quite different from those of the girl, or at least they seemed so on the surface anyway,

because when it came down to it, she wasn't really thinking about the nobility of the German woman either, not when she got down on the bed and took him inside her, but when she was pregnant, and the two of them were searching for a name, Siegfried was the only one they could agree on. As newly-weds, they managed to get an apartment on the Hermann-Göring-estate. Her father was an old party member and had good connections to the right institutions and government departments. He himself found work in the new factory and Siegfried turned out to be a Sigrid.

Roast beef with potatoes, salad and a glass of beer. He wiped his knife and fork with the paper serviette before he used them. All well and good, but what about all that nonsense in the third year of the war, when one of his stupid comrades who was home on leave at the same time made that remark about the brothel in Saporoshje. That was completely different. Of course, there was her body too, but there was something different as well, their common love for music of course, but there was something more too, he couldn't explain it, no, it wasn't those slogans about the true German Man, which, admittedly, she didn't reel off quite so frequently as she used to, although she had taken on the position of section leader with the National Socialist People's Welfare and was acting too as a first-aid officer in the Civil Air Guard, something he couldn't explain spoke within him about her again and again, pulled him towards her again and again, he supposed it was what one called love. Sometimes he thought it was a kind of sympathy or affection. But then he realised that he felt affection towards all sorts of people with whom he had quite different relationships, and therefore there was no reason, in his opinion, to create a scene, just because he happened to be in the room, when the little French whore got drunkenly undressed on the *Führer's* birthday and was lifted up on to the table where, to everyone's delight she was forced to dance until she fell into someone's arms, who then got to go up to her room with her; by the way, the poor thing told him that she wasn't all that drunk after all and that she wasn't French but came from Alsace and had only recently be delivered from the shameful French oppression by the victorious arms of the great nation of Germany, but as they'd found out she had a Jewish father, she'd been forced into her present profession. She still maintained that she was lucky, which he couldn't understand, and then she'd told him that it wasn't by chance that she'd fallen from the table into the exact spot

where he'd been standing. What else could he do but bring the poor girl some bread every now and then (of course he didn't mention the Jewish father to anyone) and what else could she do but thank him in the only way she knew how? What on earth did any of that have to do with them, especially now, when she was expecting their second child? It was another girl and they called her Sieglinde, and after the birth, she was back to her usual self, and when he returned to Saporoshje, the little French woman wasn't working at the brothel anymore, he was told she had disappeared one day, no one knew where to and shortly afterwards he was transferred as well.

He wiped his mouth with his serviette and took a mouthful of beer. The arrival of the third girl had taken him by surprise, he had only been at home for one day and one night during the time in question, he had been on his way to a different front, and the apartment seemed a bit more neglected than usual, the children didn't seem to be quite as spotlessly clean as German girls were supposed to be, his wife wasn't section leader of the National Socialist People's Welfare anymore, just a member of the Civil Air Guard and the girl, the third one, was named Siegfrieda but when she was one year old and just starting to talk, well it was 1945, it was agreed to call the child just plain Frieda and the name stuck. Oh, yes, anyone who had a family with three children had to work unbelievably hard to get them through those years of hunger. Peas were hardly the ideal food for the little ones, but very often that was all you could get. His wife was courageous, even if she wasn't a true "German Woman" anymore and he had to admire her cleverness in getting hold of things and her ability to find her way through those confused times, when she couldn't help but occasionally spiel off some of her old phrases like *Hard as Krupp steel, tough as Russian leather... or Have courage, young maid* but an underlying ironic tone had already crept in, she was making fun of it all, and she had connections again, one of her uncles had been in a concentration camp, he was said to have had connections with revolutionary Czechs who had planned to assassinate the governor, but it couldn't be proven and he was locked up, just in case. Thus they got their apartment back relatively quickly, and a garden section too on the outskirts of the city, and once he had taken on extra work they were able to furnish their apartment again. She too found a new direction for herself, she was looking round for new slogans and jingles and was welcomed back into the arms of the church which she had left during the brief

duration of the Thousand Year Reich, and to him it seemed exactly the same as her former position as section leader with the National Socialist People's Welfare and her Myth of the Twentieth Century. He couldn't help but smile at her struggles, her question whether Friedrich Nietzsche had been a party member. She needed those pet phrases, for her they were perhaps the best she could do, but as for him, he'd been interested in religious questions from his last year at high school on, and later, at the technical university, he'd tried to solve the secrets of the world empirically, philosophically, deistically and pantheistically. He read Locke and Rousseau and some Lamettrie, and the Old and the New Testaments as well, and the Confessions of St. Augustine. He enjoyed frequent discussions with his friends about that sort of thing, Josef the cynic for instance, and was quite prepared to believe that she didn't much care for any of that stuff, that she thought it useless because, as she put it, in the end one wasn't any the wiser, he believed her, just think, Nietzsche the party member, but then why at the very least hadn't she stuck by her pet phrases?

But then he remembered that even as a leader of the National Labour Service she hadn't followed the rules. Why else would she have let him in that afternoon when she was alone in the room, he had to measure the place where the loudspeaker was to be installed and had been fiddling about with his measuring-tape, why would she have let him in that afternoon with her blouse undone, and then, as if she were surprised - she'd tried to button herself up again, which he, of course, prevented. He wasn't a party member, not later either, she must have realised that from the talks they had together, but she was hardly the Victorious German Girl, the conqueror of self either, she was driven by lust every bit as much as he was, the only difference was that he never denied it to himself, never spoke about it as if it were all beneath him.

He called for the waiter and paid. Then he got up and left the inn. Each step that brought him closer to the factory helped to suppress the images, black them out, and when he was sitting in the laboratory again, all by himself this time, all that was real to him were the figures and the circuit diagrams, the tangle of lines and figures, the coloured symbols and the specialised terminology. If everything had been calculated and checked correctly, and there were the most precise methods available for doing that, one could rely on them one hundred percent, there were no surprises.



He decided to go on working until four o'clock and enjoy himself. He felt somehow relieved at that, and he felt his old sense of happiness return to him, his optimism, his belief in the human race and intellect. Here, this was where his ethics and his morals were, his philosophy and his religion. His loneliness, his sadness and uneasiness had disappeared and he knew that *in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread* was not a curse, but a blessing. He could feel it himself, he had never before worked so hard, so single-mindedly as lately, he was living proof of the saying that the man grows with his task.

They sat together at a small table and talked about jazz. Actually, she had no idea what jazz was, all she listened to was cheap pop music, and he didn't really know much about it either, being mostly interested in symphonic music, mainly the classics. Neither of them could have said how it was that they ended up discussing jazz. So far they hadn't said any more about Pohanka's wife and Kitty was wondering whether it wouldn't have been better not to mention it at all, whether it had been silly of her to say as much as she had. They didn't stay long in the wine bar. Kitty had brought the book back and wanted to exchange it for another one. They decided to go back to Pohanka's apartment.

As they walked up the stairs together, he began to feel strange. He wouldn't have been able to say why. Was it the new knowledge that had changed things, was it the young girl's company, he didn't know, he had climbed these stairs hundreds, thousands of times before, but never before had he been conscious of them. Today it was different, today each individual landing took on a new significance. His eyes were drawn suddenly to the childish scribbles on the wall, no, not his children's, they were still too small and altogether too... and he heard his footsteps and those of the girl next to him, even the keys, in all probability they were jingling and tinkling just the way they always had, but today he really listened to them, and then they were in the entrance-hall and where he usually heard the humming of flies, he could hear the tripping of Kitty's shoes. But he didn't put his hand on her shoulder as he stood behind her at the bookshelf, even though the summery low neckline of her dress revealed a tempting expanse of bare skin. Instead he pointed to this book and that book and gave her advice. He hadn't handled many of the volumes for quite a long time. But they were nonetheless more familiar to him than the many other

objects of daily life which he took little notice of these days. Today the air was not only filled with the musty smell of the dust which covered the books but also with the strange smell of another person's body, a smell of damp mint, of camomile mixed with a hint of powder.

They finally agreed on *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Again, she had seen the film of the same title and was attracted by the familiar, the known. Then they sat down at the little kidney-shaped table. She sat opposite him in one of the easy chairs. He had set a bottle of liqueur and two small glasses on the table. Every now and then they took a sip of the sweet liquid.

She had allowed her gaze to wander around the room, she liked it here, it was exactly as she had imagined and for that reason she felt even more sorry for Albert, he didn't even have the time to enjoy all this, he was always working, day in, day out, until all hours of the night, he didn't deserve all this business with his wife. She'd never before sat in such a beautifully comfortable chair, they didn't have carpet like this at Heini's place, only linoleum with a surrealistic pattern (of course she had no idea what surrealistic meant, and if the truth be known, the pattern was anything but surrealistic, it was pure kitsch) he, Albert, was much too good for a woman like that, she was surprised for a moment that she had ever thought he might try something on when they were alone in his flat, and suddenly she was ashamed of herself. But when she thought of the woman again she felt a sense of hatred rising inside her and if she hadn't already felt so sorry for him, she would have told him all about tomorrow as well.

Pohanka was pleasantly surprised. He had to admit that she could carry on a conversation remarkably intelligently. He really hadn't expected it, all right, granted, back there in the wine cellar they'd had a bit too much to drink, and then they'd flirted a bit, and in the factory she learned her tasks as his assistant quickly, but what else could they talk about?

At first he had turned the radio on, music, to cover any awkward silences, but soon he had to turn it down to stop it interfering with the conversation. Kitty seemed much taller to him somehow, much more mature than she had a few days ago, as if she had grown recently, not just physically either. Now, with her sitting opposite him, he could see her knees peeping out from above the table top, and he stared at them quite openly and with pleasure, those knees and those legs, but not

with the kind of lust which usually overcame him when he saw legs like that. They didn't talk about anything that might have been over her head. They talked about children, Albert's children in particular, but about children in general as well, and that meant she could talk about herself (after all, she'd only recently stopped being a child herself), and she found that easy enough, after all, most people do, and so they laughed when he said he'd have thought she wouldn't want any children, she wasn't the type who wanted children.

She had brushed her red hair back off her face and crossed her legs and asked just what did he mean by her not being the 'type', did you have to come across as dowdy and stale and humdrum to want children? Of course, there was no need to shoot them out as fast as Frau Fink from the condenser department where she used to work, sixteen years old and then a second one shortly afterwards, he was still living with his parents and she was still living with hers, no, really, she wasn't against children, he mustn't believe that, even if it did have its drawbacks, nine long months for a start, she spoke without a trace of embarrassment, and she wouldn't want too many, but first of all you had to have a place of your own, she wouldn't do it if she had to put up with the sort of conditions she had at home, no, there were certain prerequisites, and she told him about her parents, about the tiresome business of having to wash oneself in a bowl, about the gossipy neighbours and the quarrels about whose turn it was to clean the communal toilet. And again and again came her refrain. Ah but you, what you've got here, this is the right kind of life!

Suddenly he felt a sense of pride in everything around him, in the things he could call his own, very proud he was, and he didn't think about the fact that he only ever sat at this table three or four times a year, or that the upholstery just sat around collecting dust for most of the year, with the odd exception of his mother-in-law's birthday, and Christmas, or the rare occasion when he and Eveline had someone to visit, or that the large rubber plant was only there to be watered or that the living room was little more than a passageway through to the other rooms of the house. He didn't remember that only a few moments ago everything had appeared so incredibly strange to him. Suddenly everything was very, very familiar, and he felt quite at home, and now he knew that a person couldn't feel at home by himself, knew that he needed a partner to feel at home, knew that a lonely person in a shell, however beautifully it might be furnished, would always remain a

stranger, a hounded man, searching in vain for a few hours of forgetfulness, a persecuted man, seeking to hide from his inevitable fate, a branded man, ready to disown his brother. He knew that only his woman could make this shell into a home, into a place where he could feel settled and satisfied.

And he decided to forget everything he had heard about his partner in life, everything he had heard about his wife, decided to try to carry on living with her, because something - or was it an infinite number of things - was binding him to her. Not even the young girl with the red hair and the slim legs could change that. Not even the image of the blue car could change it, for maybe there was more to it than the physical element for him too, back in Saporoshje with the little French woman, and maybe it was no more than physical attraction for her, and who knows where Josef had been. But he was grateful to this girl who was sitting so innocently in front of him, whose body had at times confused him and who was now bubbling along without a trace of affectation or pretence, grateful that she had roused these feelings within him.

"But what about your parents, Kitty?" he asked, "surely your parents are happy, and didn't you tell me that there were three children?"

"Oh yes, my parents," she said, and for a moment it was quiet until she went on: "They didn't know any better and later on they just got used to it, I suppose." And after another pause: "Mother has always worked very hard."

"But surely they're content, Kitty? Aren't they?" Albert asked again.

"Content," she said. She said the word indifferently, not a question, not an exclamation, as if it were a concept which was foreign to her, a concept she had to keep at arm's length in order to be able to observe it from a distance and better understand it.

Later, when Pohanka was alone again in his apartment, when the door had closed behind the girl, all his walls fell down around him, buried him and stopped up his eyes and ears. Desperately, his fingers felt here and there, blind fingers.

Finally he sat down, took a piece of paper and began slowly to compose a report to Head Office. At the top of the page he wrote **HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL** and underlined it with a red pencil and then he set down all his observations concerning Herr Leidemit and

Herrn Rubnicek from the EWT. When he typed it out, he wrote Friday's date and decided to go in tomorrow, Sunday, and set the letter on the manager's desk personally.

The children were asleep in their beds. The only light in the room came from a small lamp on the bedside table and the woman gazed across the clutter of dirty clothes and meal remnants and toiletries, toys and gardening tools, into the dully shining glass of a mirror, which, half in shadow, hung on one of the walls in an old frame which had once been gilded but had now faded to a reddish hue. Was this really her? Was this Frau Eveline Pohanka, mother of three, who was now staring at herself from this badly lit room, from this reddish-dark room, this woman wearing a stylish new dress which hugged her body tightly and made her seem slimmer than she really was, which gave her such a lift, even made her look, dare she say it, sophisticated? Where was the link between her and this woman? Were those her children? Those pink chubby faces, one turned towards the wall, a hint of a smile playing around the gently parted lips of the other two. Like the heads of little baroque angels! They slept on in front of her on their own little pillows, yet she had once carried them in her womb. Hadn't she sat just like this a hundred times before, what was so special about today anyway, except that today she was wearing a beautiful new dress and that tomorrow she wasn't going to see those little faces for eight hours, maybe ten, she was going to have a life of her own for once, do something for herself, and not for these three children. Maybe she was dead, maybe she'd died when she gave birth to her first child, died as a person, maybe there was nothing she could call her own anymore, not even her will, not even her feelings. Had every last possibility for a life of her own, not only the possibility, but the prerequisites too, and not only all the prerequisites but also the merest trace of desire for a life of her own been taken from her with the appearance of these new little lives? Maybe Josef was right when he'd brushed aside her scruples, assuring her of the fundamental right of each individual to his own, personal experiences, his own feelings and his own will? And for years and years hadn't her only experiences of life been through these children, her every feeling filtered through these children, every sunray, every breath of spring, every trial and every joy, she received it all through the souls of her children, like a person who only ever sees light reflected through a prism and never

directly, like a person who sits in the sun behind a wall of glass, warmed by the sun's rays, but whose skin never browns to that healthy tan it gets outdoors. Oh, she loved them, they were her children and they would always be hers, he had no share in them. None at all! For Albert there was only work. No room for her! No, if he'd seen her as she saw herself now, dressed up and made up for tomorrow, like a kind of dress rehearsal, he'd have laughed at her or worse still, would he have even noticed her? Had he ever seen her as a lady? Would he ever have dreamt of kissing her hand like Josef did, even when he was leaving and they were alone at the garden gate, when there was no one to impress, or when they were tired and about to part. Did Albert ever think of asking her whether there was anything she wanted, think of granting her a wish, some small, modest wish, no, she had to nag him for everything. She was forced to go around like Cinderella! Thank goodness for her parents and their practical streak, they'd given her those beautiful ear-pendants and those beautiful rings, if it hadn't been for their eye for investments she wouldn't have had anything to wear tomorrow. Didn't jewellery like that make the hours you wore it so much more special, raise them above the monotony of everyday?

She looked down at her rings, turned her head to and fro, the precious stones glittered. He hadn't even been happy for her when she was given that jewellery. Just when do you suppose you're going to wear that sort of thing, he'd said, and hadn't even looked at her, he'd only looked at the rings and the ear-pendants. It's just showing off, he'd said, who do you think we are, and then, what do you want to wear all that for. Of course, he was right, the right occasion never did come along, she never had the right clothes, she couldn't afford to buy a fashionable new dress every year and she never had the time to go out in the evening like other women, not even to the theatre, or a little restaurant with music and dance. He had to work and she had to mind the children. The crystal-clear stone glittered and the large agate gleamed dully, the woman had formed her hands into little fists and stared mesmerised at her jewellery.

Why was she thinking so much, was she trying to justify herself? Justify herself? To whom? To Albert? What was she to him? Nothing! For the longest time now there'd been no attentiveness, no friendliness even, dutiful care was all she got, he talked to her like he would to an office clerk and those long nights with the dreary satisfaction of

his carnal needs. Duty! Yes, that was it, that was the sum of things, her whole life had become an overwhelming cloud of duty, stifling her in everyday drudgery, devoid of tenderness, only the dreary game of habit was left, the dull satisfaction of physical needs.

Slowly the woman began taking off her jewellery piece by piece, undressing herself. Where were these thoughts coming from? Had she ever had them before? Why was she having them today? Because tomorrow she planned to break out of her cage, for just a few short hours. Because tomorrow she wanted a few hours of freedom, wanted to feel life the way she had once upon a time, when she hadn't been fettered to this two-horse team, haltered, like a draught-horse in a shaft, weary head by weary head, pulling the heavy load of the carriage.

The mirror now showed her in nothing but her pink petticoat, she looked away immediately, no, she didn't want to see how much weight she had put on round her hips, she hurriedly pulled the garment over her head, didn't want to see the rolls of fat that had accumulated across her stomach, she didn't look at the glass, at the bothersome glass which defiantly reflected her image straight back at her. As soon as she'd taken off the last piece of clothing she slipped into her night-dress. It reached in loose folds almost to the floor and made her substantial figure appear even larger. It was only now that she could bear to glance again across to the wall where the mirror hung. That low neckline! She smiled. Josef!

She was just about to switch off the light, when her children caught her eye, and they reminded her again of the future. What was going to happen? Yes, she asked him sometimes, not when she, all the trumps in her hand, was reminding him to be patient, but when he left her alone again and she found herself afraid of her loneliness. Now is now, Josef had always said, all we can do is live for the moment, everything that was and everything that is to come, leave it to the past and the future. He had kissed her and had looked into her eyes in a way that Albert never had, she almost felt as if he were hypnotising her, and at that moment she forgot everything that had come before and everything that was to come afterwards, and had freed herself, but she could only manage it for a very short time, only when she concentrated on feeling his closeness, then she could feel the past years building up behind her, projecting their shadow into the future, and she wasn't only thinking about what she meant to her husband, but

also what she meant to him, what she meant in his life, could mean in his life.

Again she looked from the mirror to the children. The mother of these children, yes, that was what she meant to him, that was all she was, minder and nanny. Once upon a time, when there were still just the two of them, then she had meant a little more to him, in those days he had paid her attention, had surprised her occasionally with rare and precious things. She looked back into the mirror, she didn't even notice that her night-dress had shifted, she didn't notice that she was confusing her terms. She asked herself what she meant to him. How did he *see* her? How did he really *feel* about her? And she didn't realise that this was at the root of everything, her constant confusing of these terms. There was also the burden of ten years - or was it eleven? - pushing her down towards the edge of the bed and as she reached out to switch off the light, she looked across into the once golden-framed, flatly gleaming space of the mirror. Far away in the distance, from a depth where the light could scarcely reach, she saw Albert's face, worn and pained, it was his face after the birth of the children, pale it was, every time, as if he was the one with the labour pains and the lost blood, the face of a sufferer, and this face came very close to her, it was full of pity and openness and a spark of hope burning in the depth of his eyes, and there were flowers on her bedside table, the red was burning across the room like the red of an ever-burning flame on an altar. Oh, how gentle and caring his hands were, how much sorrow and compassion in the slightest pressure of his fingers.

She looked from the mirror across to the chair on which the new dress was lying. No, it was out of the question! She would return it to Josef tomorrow, she wouldn't put it on, she wouldn't go with Josef, it was all a dream, a strange, peculiar, beautiful dream. She couldn't just walk away like that. Her hands would reach into nothingness, nothing would return their gentle, silent pressure, the flowers would wilt in them and the spark in the depths of her eyes would die away. But hadn't it died already? Hadn't it ceased to glow a long time ago, hasn't it long since been extinguished with those first, dry words of his, words which he meant to help them along, which had helped them along, further and further along, creating more and more space between mouth and ear, between one and the other, miles and miles, a world of distance. Wasn't it already too late? Why shouldn't she



enjoy these few beautiful hours tomorrow, she had been looking forward to them so much, scrutinising her appearance, planning them with Josef, all week long? Hadn't she left this narrow little house long ago, the oppressive monotony of duty, hadn't she left it long ago for the odd fleeting moment, for those few short hours, breaking out of the cage that was her marriage? It had been over that evening of the thunderstorm, no, before that it was Sunday when she first felt Josef's glance smiling on her. The material of the dress shone dully in the dim light, and a single, bright, star-like sparkle escaped from a facet of the small, crystal-clear stone. The ring was now lying on the table behind the chair. Oh, Albert hadn't even noticed and he wouldn't ever notice that her life wasn't the same anymore, wasn't the same life which he had been a part of for such a long time - was it ten or eleven years? No, that wasn't right, the life he *believed* he'd been a part of, for it was only make-believe, because what did he really know about her life?

She was about to reach out again to switch off the light when she saw once more the face in the deep, shadowy, red and gold (red like smeared, dried blood) framed space of the mirror. It was the face of the father of her children and when she got up and took a step towards it she could see it quite clearly. It was a photograph of Albert, and it was standing on a shelf opposite the mirror. It was a picture taken in those days after he was released as a prisoner of war, after he'd come home. The man looked over at Eveline, tired, worn and pale. There was no visible source of light in that surreal space, only a gleam from somewhere she couldn't see and Eveline could clearly distinguish between the smoothness of her tanned skin and the bright shimmer of her breast which the low neckline of her night-dress barely covered. Here the lips of the three children had rested, Albert's head, after the long separation, silent in the mute emotion of his return, she shook her head indignantly, Josef's hands, just think, only yesterday Josef's hands! But that was something different, quite different, and there was tomorrow to think about. And when she thought about an outing with this man she was suddenly in two minds about it again. Suddenly it seemed to create more of a feeling of emptiness in her than the emptiness she had suffered over the last few years, more than the intellectual and emotional emptiness she'd experienced since her contact with Josef had started.

Finally, she switched off the light and fumbled the last two steps to her bed in the darkness, a weak shimmer of light was all that struggled through the window. Outside in front of the panes of glass, the rampant growth of a lilac bush gently obscured the light from the moon and the stars. Eveline tossed to and fro for a long, long time. She wondered why she should suddenly be having second thoughts about their meeting. She couldn't work it out, she couldn't explain it, there was just some vague feeling inside her that was somehow against it.

Under her pillow, an alarm clock ticked softly. She'd put it there to make sure she got up in time. Josef planned to collect her early.

She almost didn't hear it, the soft throbbing, for the nightly song of the frogs and toads was far louder. The song of a thousand voices floated up from the water, from the mud and from the wet meadow borders, the song of life and lust sounded from the dampness with a thousand voices, a song penetrating the dark night of the world, the dark night of the senses, the dark night of Eveline.

Outside in the garden, the first rose bud had opened. The gentle night breeze carried its delicate scent into the room. Eveline loved those roses. She looked forward to enjoying them first thing in the morning.

## IX

It was early in the morning when Leidemit arrived to pick up Kitty and her mother. It didn't take long for the blue car to reach the bridge, and from there they had a clear view of the gleaming white passenger steamer travelling downstream to the landing-platform, sirens blaring and crew scuttling to and fro. As yet there were no passengers on board, they were all jostling near the gangplank, watching the ship's docking manoeuvres. Although it was still very early, there were a lot of cars headed in their direction. The traffic to the municipal baths started early on sunny Sundays.

Maybe this was the reason that Leidemit said very little, but perhaps it was also partly due to a certain uneasiness he felt in the presence of Kitty's mother. This plainly but neatly dressed old woman was a strange contrast to her daughter, and it seemed to him that she somehow knew exactly what he and Eveline were up to and didn't quite approve of the whole affair. Maybe she was even regretting her decision to stay with the children. And this in spite of all his careful explanations - he had told her his version of the story the minute she had taken her seat in the back of the car. It was only a feeling, nothing he could explain, but at the same time he couldn't quite rid himself of a certain uneasiness in her presence.

The car had crossed the bridge, the sun was in the east just above the river, the silhouettes of the distant trees lining the street trembled gently in the rapidly-warming air, and a dim haze was spreading across the long row of cranes which stretched their thin fingers up into the sky on the other side of the river. Suddenly, Kitty caught a momentary glimpse of the same black boat she had seen recently on her way across the bridge with Heini. It was travelling upstream, at least, she thought she saw it travelling upstream, in her mind it had never stopped travelling, it was still under that bridge, still spouting those dark clouds of smoke into the dark sky, and although neither she nor Heini had taken any notice of the vessel that night, she saw it quite clearly now. Not that she looked back to see whether the ship was

really going under the bridge as they travelled across the wide, green expanse of the flood protection zone which ran along the river, no, she stared straight ahead through the windscreen of the blue car, stared at the boot of the car in front of them and sometimes further ahead, to the boot of the car in front of that, then even further, out sideways to the green of the gardens and the silver tributary of the Old Danube, and she could hear the words of Herrn Leidemit next to her, telling her about a white steamship and advising her to take a trip out to Wachau. When she confessed she had never been there, he rattled off the names of a few places she would simply have to see. But then she betrayed her ignorance by asking whether the white ship ran every day, and when she was told that it only went on Saturdays and Sundays she remembered again the dark black sloop on the dark river. That was the real reason that she kept asking the engineer more and more questions about the beautiful white steamer, to suppress that dark tug, to let the holiday-Sunday ship take up more space in her imagination. Leidemit was by no means displeased, it helped him bridge the heavy silence which the old woman behind him had cast over his explanations and as he turned from the main road into the long avenue, his glance barely skimmed the slim knees of his neighbour, and only for a second, for the traffic was heavy even here and he had to watch the road in front, not that it prevented him launching into an explanation of the glorious sights a walking tour had to offer for Kitty's benefit. He told her about the fascinating castles and monasteries along the way and was amazed to find that the girl hadn't even heard about the sights the next town upstream from them had to offer, but then he thought about those men he'd shared the Tuscan castle with and for a brief second he thought about the octagonal room in that house and his brain made a strange connection with the slim knees of his neighbour, it was after all something everybody has to do, but it was really only for a second, and he talked on about the cultural treasures and the works of art on display at various places along the river valley, he talked continuously, taking his time, with a certain sense of delight as well, as if he were unfolding a beautiful piece of material, but then again, maybe it was just a blanket he was unfolding, a blanket to hide things under, something he could use to hide his uneasiness in the company of the old woman. On and on he talked, as the car sped along the main road out of the city, past the first allotments and finally down into the side

street leading to Pohanka's garden. It was quite definitely Pohanka's garden, Kitty recognised it from Albert's description. She had asked him about his garden on Saturday, what it looked like, which direction it faced, and the man had described it in detail, both the house and garden layout, it was exactly as Albert had sketched it on that piece of paper at the wine cellar, yes it was Pohanka's garden, Kitty was quite certain of that. But she didn't say anything, she didn't say anything later either, she said nothing, neither to her mother, nor to Heini.

Eveline was ready to go. She had tidied the house, put everything away, had washed and combed the children and told them about the nice old Oma who was going to stay with them on Sunday because Mama had to go and see Papa, and when it turned out that Uncle Josef had brought a nice young Aunty with him too, the children became quite boisterous. They were allowed to go to the garden after they had drunk their milk and they proceeded to show Kitty, who was actually much more interested in Eveline, their sandpit and the tortoise and the birds' nests, and one brought toys, a whole armful of them. They could hardly bring themselves to come to the gate to wave to their mother as the car departed.

The car purred slowly along the side street and out into the main road. Eveline had opened the window and allowed her handkerchief to flutter in the wind. Only now did she remember that she had forgotten to go and see the newly-opened rosebud.

As the road improved, Leidemit accelerated. He despised any form of sentimentality and thought that getting her out of the children's sight as quickly as possible would be the best way of making the woman pull herself together. It was ridiculous really, a few short hours. Other people left their children by themselves more often and for longer periods without making such a fuss.

They headed north, past gardens at first, then through built-up areas, where old, grey, low-rise rental properties and modern housing estates lined the streets. On the right-hand side, the huge round tank of a gasometer towered over all the other buildings. The flower and vegetable beds of the market gardens stretched out for some distance, then they passed another main road, tram lines, bus stops, a large department store, a government department building and more apartment blocks and then the main road, a railway underpass and back to the main road and soon the number of houses began to decrease steadily, a few desolate factories, partly destroyed by the war and not

yet reconstructed flashed past in a second. But then there was nothing but fields on their left and on their right and every now and then a strip of river-meadow, stretching a lazy tongue into the cultivated land. The further they travelled from the city, the fewer vehicles they saw on the road and with Josef at the wheel driving elegantly and confidently, using every opportunity to overtake and pushing the car to its limits until it hugged the corners like a wild cat with tires screaming, they were soon alone on the road.

It promised to be a beautiful day. Not a cloud was in the sky and the sun was already so hot that the air above the asphalt had taken on a slight shimmer.

When it was safe for Leidemit to steal a glance at his companion, he saw two knees again, there, where only a short time before he had seen the two knees of the young girl. These ones were wider, plumper, but he made no comparisons, he just caressed them with his hand and murmured: "Evie! Evie!"

Of course she could feel all his tenderness in those two short words, in those barely-breathed syllables. But it took some time until she was able to free herself from the memories of her children and the garden and the house. When they crossed the main square of one of the small towns and she saw all those people going off to church, she thought briefly of her sin and the torments of hell, but then she smiled, she wasn't a child any longer, they were just stories, who did they really frighten, in the end she had to be responsible for what she did and she had prepared her defence already. She could always atone for it anyway, but then wasn't that what she'd been doing her whole life up till now? But she didn't want to think about all that right now, that was the best approach, no, she didn't want to, not now, some other time, later, all week long, she'd have time for it then. She brushed the thought aside. Here she was, sitting next to Josef and it felt so good, watching the whole world flying past like this, it just felt good.

She rested her head on the shoulder of the man beside her and looked out at the landscape.

His hands caressed the wheel gently and shifted the gear-stick, his feet pressed playfully down on the brake pedal and the accelerator, his eyes scanned the rapidly changing scenery in front of him, he noticed the strong smell of the first hay of the new harvest as they passed through an expanse of meadows, the warm air with its scent of resin, the white band of the road cutting through the dark pine forests and

sometimes the reflection of sun upon water would flash up and blind the driver and sometimes the monotonous humming of the engine would die back momentarily, but then it would roar even more loudly than before. Josef was determined to show the woman just what his car was capable of, or perhaps he was just looking for self-justification, wanted to demonstrate his dominance over all that pent-up energy and power.

Eveline scarcely took any notice of his expert driving, neither did she notice the trees were flying past at close quarters, she had been thrown out of her familiar orbit and so was dazed by all these unusual things that danger meant nothing at all to her, it didn't even register. She was free, and she glided freely through the air, easy as a bird.

Herr Pohanka had set off to the construction site at Kahlenberg with the rest of the team to assemble the transmitter. Everything had been planned and prepared with the utmost of care, and the assembly seemed to be progressing without any problems or complications. A team of labourers had already done all the preparatory work and now they were waiting for the technical side of things to be installed.

Large windows revealed a view of huge old oak trees, shrubs and the green of a meadow which gleamed from in between the dark tree-trunks. The technicians laughed together, they were obviously in a good mood, as is often the case on a beautiful morning in the open air, even if they had to come to work on a Sunday while others were off enjoying themselves. Something of the sunlight dappling the leaves, of the strong smell of the bark of the oak trees, of the solemn stillness which surrounded the building seemed to be transferring itself to the men. Pohanka had satisfied himself that the work was being carried out properly and had decided to climb the tower where the antenna was to be attached. When he reached the platform, a few meters above the tree tops, he found he could see the large city spread out at the foot of the mountain-chain, shadowy in the morning haze. He could see the houses in the outer suburbs quite clearly, just beyond the slopes of the vineyards, he could also make out single spires here and there, cupolas and high-rise buildings, shadowy they were, towering above the bluish haze. The silver band of the river sketched a gently curving line, which eventually dissolved in the south-east into a shimmering vagueness. The course of the river was crossed by five bridges, one of which had been destroyed in the war and was as yet

only partly reconstructed. It parted the flow of the water with a dark smudge, cutting a crooked imprint into the silver.

Automatically, the eyes of the man searched for the gleaming water of the Old Danube. Where the garden was, the children, Eveline. He didn't think about the tablecloth which would soon be marked and stained, of the nightly choir of frogs, of the fence, he didn't think about anything in particular. Up till now he had been caught up in the rhythm of his work, now he was standing at a distance, and from down below the muffled sound of whistling and joking of the workers made its way up to him. Out on the road, a bus hummed along like a bumble bee. Further down the slope a vintner was sticking new supports into the ground. Pohanka could hear the repetitive short, loud hammering of a metal tool on the wooden pegs. But it was all distant, and it all seemed a little unreal to him, like strange, artificial stage-sets, the only real thing he could hear was the song of a bird in the old trees surrounding the tower. He stared down at the tiny shimmering speck of the separated water-course and listened to the song.

The haze started to lift a little. Pohanka could make out the slim spire amidst the grey of the houses. That was the cathedral, and in front of it the gentle green cupola of St. Peter's, and while he was still trying to separate the circular line of the broad Ringstraße from the haze, he could hear voices on the staircase leading up to the platform.

"No, no, it's all right," he heard Direktor Rothenstarker say to one of the workers. "I prefer it that way. I'll go up there myself. There's a good view. And when Dr Mühlfeld comes, please tell him to join us."

The bird's song had ceased. All Pohanka could hear was the heavy thumping and scraping of shoes trudging up the steps.

He prepared himself to meet the manager.

How could it have happened so quickly! He wouldn't have thought it possible. He thought he would have today at least, one whole day before anything would develop. Monday, he'd thought, at the very earliest! And now the manager was coming up here. Why? It could only be the letter.

"Guten Morgen, Herr Direktor."

"Guten Morgen!" Rothenstarker stepped out onto the platform and looked around. "Good view, isn't it? A bit hazy today, but it's going to improve." He shook hands with Pohanka and walked over to the balustrade. He leant there for a while, gazing out over the city.



It was as quiet as it had been before Rothenstarker appeared, yes, if anything it seemed to Pohanka to be even quieter. The voices of the technicians had fallen silent, the engine noise from the road and the hammering in the vineyard sounded muffled and distant and even the bird remained silent. The two men stood next to each other, neither wanting to make eye contact, it seemed as if they had been sent there to read some symbolic meaning from the hazy blue veil, which was gradually beginning to dissolve.

“You were his friend, weren’t you?” said Direktor Rothenstarker after a while.

If Pohanka had still nurtured some slight hope, the smallest of hopes in the tiniest corner of his imagination that his superior had not been to his office yet, that he’d maybe come directly from home, in order to be present at the first day of assembly perhaps, as if it were a premiere or sorts, maybe the press was expected, maybe Rothenstarker had wanted to be immortalised with a profound or, failing that, a conventional word or two in one of the stories, or at least get his face into the archives of the newspapers. But if Pohanka had hoped for any of these things, hoped that he wouldn’t have to have this difficult and disagreeable discussion today of all days, but tomorrow, Monday, (he was in the habit of deferring disagreeable discussions until tomorrow), that question forced him into the realisation that it wasn’t to be. The discussion had already started.

“Yes,” he said, “it was very difficult for me. I had several sleepless nights, trying to decide.” After a pause he added: “Especially now, when I’m in his debt like this.”

The manager made some gesture, as if he were shooing an imaginary insect off the balustrade. “That had nothing to do with it. We knew who you were and what you meant to the firm. It’s become very obvious now that we weren’t wrong in our estimation of you.”

“It puts me in a very awkward position.” Pohanka looked across at the gently shimmering silver of the Old Danube. Eveline, he thought, Eveline, Eveline. He wanted to say something else.

“I understand, I understand.” The manager didn’t give him a chance to speak.

It didn’t bother Pohanka. No, you don’t understand anything, nothing, he thought, you have no idea how it all came about. He stared at the distant silver surface. Eveline. Eveline. No idea at all.

"The firm! Quite right, Herr Pohanka. We know. We understand. Your work ethics are exemplary! Your work is like a calling to you, you give of your best at all times." Rothenstarker was drumming slightly with the tips of his fingers on the stone balustrade now. "You've done the only thing possible, believe me. As your superior I could just say that we wouldn't have expected any less from you. But as a human being, well, I understand that it must have been very difficult." As he spoke the last few words, he straightened his upper body, which had been leaning against the balustrade, and looked straight at Pohanka, which forced the latter to straighten up as well and to tear his eyes away from the silvery surface of the wide current. He looked into Rothenstarker's face but it seemed as if he were trying to make out something beyond it, far beyond. Eveline, Eveline. Was it Eveline?

The manager felt the helplessness of that glance. He interpreted it in his own way: "Of course, we'll deal with the matter with the utmost of discretion. You don't have to worry. Herr Leidemit won't be told a thing. I mean, of course, nothing about your involvement in the uncovering of this affair. I telephoned Herrn Dr Mühlfeld immediately, he's on his way. We won't be disturbed here. We can discuss these pressing matters in private." He looked around as if searching for something. "It would be nice to be able to sit down," he added.

"I'll arrange for some chairs to be brought immediately," said Pohanka and rushed away. "Your work is like a calling to you, you give of your best at all times." He felt shabby.

When he came back up on to the platform, following the workers who were carrying the chairs, all the haze had disappeared and the city seemed to be presenting itself nakedly to the gaze of the two men in the morning light. Pohanka and Rothenstarker remained standing for a while before they sat down on the chairs. They heard the steps of the workers in the corridor growing more distant, and the closing of a door. Maybe Rothenstarker wanted to avoid repeating himself, or perhaps he didn't want to pre-empt things if Dr Mühlfeld was dealing with the case, maybe he really was so fascinated by the view that he couldn't bring himself to talk about Leidemit.

"You see," he said and nodded with his head towards the city, "I told you it was going to clear. It's going to be a beautiful day. May I offer you a cigarette." He presented his cigarette case to Pohanka.

The engineer took a cigarette gratefully, offered his superior a light and hastily drew the first breath of smoke down into his lungs. He was nervous, he would have preferred to have the whole affair behind him.

At the switchboard, in the laboratory, those were the places he felt confident, where he knew what he was doing, but after the meeting in the conference room last week, he had realised that that was not all that his new position required from him, that the responsibility for every aspect of every project rested with him now, and suddenly it seemed to him careless, almost criminal, that he hadn't reported it immediately then and there, the instant he first noticed that Rubnicek had made contact with Leidemit. It would be best not to go into all that now, it might get him into trouble. Aiding and abetting and all that! But the way it was, he couldn't have hesitated any longer. Every last construction worker would have done the same in his place. He had only delayed for so long because his thoughts had been on his work, nothing but his work, and he had simply overlooked any other connections. Overlooked them! Dereliction of duty! But now he was in a position which enabled him to have an overview after all, to see all the connections and all the resulting possibilities and he recognised that it was his duty, yes, his duty! But while he was thinking along those lines, other thoughts were floating quietly just beneath the surface at the same time, they weren't as intense as the first set of thoughts, they weren't being released into his consciousness as strongly as the other ones, but they were present nevertheless, like a kind of Morse code repeating her name over and over again, *Eveline*, *Evelin,e* or announcing Kitty's report of Leidemit's parked car between the gardens at night. And his glance slid across the districts on the other side of the Danube and stopped at the large gasometer towering above the suburbs where the flower and vegetable beds of the market gardens spread their fields, and as he watched, the gasometer changed into a huge tin of malt extract, into the tin of malt extract which he had never mentioned to Josef.

"Better than back in the city, isn't it?" said the manager. "I hope the weather's going to hold until you finish the job."

Pohanka wanted to say something in reply. But at that moment Dr Mühlfeld came up the stairs and both men turned away from the balustrade.

"Wonderful, just wonderful," were the first words the newcomer said, or rather sighed. Then he greeted the two gentlemen. He sighed

again as he addressed the engineer: "A wonderful thing to present us with on a Sunday morning,, just what we needed." And looking towards Rothenstarker: "He's not at home of course. But that's only to be expected. Who would stay at home on a day like this. Most likely he's gone up north, to the Waldviertel or wherever else he usually goes to fish, if any of those stories were true. But why wouldn't they be. A harmless enough activity, a person needs some relaxation. I'm sure you have something that relaxes you, Herr Pohanka, of course, your garden. Well, shall we start?"

"Might he not be with the gentleman from the ETW?" asked Rothenstarker.

Dr Mühlfeld made a dismissive gesture. "He's sitting by himself in the coffee house, reading the race reports, I know that already. I've also made inquiries with all the travel agencies and airlines as to whether any tickets have been ordered or recently issued in the name of Leidemit. But of course today, being Sunday, we won't make much progress, the police are hardly going to be of much assistance before Monday and tomorrow we'll be able to see for ourselves whether he's going to show up or not."

"If it isn't already too late," said the manager.

The three men sat down. The city had disappeared from view, only the odd tree top showed above the stone balustrade, and the light metal pole stood out like a thin thread of a web against the silky blue sky.

"I don't think so," said Dr Mühlfeld. "If he's clever - and he's clever, there's no doubt, otherwise he could never have earned our trust and deceived us for so long - he'll delay the final decision until the last possible moment. Then he'll say goodbye, just as if he were changing firms quite normally. He'll act as if he's sorry to leave us, and he won't remove the documents until that same day, or the day before at the earliest, Herr Direktor. You understand now his refusal to compromise on any of his demands at our last conference. He didn't want the firm to even consider his proposals." Dr Mühlfeld had put his briefcase down on the floor next to his chair, he now took out a notebook and started questioning Herr Pohanka about his observations, making notes continually as he did so.

Two things gnawed away at his insides as he answered the questions, spreading cancer-like, forming pustulous ulcers which inflamed his imagination more and more. One was a question, where had Josef gone today? He told himself the answer: to see Eveline, of course!

And the second a conviction: he's going to take her with him, he's going to escape, and he's going to take Eveline with him! He had known Josef for so long he should have known that it was absurd to think that Leidemit would ever burden himself with another human being, and on one level he did know that, but for some reason he refused to give the knowledge any room in his head. Once fixed in his brain, that nonsensical idea simply refused to be got rid off. At times he came close to just blurting out the whole truth to Dr Mühlfeld, or rather what he believed to be the truth, that all he needed to do to find Leidemit was drive down there to his very own garden, right next to that silvery stretch of water; but each time he shied away from telling his shame to the whole world.

Direktor Rothenstarker got up again and walked over to the balustrade. He paced agitatedly back and forth, and only when a worker came and called Dr Mühlfeld to the telephone, did he sit down again. "It's most fortunate," he said, "that you've taken on this job. It would be best for you to come straight out here tomorrow, don't come in to the factory. I can see that you're upset. It would be better not to see your friend; it would just be too awkward."

"Thank you, thank you very much, Herr Direktor," said Pohanka. "We were close friends, I could never have imagined he would do something like this to me."

He's taking it all so personally, thought Direktor Rothenstarker to himself, the way he identifies himself with the firm; a rare example of a human being.

"Well, what did I tell you?" Dr Mühlfeld had returned. "I've just been told that he's booked tickets with KLM to Paris and Madrid for the twenty-seventh. That gives us almost three weeks."

Tickets! Tickets! The two words pounded over and over in Pohanka's head. When the two gentlemen got up and the manager thanked him on his own behalf and on behalf of the firm he heard them again: Tickets! Tickets! As they stood by the balustrade, talking about the view, about the Schneeberg rising up amidst the chain of mountains with its white, glittering, snow-covered slopes, about the peak of the Hundsheimer Kogel which rose up on the horizon before descending rapidly to the river and about the Lower Carpathian Mountains whose delicate blue contours could just be seen in the far distance, he heard nothing but those two words, over and over: Tickets! Tickets! The delicate blue contours made a sudden dive, as if he were seeing them

from an aeroplane which was rapidly gaining in height and then the red mountain was back in the middle of his view, the one from the conference room, it seemed to be crumbling, the black lines had formed deep crevasses, yes, terrifyingly deep crevasses and the lower half of the red had already started to change colour. It seemed unable to keep the same shade of scarlet, was dissolving, diffusing, sinking into a strange corner where a dark shadow stood waiting alone, its underbelly was ripping open, red spilling out, intermingling with the blue, becoming tainted, impure. Above it all was a strangely white sky, a gauzy sky of blossoms, pear blossoms, damson blossoms and a few spots of green peeping out lower down, like outcrops of weeds, or stinging nettles or rampantly growing cow-parsnip. And later on, when the two cars were rolling towards the mountain road, and Pohanka was on his way back to the workers after accompanying his superiors to the door, he could still hear the distant engines singing the refrain all the way down the red mountainside: Tickets! Tickets!

He was so disturbed that he didn't quite know what to do with himself when he returned to work. He stood behind one group of construction workers after another, watching them, but scarcely able to distinguish one tool from the next. He almost tripped over the piles of cables which lay in a tangled muddle across the floor, like loose and irregular coils of jungle vines. Black lines across the red mountain, crevasses, cables laid out according to precise drawings and diagrams, after countless calculations. The vision of a great master, these black lines and those black lines and not a black line out of place, all these crevasses, scarring the scarlet red mountain.

After a while he realised that he was just getting in the workers' way and returned to the platform. He smoked one cigarette after another while he stared out at the city below him. The pretty haze had now dissolved into a uniform grey sea of weeds, stinging nettles and cow-parsnip, with the odd new shoot of deadly nightshade towering above the rest.

It must have been close to lunchtime when one of the foremen came looking for him. Some unexpected difficulty had arisen and the work had come to a halt, forcing him to find his way down from his sea of thoughts and into the world of technology. He went down to the large room, bent over the plans and calculations, compared and contrasted, thought in terms of curves, lines and relative frequencies,

gave instructions here and there, and before long he had the problem solved.

A master had only to say a few words, indicate this point and that, and immediately a host of ready hands came alive, marked lines in black, pulled cables this way and that, in all directions.

Distantly, very distantly he could hear Rothenstarker's voice every now and then: *This job is like a calling to you, you give of your best at all times.*

Eveline and Josef arrived at the restaurant in the old castle at half-past four. They had arrived later than had they initially planned. It wasn't just the sights along the way which had delayed them, the little pathways through the dense fir-wood had proved especially alluring. They couldn't help but stray from the path, and then those soft green cushions of moss had just begged them to lie down for a moment.

For Josef it was a goodbye, a last, strong draught from a full goblet. He knew that in a few weeks time he wouldn't be lying in dusky, cool forests like these anymore, wouldn't be passing ice-green rivers full of trout, or simple country gardens full of pear and damson trees. It would be walls of prickly cacti from now on, rustling leaves of sugar cane, and the glow of the bougainvillea along his path.

His car was not the only one, nor was it the most expensive one parked in front of the ivy-clad gate of the castle. Inside, the rhythm of a small musical ensemble tucked away in a little corner accompanied the patrons as they moved through a medium-sized hall which was kept in a sort of twilight by narrow windows of dark stained glass. There were many well-dressed men and elegant women. Eveline and Josef sat down at one of the tiny tables, and she felt as if she were part of a fairy tale. Long, slim glasses were set in front of them, containing a tiny measure of some slightly milky liquid. That there must be an expensive little number, it brushed past their table, swinging gently, closely hugging the body inside it, and that body was in turn pushing itself up against the man's jacket, the long slim fingers of the left hand rested near the collar, five small oval slim red fingernails gleamed in the gentle light, a red mouth smiled and diamonds sparkled on the slim neck, ash-blond hair floated past, light blue cigarette smoke curled lazily in the air before mingling with the scent of cigars and perfume. Eveline set the glass down on the table, the milky-white liquid had disappeared, it was effervescent, stimulating, refreshing

and it felt good to glide through the room on Josef's arm, cutting through the spirals of cigarette and cigar smoke, she was dancing on air, not quite on golden sandals like the lady next to her, but in her best suede pumps, slightly dusty from all the sight-seeing, but face to face, cheek to cheek, just like everyone else, swallowing the music, gulping it down like the milky-white drink, equally intoxicated by it, light as air, refreshing as ice, She hadn't felt this sense of floating for quite some time, far away from sinks full of dishes, hungry children and dirty laundry, the rhythm of her youth she had almost believed lost forever, the rhythm of glittering eyes, of incontestable closeness, carried away by music laden with reminiscences never quite admitted, the memory of her first falling in love, in the time before Albert, the sweet non-fulfilment, the sense of expectation at the unknown, the dreams, the dream of life.

The two of them had sat down at the table again. They could hardly see the pair next to them in the twilight of the old hall. Of course, some of the others, that one in front, for example, and that one they had passed when dancing, they were quite a bit younger than her, slimmer, better groomed, didn't have the weight of three children on them, that weight which a woman carries for far longer than nine months, all her life in fact, a weight which makes her walking slower and her decisions more hesitant. But today Eveline had set everything that reminded her of her daily existence aside. She'd set the children aside like toys, like three dolls, that was what they were to her, the weight of light little dolls, and she tried to act all silly and natural like the young girls around her. They both had another Pernod and it transpired that the woman could not quite manage to be as natural, but certainly as silly as the other girls in the hall. She and Leidemit twirled and whirled through the whole castle. She had to see everything and she wanted to be seen by everyone. It seemed to her as if her life might somehow gain in value if she were finally recognised by her fellow human beings.

That Eveline was behaving a little too loudly for the society in which they were moving was a detail which neither she nor Josef noticed.

One of the staff, for they all knew Leidemit, tried to keep the pair in the dining room. He showed them the dishes on offer that evening, and both of them agreed they were a feast for the eyes.



They decided on the poultry. Leidemit soon gave himself up completely to the pleasure of eating and Eveline suddenly found herself sitting alone with her drumstick within the old castle walls. The man had penetrated the crispy, brown, roasted skin of the young bird and had reached the tender white meat inside, he had settled himself down comfortably and seemed to be blending himself with the subtle oil of the salad and the celeriac, dissolving himself in mouthfuls of the late harvest Riesling which accompanied it all. As the woman sat at the table and observed her companion enjoying his meal so unashamedly, so uninhibitedly, her sense of security and ease evaporated. She herself swallowed her food quickly and clumsily. The dead weight, the triple heaviness, settled itself upon her frame, heavier than she had felt it all day. She wanted to leave this place immediately, and go home, but the man, this suddenly altogether foreign masticating man at her table was still far too pre-occupied, he wasn't thinking of any such thing, wasn't thinking of anything but the taste in his mouth, the fine spices and the sweet herbs. When he finally noticed that she had stopped eating some time ago, he was disappointed. So her approach to food is as unsophisticated as his, thought Leidemit, and only then did it occur to him that they might have perhaps been inappropriately loud when they'd stormed through the fortress like two boisterous young lovers some time earlier.

But then they were back in the car again. They had promised Frau Mislowitsch not to be too late.

All the same, it was getting darker and after a short while Josef had to flick the headlights on. The pair hadn't even noticed the passing from day to night. Their road led them through thick forests, which provided dense shade even during the day, and when they got back out on to the open road, all they could see were the things that happened to fall within the beams of the headlights. The car was moving along quickly, the needle on the speedometer was hovering constantly between about ninety and a hundred kilometres per hour.

Eveline saw the white of the blossoming trees flashing up and flying towards her on her left and her right, one after another, the trunks whipping rhythmically past their windows, until they all blended into a monotony of speed. The woman was still looking for some safe point near Josef that she could cling to, but there was none. In vain she fell headlong into a vacuum, the headlights flashed up and illuminated one strange object after another, the smooth wall of a

house, a fluttering row of fence posts, a dull mass of stinging nettles. Eveline's life felt too heavy to keep aloft in all these tiny fragments, fragments of a looking glass with a thousand different reflections, she couldn't pass through all of them. She shrunk into herself more and more. She was tired and finally she fell asleep. As her senses gradually dimmed, she remembered the rose, whose heavenly scent had wafted over her during the night, but which she had forgotten to look at that morning. Some time later she woke up for a brief second when she thought that a huge red otherworldly blossom had opened up in front of her and she had jumped inside it. Then it was all over and dark again, night.

Josef gave her no opportunity to cling, nothing to cling to. He sat obstinately behind the wheel, his foot jammed up against the accelerator. Only on the bends did he release the pressure a little. A god has lost its divinity. He was furious. He wasn't a god! An idol of foolishness!

How could he have strayed so far onto the wrong side of the road? The brakes shrieked, then the engine roared again and the speedometer needle shot upwards. Another car sped past them. The sleeping woman was shunted forward. Her hands grabbed instinctively at Leidemit. But he needed freedom of movement to maintain control of the vehicle. Eveline slid towards the door. You can't grab at a god for safety. A god is only for worshipping. Leidemit's foot kept a steady pressure on the accelerator, while he stared at the road in front of him, taking odd glances into the small rear mirror.

There was still the narrow concrete strip and the dark wall to the left and the right, but nothing more, neither was there anything at the other end of the narrow road, nothing, and nothing was briefly caught in the headlights and quickly run over by the wheels, nothing at all! But he couldn't completely deny it, some traces remained after all. The flowering elderberry bushes had been a source of constant fascination for the boy during his long lonely hours. Half-obscurd images in the mirror, the chickens from the neighbour's garden, the little piglets, Ursula and Peter playing doctors and nurses, bows and arrows and the flute made out of a hollow elderberry twig. He breathed the scent of the white umbellar elderberry flowers through his nostrils, it was as close to him as the voices of his school friends Ursula and Peter, as the grunting of the piglets, and the scratching and cackling of the chickens. Everything was always so close, his room

with the empty walls and the crate with the Renaissance goblet, cupid riding a dolphin, the pictures and vases, the white wall of the house in the pampas before him, he was approaching it with terrific speed now, the wall where he had first seen a drawing of a naked woman and a naked man, and the wall where the revolutionaries had stood, before they were splashed and befouled with their own blood. And yet all that was nothing, was nothing at all, only his flute made from the hollow twig of the elderberry bush, his bow and arrows, his hands on Ursula and his voice giving the order to *Fire!* were real. But that couldn't be right either, nothing could be right, everything became submerged in the darkness of the dimly gleaming mirror, that wasn't his either, no, it was never his, it was just some other boy's elderberry flute and bow and arrows, some other child's hands on Ursula and some other officer's voice giving the order to *Fire!* Acceleration, one hundred and ten kilometres per hour. Fools, who did they think they were deceiving! As if it weren't all the same whether it was the Red-Faction or the Black-Faction who were robbing the people. The most important thing was to be on the side of whoever happened to be doing the robbing at the time, it was always the same, from one to the other, from Europe to Africa, from Africa to South America, thundering engines, the ancient blood of the nomads, Mother with her folding chair sitting down here, resting over there, playing railways on the embankment, at the rubbish dump riddled with broken glass, glittering shards of glass, tents built of elderberry branches and dirty blankets, the lodger of countless old landladies, yes, my friend, yes Rubnicek, this is the only way out off the gutter, but the others lined up against the wall, believe me, Rubnicek my friend, it's all for the best. They'd filled the octagonal music room in the little castle with crap, that beautiful little music room with the most stunning view out over the Tuscan landscape, you couldn't even reach the window any more, and the stench wafted as far as the park on warm days, but they all came to the lectures on Richard Wagner, yes, and they gave lectures on Rilke to that bunch of illiterates. A dangerous bend, badly planned, that one. Yes, this was the stretch of road that was about to be upgraded. Sand. Albert was always moderate, he was never a radical, his best virtue you might say! One should never be a radical, one should always keep a little door open, after all, who knows who's going to turn out to be right in the end, think of his parents, not poor devils like us, playing Cowboys and Indians on a rubbish dump

covered in broken glass, no, he was a member of some club or other, red too of course, but maybe not quite as dark a red, I don't know, during the cycle tours there were always discussions, you could tell his leanings were towards the pinkish end of the spectrum. Rubnicek would have liked our home. I'm the only consistent person of the lot, no theoretician, no, not me, a practical person is what I am, a man who practises what the others only preach, only he who lives in wealth, lives well, and all that. I changed sides just in time, became conservative, *Heimwehr*, just as well he didn't cross my path then, apparently he was living out in the country at that stage, and then in thirty-eight he was useful again, a wall, connections through his young wife, why didn't I pay her more attention at the time I wonder? And who knows whether it would have been as easy then as it is now, this is all for the best in any case, it will all be over pretty soon anyway, KLM, no strings attached, best we don't see each other anymore. He doesn't ever need to know, he'd probably think it was going too far, consequences and all that. But he loves children so much. Children are like flowers! We must have been thistles, or stinging nettles in that case. All right, let him grow flowers in his garden, a little paradise with Eve and the infamous serpent. Which one is which? Paradise only exists for the individual, for the one self, and anyone who concerns himself with the 'other' is just asking for trouble, he'll lose whatever glimpse of paradise he had and gain nothing by it. He's blinding me, the bastard, dim your lights! Can't see anything, blind at a hundred kilometres per hour, but there's that wall again, the white wall of white-washed tree-trunks and there, those red dots are disappearing in the rear mirror at last, about time you bastard, there's always one isn't there, driving as if he's the only one the road. Where are we? Somewhere, always somewhere, some name or another, what does it matter? It matters as little as Pohanka or Rubnicek, and in a month's time they'll all be calling me Hammerstein anyway. Who's going to notice a thing when they hear the name Hammerstein? But if I tell a man or woman over there the name of this place, it won't mean any more to them than the name Pohanka, not even if they're a university professor, and this body next to me, who bears that name, it will just carry on existing, or not existing, as the case may be. And Hammerstein, it's not going to mean a whit more than bows and arrows and elderberry flutes. Leidemit, he's going to be dissolved into nothingness, he's going to crumble, decay,

slowly disintegrate, like things do, like a powder compact perhaps, the first lipstick or the furtive glance a girl steals into the men's section of a communal shower. And it's good that way, no one can hold on to anything, she can't and I can't, and she knows that as well as I do, how else could she do it, a married woman and all, but after all, there's pleasure in it for her as well. And Albert? Albert! Albert! The road is bad here, really, really bad! It's got to be pretty boring with him after a while, just him and his deadening, deathly seriousness and his never-ending bloody humanism. What kind of a clapped-out piece of junk is that? Lights not nearly bright enough. Always thinking of mankind, everything done for the good of mankind. I am the man in mankind! I am, me, I!

The car he passed was an ancient Mercedes.

There were five people in it. They too had been driving about from place to place, had visited this castle and that monastery and finally ended up at one of the vineyards which had their little bundles of fir branches or green wreaths displayed along the road, indicating there was wine for sale. Now their dodderly old car was rattling back towards the capital city. The man driving had a lean athletic figure, his face had intelligent hard eyes and a somewhat crooked nose, which could have made him look severe and unfriendly if it hadn't been for a gentle and compassionate air which played about his lips and banished any potential trace of unpleasantness. In the back seat, wedged in between two young women, sat a rather fattish man, his Dionysian face beaming with satisfaction and the enjoyment of wine, he had put each of his arms around the shoulder of a woman, a black-haired one on his left and a blond one on his right and was engaged in developing a theory about the connections between the baroque inclinations of the great architect Munggenast and the excellent wine of the monasteries. He was a poet, a species which was plentiful among that sort of people, but not the kind of poet who craved fame, nor the kind who was convinced of his own unique calling on this earth. Instead he had developed a certain sceptical outlook, paired with an Epicurean enjoyment of life and went about quite happily producing collections of some of the most useless things in existence on this earth: poems. The two women were of a fairly middle-class appearance, their job was to provide the man in the middle with a continuous stream of cues and key words: Ionic capitals, column bases, façade-design, spires but also quite different words: blossoming apple trees,

young shoots, wooded hills and so on. The man talked about each at length, considering them from all angles and perspectives. The third man, the one sitting next to the driver, had slightly slanted eyes and the appearance, especially when he gave one of his frequent impenetrable smiles, of a man of Asian extraction, an impression reinforced by the drooping ends of his moustache. In spite of these surface differences and their different philosophies and points of view, they formed a unity, not only among themselves but also with the landscape they had been part of that day, with the people living in it and their history. As if the dry wine they had drunk formed some sort of unifying tie with the blood of the earth and the men and women who cultivated the earth and the men and women before them and further back, right back to the planters of the very first vines. But it was nothing more remarkable than love, which joined them in this way, a love which had nothing to do with lust, a love which bound them together in the same way that it bound them to the landscape, the soil and their homeland. They had given up their selves to a greater self, and the poet in their midst sang with their mouths, with the mouths of all the woodlands and vineyards.

They had already seen the blue car somewhere, it might have been back in Altenburg. Now they watched as the speeding car disappeared into the distance and shook their heads. Those poor beggars! They must be in a devil of a hurry! Not even the time to see the stars.

The woman was just as she had imagined.

The car disappeared out onto the main road and Kitty turned back to the garden. The children wanted to show her their tortoise and the sand pit, the moulds for the sand cakes and the rings for swinging on which were screwed into a beam behind the house. While Frau Mislowitsch looked round the house to see what there was to eat, the children began a game of hide and seek with the nice young auntie.

Kitty went into the bedroom to look for a place to hide. She had thought she might hide in the wardrobe. But when she opened the doors, she saw Albert's photograph standing on one of the shelves in between piles of underwear, socks and children's singlets. Leidemit had told her to put it there. He knew of course that his friend was hardly likely to be having personal conversations with that silly red-haired goose of a labourer, whose head was filled with the one single thought of finding herself a good match, just like all her friends. And

even then, so he thought, there was the fact that she knew that Albert was working on Sunday and would simply assume, as far as girls like her were capable of thinking at all, that he really was taking the woman out to the construction site. But the less she knew about the people in whose house she was spending her Sunday, the better. With this in mind, he had arranged everything in such a way that the introductions were very short and he had asked Eveline to make sure she mumbled, and indeed Frau Mislowitsch had absolutely no idea as to the names of the people whose children she was looking after.

As Kitty stood there, looking at the photograph, she heard one of the girls in the garden call out: "Coming, ready or not..." She should hide. But she hesitated. She stood still as a stone in the room and stared at the photograph, even when the little ones saw her from outside and called her name Kitty, Kitty and auntie, auntie. She ignored their shouting and finally the children got bored and gave up. They looked for something else to do.

But Kitty was staring again at a man in a military uniform bare of all distinctions, just as she had four years ago, or was it five? She had just come home from school. It was a sunny day. Holiday thoughts. She had been standing in front of the cinema with the girl from next door and they had been talking about the meadow out by the Danube. But there was that man sitting in the kitchen when she got home, grey-green like Albert in the photograph and just as thin and shabby. Mother had been sitting on the coal box, weeping, she could see that right away when she came in, red eyes and a handkerchief in her hand. But perhaps it was the piece of cake which she had noticed first of all. The plate was in front of him and a cup of coffee, with KATHARINA inscribed in large Gothic letters on the porcelain, difficult to read. Father often brought a little lard home with him from his travels and corn-flour too, a little extra to add to the scanty bread rations. Mother did most of her baking on Saturdays. This piece was a left-over from Sunday and the stranger had already taken a bite out of it. Of course, they had already talked about it, otherwise she wouldn't have been crying like that. But when she entered they fell silent and the mother had looked towards her from the coal-box and the man had looked from his chair at the table. He had half turned round towards her, and she remained standing at the door. She had disliked him immediately. Mother had introduced her to him and so she had learned that he was one of Hans's comrades. She had liked him the

best of all her brothers, she was in love with him actually, maybe he was the only one she had ever been in love with, and never ever again with anyone else, even if he was her brother, that didn't matter to her at all, it was no business of anybody else's, with all their complicated, brutal laws which said you couldn't do this and weren't allowed to do that and claimed that you weren't allowed to be in love with your own brother. And he had looked after her. They had even kissed each other, whose business was that? Not the strange man's for sure. There was no need for him to look at her breasts and her knees like that, she had known even then why he had looked at her like that. Her brother, her dead brother, would never have done it! Dead. A messenger of the dead who had stroked her hair with his bony hand and had said "Poor child". Never, her brother would never have dreamt of doing that. Like a child! Maybe that was what had increased her hatred towards him, and of course the fact that he was talking about her brother again. Mother had cried and she had hated him because he had spoken of the dead boy as if he had some claim on him, some knowledge of who he had been. She knew everything, no one needed to tell her anything. Dead, no return, and now he was already so far away that she could hardly remember his face. But the face of the messenger was in front of her, that soldier who looked so much like Albert Pohanka, the soldier whose name she had forgotten, never known, even though Mother had told her several times, even though she had heard it, it was a name which she refused to recognise, just as she refused to recognise the person to whom it belonged, for her they were unreal, always, for ever.

She stood and stared at the photograph.

In front of the window a fruit tree was blossoming and Kitty thought she could smell the scent of a rose. She wanted to have a look to find out where it was coming from.

She wondered about herself, as she closed the wardrobe again and turned towards the door. She hadn't thought of that episode for years, and now, when she didn't have the photograph in front of her anymore she told herself that the likeness between Albert and that strange soldier wasn't that striking at all. But maybe to her all the boys who returned looked alike, because Hans didn't return.

As she looked for the rose out in the garden in front of the bedroom window the image began to fade again, but it still left some sort of shadowy imprint on her mind, an imprint which affected her all day



long, every word she said and every movement she made, everything about her, down to the lift of an eyebrow, the turning of a shoulder, or the slight movement of a leg, every gesture was subtly altered because of what she had seen. In this she joined that group of women who are perhaps more influenced by the emotions, by that deeper and more uncontrollable side of existence than the cold rationality of so-called intellectual men.

Heini too noticed this change of mood in Kitty when he appeared at the gate after an hour or so. The girl called out to him. He was, as were many of his age group, open to all forms of sentimentality, even if he tried to behave all detached and relaxed, or maybe that was the reason he tried so hard. Kitty seemed especially attractive to him when she was in a melancholy mood like this. The two of them played in the sand-pit with the children, built castles and dams and ditches and the little ones enjoyed destroying everything. Kitty and Heini rolled in the damp sand in their bathing costumes and let the dry sun-warmed sand run down their bodies and amused themselves with the patterns it formed on them and the imprints they left in the damp sand.

The little girls started to play with their cake tins and the old woman sat in a deck chair next to the house, knitting.

It was so hot by lunchtime that the two young people went down to the water and swam out quite a long distance. When they returned, they were tired, and they lay down in the grass next to each other. Heini's small radio played sentimental songs beside their heads and they both felt that they were the perfect accompaniment to the way they were feeling.

A week ago she'd been lying over there too, thought Kitty, as she looked across to the public bath, on the raft and there were the strange boys with all their pimples, and the pair of lovers! She felt with her right leg for Heini's left one and her calf rubbed against his. She bent her knee so that her toes pointed towards the sky. Heini's leg followed suit.

The bald man, thought Kitty, the stupid laughter, everyone showing off, really, did she need any of that, a little house like this, a garden on the shoreline and a row-boat, travelling on a white steam ship to the Wachau to see all those things the boss had been talking about today! That Pohanka woman might already be there, she's got everything, a three-room apartment and a fragrant blond friend who comes to collect her in his blue car, who arranges Albert's work so he can go

out with his wife, and he has no idea, he's so dedicated to his job, works day and night and hasn't even tried to kiss me, a few glasses of liqueur, nice conversation and then that goodbye, as if I were ugly as sin, it must have hit him quite hard, and after all she just doesn't deserve all that, not with her hips and thighs!

Eveline's image floated in front of her, the way the woman had bent down and got into the car, lifting her skirt slightly as she did so.

She suddenly hated Herrn Leidemit and felt nothing but pity for Pohanka.

She looked through the crook of her arm, past the nearby shoreline and the water, to the point where the distant mountains dissolved in the midday haze. She looked without really seeing anything properly, without being able to hold on to what she was seeing, and as she looked she told Heini about the white ship and what the engineer had told her, and the young man laughed and told her that he could take her to all those places, he'd been along that route on his motorbike many times, if she wanted to, they could work out a plan for next Sunday right now.

And so they worked out a plan for the whole of the summer. And when Heini said that they would be much faster on the motorbike than the white steamship and would be able to see and experience much, much more, Kitty believed him, although she was a little sorry that she wouldn't be able to go on the ship. It had looked so bright and inviting and maybe she even suspected that it would be more fun on board a ship than sitting one behind the other on a speeding motorbike, but it was only a maybe, she couldn't be certain, it could be so romantic, with all the dancing and music and standing at the railing with their arms around each other. But did they have enough to talk about, enough to make sure that a slow journey like that wouldn't become boring? As it was, even now, after one morning, and the day had had its fair share of distractions, they didn't always know what to say to each other. It would be much better to speed along through the Wachau on Heini's motorbike. If they wanted to dance, they'd surely be able to find somewhere in one of the little towns along the Danube.

From the river came the sound of a ship's horn. It was a shrill, high-pitched sound and Kitty knew that that could only be the black tug.

Lunch went along quite quickly and uneventfully with the three of them fussing over the little girls, although the smallest one, Frieda,

missed her mother and had almost started crying at one point. After lunch, Kitty and Heini got into the boat and went for a ride. Heini rowed and Kitty lay back in the round body of the boat. She stared dreamily into the sky. Heini had stashed his little transistor radio under the bench, where it crackled and whined, but the girl didn't hear it. She didn't hear the shouting of the young men when they passed the raft at the public baths either. All she could hear was the gentle lapping of the small waves on the planks of the boat.

In the distance she could see the blue shimmering mountains, they were still swimming in a sea of mist and trembling air. The sky above them was very light, almost empty of colour, only from a certain height downwards did it become blue, continuously bluer. There, on one of the last mountains running down to the Danube, that's where Albert would be just now, the girl thought to herself. He had been so composed, had accepted her news so calmly, and was still able to talk to her afterwards. A remarkable man.

Back then she had hated him, when he had stroked her hair and had called her a poor child and said "You don't have a brother anymore now," the stained, smelly uniform, what did he know about having a brother, no, he wasn't one, and yet at the same time he was, they all were, every man who treated her with gentleness, like a child, who stroked her hair soothingly, kissed her on the forehead and didn't bite wildly or demandingly at her lips, they were all one.

The boat rocked gently on the waves. Heini had said something. Kitty was lying quietly, staring into the blue of the sky. She wasn't listening to him, she knew that she didn't have to listen to him, and that he would talk to her anyway, that he would propel their boat forward with strong steady oar strokes. She didn't know that Eveline had once thought the very same thing, that she didn't have to listen to Albert.

She felt her power over him. He would steer the boat wherever she wanted him to, twice, three times along the shoreline if she wanted. He was looking at the body lying in front of him, showing it off with a certain air of pride and contentment to all the people they paddled past as if she were a platter, a trophy. Look here, his eyes said and the pride of ownership shone in them, that's a body for you! And all that is mine. It belongs to me.

Drops of water rained down off the oars, pearl after pearl, and the keel divided a sea of pollen. Cupid up on the highest branch and the

fish at the bottom of the water. The girl in the rocking boat thought of Albert, the strange soldier and her brother. Even when she sat up and leaned against one of the young man's bent legs, it was Albert, the strange soldier and her brother who occupied her mind.

Heini was proud and happy.

*You are making the world a better place, a better place...* the tone crackled and shrilled from the tiny speaker of the little radio. As if on cue, the two people sitting in the boat started humming the melody at the same time.

Kitty had finally rid her mind of the strange soldier from her mind. Albert and her brother seemed to be getting on well together.

The boat carrying the two young people floated past many houses. Men who happened to be out painting the fence, or fixing the roof, or mowing the lawn would look up and watch their progress until they floated out of sight.

The same smile played around both sets of lips, they sang along to the same melody, following the lead of the radio under the bench of the boat.

The afternoon went by very quickly. Back in the garden they played some more with the children, had a go on the swing and tried, albeit with little success, to teach the oldest girl to swim. After the evening meal, which they ate together very early, at half past six, Frau Mislowitsch grew a little edgy. It wasn't such a good idea, she thought, for Herr Leidemit and the lady to find Heini here when they got back. Frau Mislowitsch was of the opinion that the blue car would return any moment now.

Kitty wasn't so sure, she had her suspicions that the pair would take their time but she didn't want to see that man again today. Tomorrow in the factory, he was the boss, all right, she could cope with that, but today - or maybe it was the woman she didn't want to see again. She wasn't quite sure herself what possessed her to leave the garden now, the evening promised to develop into such a beautiful, mild July night. She asked Heini to drive her home and the young man was quite willing.

When they arrived at the block of flats there was hardly anybody still looking out of the windows. Only an old master cobbler, a shrivelled-up widower on the ground floor, and Frau Blahovec, were there to observe the two young people entering the building. Frau Blahovec was a bit short-sighted and thought she saw the young man

leaving again after about five minutes when the Eichelberger family's boarder went out, so she left her observation post with a clear conscience. The old master cobbler however indulged in melancholy reflections. He was dreaming of those times when people still wanted shoes made to measure. He would have been able to tell which type of shoes went into the house but not who wore them. He was an old-fashioned gentleman and Czech, like so many of his colleagues. Although he had been living in this city almost all of his life, he still couldn't speak German terribly well.

When the door to the flat closed behind Kitty and Heini, the young man asked: "Do you think that they'll be back any time soon?"

"No," said the girl. She stood in the kitchen, uncertain of what to do. The dark line on the wall, the stove-pipe, the coal box, the chair with the worn paint, the bread bin on the kitchen cupboard and the jar with the gherkins, Kitty didn't notice any of them. She went to the other room and pulled down the blind.

Heini noticed the stove-pipe, the dark line, the coal box, the chair with the worn paint, the bread-bin on the kitchen cupboard and the jar with the gherkins and everything seemed familiar to him, not all that different from his own home. He felt very much at home and that made him feel brave and strong. He followed the girl into the other room.

Frau Mislowitsch sat out on the veranda. It was getting darker now and she told the children the story about the Princess and the Pea, and the one about the Frog Prince and Puss in Boots and at the end of each story she paused for a while to let Sigrid run to the gate to see whether her mother and Uncle Josef were there yet.

They weren't. Darkness fell, the frogs began to croak and Frau Mislowitsch found herself getting slightly annoyed. Of course, she didn't let on to the children, but she did think it was inconsiderate of them to keep her waiting like this.

Finally, it was past the time that the children should have been in bed. And their mother had promised to be back in time too! Frieda was getting sleepy and the two bigger girls were becoming fractious. Not even the story of the dwarf with the enormous nose could help very much. Their mother mustn't have thought she was going to be late, because she hadn't told Frau Mislowitsch anything about their nighties, nor their beds, nor about washing, teeth-cleaning or any other part of the good-night-ceremony. Just to make sure, the old

woman went into the bedroom to look around before she started on the next fairytale. It was already quite dark inside and she had to switch on the light. When she returned to the dark veranda, the two littlest girls were fast asleep. Sigrid was yawning and sprawling across the table. Frau Mislowitsch carried the little ones into the other room and after the oldest had told her which bed belonged to which, she tucked the children in, made the sign of the cross over each of them, just as she had done with her own children, and returned to the veranda. Sigrid snuggled up close to her. The child wouldn't settle in her bed. It seemed as if she wanted some sort of protection from the woman, it was as if she had known her for a long time, as if she really were her grandmother. The two of them sat together in the dark, the frogs croaked on the shoreline, the stars twinkled in the black sky, and the woman, who up till now had been thinking of nothing but the child's mother's lack of consideration, forgot her grudge. Maybe, she thought, there had been some sort of unavoidable delay.

She felt the heat of the little girl's body next to her, watched her legs swing back and forth, and a peculiar feeling welled up in her, she'd missed it, she herself had had a little girl like this once, yes, she had even been this little and helpless herself, once upon a time. Children's legs streaking through the dark nights, through the fields, up and down the meadows, frogs croaking, dark reflections of stars surrounded by clumps of bulrushes, the first train whistling in the distance and the trotting of the horses pulling the imperial carriage off to the hunting lodge, the storks clattering on the chimneys and in the wet grass, the storks which brought the babies, or so she'd been told.

She didn't tell the girl any more fairytales. Instead she began to tell her stories about the fields she and all her many brothers and sisters had crossed on their way to school, about the high-rise buildings which had taken over the meadows and grasslands now, she told her of the crowds of children who played around the ponds at the brick works in summertime, barefoot, in their patched, shabby clothes, told her about clay diggers, and kiln workers, poor people and postmen. She told her about her world as if everything had been wonderful, as if the cheap brandy, the rapes and the child labour hadn't existed, even when she talked about the diseases they'd suffered, about the bad dental care and the terrible housing, she made it seem as if those were all things which they had put up with cheerfully, endured with the same composure as the much colder winters and the much hotter

summers they'd had back then. She talked about all these things just as if she was telling the story of Puss in Boots, or the Frog Prince, or the Princess and the Pea, but it didn't really seem as if she were talking to the little girl who leaned sleepily up against her, it seemed more as if she were talking to herself, softly and evenly. And soon she really was talking to herself, for the third child had fallen asleep too, leaning at her side. She gently propped the little one up against a corner, got her a large pillow and rested her on it. Then the woman went down through the dark garden to the gate.

There was no sign of the car. Had she misunderstood the arrangement somehow? She tried to remember what the engineer and the woman had said, they hadn't said much actually. But no, they had mentioned a timely return. Something must have happened. It was already ten o'clock.

From the river came the sound of the ships' horns, sonorous and deep, a little melancholy if you really listened for it, traces of far away places and endless journeys across vast distant plains. In the distance the lights of the city threw their illumination deep into the night sky. The reflection of thousands of lamps wove a reddish haze on the horizon, and behind that rose the sound of an incessant murmuring and humming. Here it was dark and silent, the barking of a dog which the wind carried across from the other side of the water only seemed to intensify the quietness. The woman turned back towards the house. What could she do? She decided to switch on the light and read for a bit. She had seen a few newspapers on the table.

She had hardly reached the veranda when she heard the growl of a motorbike and the beam of a headlight swept along the narrow street. The vehicle stopped in front of the gate. An even more intense silence followed.

Who could it be? Frau Mislowitsch saw two figures in the dark as she ran back across the garden. Police! was her first thought. Something's happened! After the crash which injured her husband, it was always her first thought whenever anyone came to see her unexpectedly, there's been an accident. It had been a policeman who had come to tell her about it.

But when she reached the fence, it was only Kitty and Heini at the gate.

At first the two had hardly been able to believe their luck that Frau Mislowitsch was taking so long, but gradually they became worried

and decided to drive back out to the Old Danube to see why Kitty's mother wasn't home yet.

They were astonished when they heard that the engineer hadn't yet returned. It all seemed very strange

With Kitty's help, the old woman moved the dreamy ten-year old girl from her uncomfortable position in the corner and into bed. Then the young people went off to look for a phone box for Kitty to use to call Leidemit's flat. There was no reply. Heini thought it was all terribly exciting. The day was turning out so differently to his normal, everyday life and he was enjoying the excitement and the novelty, although to be honest he would have had no objection to returning to the flat with Kitty.

Kitty thought of Albert. But no, he didn't have a telephone, and there was nothing else they could do at that late hour. Tomorrow they would all find out what had caused their delay and where the pair had been all this time.

Frau Mislowitsch got ready to bed down on the sofa. She had decided to sleep there the night. Who knew when the two would be back. It might not be until the early hours of the morning.

Kitty and Heini said goodbye. For a long time the old woman could hear the roar of the motorbike and when she couldn't hear it anymore she knew that before long they wouldn't be sitting behind each other but would be lying together entwined on the girl's bed in a tight embrace. She fetched a rosary from her handbag, and when she had stretched out on the sofa, she very slowly let one bead after another glide through her wrinkled fingers. With each bead she thought of the strange people whose children she was minding here, and of her own daughter who, so she thought, was at that very moment committing a sin.

As Pohanka sat on the edge of his bed that evening, drifting his glance from his hairy legs as they protruded from his night shirt, across the floor to the windows which were blacked out by blinds, he was filled with an inexplicable sense of satisfaction. He looked at every object around him in turn, reflected on each one for a while before continuing on, finally resting his gaze on the bedside table with the alarm clock and the small lamp which cast its soft glow over the room. Time would heal everything! He stared at the two big hands for a very long time, and then at the thin, thread-like hand which showed the seconds. He watched the visible course of the clock for a long



time; one revolution after another closer to eternity, one revolution closer to tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, one step closer to completion, to the set routine of his tasks the next day, to the routine he was willing to subject his life to, to the greater order which would embrace him at the end of all measurable time. Tomorrow he would wake up at the correct time, even without the alarm ringing, he would go to work again, would contribute his part to an order he was familiar with, an order which he believed to be essential to life, not only to others but to his own too.

In spite of that he gazed, almost enraptured, at the two, almost silent big hands and then the one very thin one as it moved, driven onwards by its invisible mechanism, so that it felt almost as if one's eye were able to perceive the very process by which both, time and the order connected with time, were being sliced into smaller and smaller pieces. Of course, he could just leave everything as it was, could ignore that tiny distance the thin hand jumped from second to second, could gaze at the two strong, quiet hands whose job it was to indicate the hours and minutes, their almost imperceptible movement which would eventually announce the time when he would find himself being propelled forward into another moment, of course, he could just sit, and wait for it, and do nothing but stare, spellbound, at the jumping thread-like needle, but the hands weren't all there was to see, he could also, if he'd wanted to, have seen the wall behind the alarm clock which was covered in a gleaming silver pattern, maple leaves, in almost the same colour and shade as the background. But he didn't see the leaves at all and he didn't see the wall either, instead he saw the leaves of the trees out on the mountain, where just this morning he had stared insensibly out into the foliage, as oblivious to everything as he was now, staring at the hands and the gleaming silver leaves behind them, and yet something was different too. Although he was tired, he couldn't fall asleep. He had three healthy, strong children, a wife who was a good mother to them, he had a beautiful garden, a weekend house out on the outskirts of town, and a big spacious apartment in the city, he could fix things, he could make things go again. Although he was tired, he was still full of energy, and even a touch of high spirits. He put on his slippers and got up again, he put on his long dressing gown, walked across to the living room, opened one of the windows and looked down onto the street.

There were still a few people milling about in front of the cinema a few blocks further up. He could see the reflection of the bright lights of the showcases in their faces, men and women, and girls too, still children really. It was a long time since he had been to the pictures. But wasn't he in the middle of one of those sad complicated affairs himself? What was he really, if not an actor and somewhere, out there in the darkness, there was the audience sitting watching him, and he was watching himself, it seemed to him as if he had played this role several times already, as if he had looked out of the window just like this, along the black, dark ravine of houses, along the lines of gloom, up to the narrow strip of June sky where he could see a few stars, and when he lit a cigarette, he had to light a cigarette, he thought of the apartment behind him and the girls down there in front of the cinema and of Kitty, of her slim legs at the kidney-shaped table with the two liqueur glasses on it, and he thought of everything he hadn't done, the things he could have done, he thought a little of the disappointment, his, and perhaps hers, and of the imagined invisible onlookers, but then he heard the signal for the next radio time announcement from one of the many windows, and he could imagine the monotonous voice of the speaker announcing the time again, wasn't it that thin second-hand in front of him, jumping from one point to the next, unstoppable, strict, keeping strict order and this strict order controlled him and didn't excuse him, neither did it excuse Eveline or Kitty, and even if he and perhaps Kitty too and certainly all the onlookers didn't want to think of the order it maintained, didn't want it, or simply didn't believe in it, he knew nevertheless that he was going to restore it. Even if he was being crushed under the weight of that vast red mountain, if that huge red pyramid dominated the centre of the painting and couldn't be denied, even then, if he, just like thousands of other people, didn't think much of abstract paintings, if this red, this red was still burning in his mind and pushing all yellow, ochre and blue to the side, even then there were still those black lines criss-crossing the mountain, cutting deep crevasses across the deep red, a cracked pyramid, a red wedge split by the light blue of the sky, even if Herr Rothenstarker and Dr Mühlfeld didn't know what those lines or shapes were supposed to mean, even if all they knew was that they were painted by a famous artist and had cost the firm a lot of money, they could never be obliterated, just as nothing which ever enters the world can ever be entirely obliterated, but

becomes part of an order, it was the same with these dark crevasses he could now see between the rows of houses, these lines of gloom, these men, women and girls with the cold light of the showcases on their faces, the skies with their stars, the narrow skies of the crowded city streets and the vast skies of the dark river meadows along the river, the skies of the three-room apartments, weekend houses and blue cars, the skies of a one-bedroom flat, bathing in the washbasin and the constantly gossiping neighbours, everything was accepted, included, part of the whole, even his confusion, because that's what he labelled the slim legs and the red, the red of that healthy, thick hair, and he was ready to find a way out of this confusion. He thought about seeing Eveline again, just as he had seen her in amongst the golden fields of corn which surrounded the National Labour Service camp, and thought about how he was going to be to her again what he had been to her once upon a time, he was going to be the man she had fallen for back in those days of political upheaval, fallen for in spite of his political shortcomings. In three weeks time he would pass his driver's licence and buy a car, surely he'd be able to get a loan, the firm would help him secure one, he needed one for professional reasons anyway, Josef was quite right, he really shouldn't have given him throwaway advice like that though, it wouldn't go to waste, certainly not when it came to Eveline, he of all people should know (but he didn't want to think of Josef), and then they could go for drives on Sundays to see things, whatever she wanted. She was a good mother to her children, his children, yes, his children too, that much was already becoming clear, his oldest daughter, in spite of all her unchildlike games of showing off just like her mother, all superficiality and pretence, getting all dressed up in that ridiculous bourgeois way and showing off in front of all the other children whose mothers were all the same, affected and unnaturally grown-up, in spite of all the affectation and pretending to be sophisticated, when she was alone with him she behaved like an ordinary, natural child, as if she were ashamed of her hollow pretences, and she brushed her mother's shallowness away with a wave of her hand, as if it had never meant anything to her in the first place. There was even the odd quality in the other two which assured him of his part in them, but she was a good mother, as good as she could be, and better than some. Maybe after a while she would even learn that other parts of the world were not necessarily more beautiful than their own, that they could live at their own "little

Riviera” more contentedly than at the real one, and that there was really nothing to be gained if the car of a famous movie star happened to be parked next to that of her husband. Maybe, given time, she would come to realise that the view across the soft, blue, rippling water to where the distant mountain sloped steeply down to the river, and the sight of that furthest peak in the broad ridge which extended to the west and south west, were as unique as the view from some southern coastline, so much more unique and special than one of those hundreds of identical beach-idylls on the northern or western coast of the Adriatic sea, where people like them flocked in their thousands. Maybe it would even occur to her that the scent of the linden trees that each gentle breeze carried across the water smelt no sweeter anywhere else, that the fresh morning dew on the grass was no more refreshing beside a foreign lake and that the rolling evening fog in their very own street was capable of magically changing each street lamp into a melon, a melon with a halo, or a face distorted by toothache, and that the horns of the ships in the nearby river could conjure up snatches of old legends, and that the everlasting nightly choir of frogs was a rug of tightly-woven love songs. But he would still have a talk with Kitty, maybe her mother would be able to look after the children one weekend. Maybe Eveline would like to go out without the children for once, to be unburdened, be free, escape from the drudgery of the daily routine. Escape? From the routine? To be as free as before, in the fields of the girls’ work camp, free, free? Free from the suffocating order, he had been free like that once before, when he rejected the *Neue Ordnung*, the “New Order”. He knew that that wasn’t possible, he believed in an order, he was an order fanatic even, he felt most comfortable when he was surrounded by his work, because his work conformed to a strict protocol, a strict process of order. But could man not be an order unto himself, to Eveline her own order, and to him his own and to Josef (but he didn’t want to think of Josef!) inextinguishable, each for him or herself, yet determined to act in unison nevertheless. He wanted to try it once more, to try that acting in unison again, one of the actors has left (no, don’t think of Josef!) acting in unison, acting in unison. Unison, unison. It was much more sensible to play with the children in the garden instead of racing along those dusty country roads like all those thousands of others, vehicles full of people looking for relaxation, needing diversion, just like him,

needing a change of rhythm, seeking some sort of contact with nature and who, just like him, could never find any of it.

He looked down at the road, no, no one was walking past. The end of his cigarette traced a red-hot arc, a thin line through the dark of the street, Pohanka turned around and went back to the bedroom. Here he was again, sitting on his bed, and looking across to his wife's one. The blue material of the mattress was a stark contrast to the white of his bed linen. He had been overreacting when the sight of this had made him think of a house split by a bomb, half a room with one bed, where no one slept any longer because the other one was buried down at ground floor level under the rubble of all the half rooms above it, a room with a porcelain stove which no one lit any longer, because it stood out in the open air on a small strip of parquet floor, like an artwork in an exhibition, useless, superfluous. He had been overreacting when the sight of the bed had caused the same feeling to creep over him as he'd had during the war when he saw a bombed-out house, the result of a casual push of a button above, opening the flaps of a spacious bomb compartment, releasing the deadly freight which caused half a house to collapse down on itself, splitting rooms in two, and leaving the other half still standing, its half rooms open to the air, so that the large mirror which hung on one of the faded walls was left intact to reflect endlessly the splintered beams and a sky darkened by smoke, his imagination had run away with him! Because, when he passed one of those ruins nowadays, the bed in the half-room was always gone and the rubble which had buried the other half had been bulldozed and flattened so that ten or twenty old cars could be parked on it, and it would be up for sale, cars parked on the graveyard of two or three floors, two, three rooms, two, three marital beds in which people had once dreamed, loved and maybe even given birth, the wind had blown soil and dust and grass seeds round the porcelain stove, which, as if still miraculously radiating heat, was surrounded by lush ruin-vegetation, pigeons strutted up and down in front of the large mirror, which had become dulled by the elements, and didn't show things as sharply as before, male pigeons engaged in their mating dance, following the females, yes, he realised he was overreacting, that his imagination was running away with him. But what had changed? Nothing had changed. The blue, faintly patterned material of the mattress still contrasted just as starkly with the clean white linen of his bed, the rough material with the stitches of the up-

holsterer's needle and the well-ironed damask. Nothing had changed, and yet everything was different. The blue material contained within it the blue of the sky, that endless sky which was reflected in the waters of the Old Danube, high above the water, simple and pure and infinite was that sky, as immeasurable as love and just as immeasurable as lust, and as the man had never known whether it was love or lust which had driven him to his wife, he didn't know why it was that what he had once perceived as a harsh, brutal image, had changed into this contemplative introspection, didn't know why it was he saw not a ruin of a bed next to the snow-clad one where he now sat, but rather the quiet, light-blue equilibrium of the vast sky reflected in the rippling of the water. His feet - his hairy legs were still protruding from his night shirt - were still on the floor next to the bed, but he was resolved to move them up on to the white linen and under the light duvet in the next moment or two. Lust or love? Lust was just as eternal as love, just as eternal, from all eternity, through into eternity, eternal in the past, the present, the future, a sister of love, part of the family, related, fitted with the same rustling wings, just as large, just as bright, a halo just as golden, a voice just as precious and just as terrifyingly near to God, but lust had fallen, fallen from the original state of heavenly bliss, lust next to lust, plummeting into the depth of ultimate lust, where it was buried, bulldozed and flattened, levelled, became a parking place, a place for haggling, a common place for second-hand car-dealers to drive their wares back and forth, the satisfaction of lust on each and every street corner. What about it, luv? - in every dirty cheap hotel, *Use Olla condoms, Sigi condoms*, in every cheap nasty bordello, but love has kept its place up there, even then, when it descended down to the rippling waters of the river meadows, even then when it was torn down by force, cornflowers between the golden ears, ideologically untenable, politically incorrect, yesterday and today and probably tomorrow as well, it kept its place up above, even in the wake of the male pigeon showing off and running after his female, through all the nights of the frogs, it was even praised by the choir of frogs, it remained up there through the synchronised humming of the flies in his room, kept its place in the face of the shaky trembling of a three-year old filly, for the ignorant creature wasn't affected by the fall, and there was gold where the bright gleam of the sun could not reach, the germination of the coltsfoot, hundreds of tiny suns in amongst the ruins of the city, but

he, he knew, he knew what he was doing and why he was doing it, he believed strongly in it, and he had always known, or thought he had known, and as he pulled his legs up into the bed he asked himself repeatedly why the naked bed next to him didn't disturb him any longer. He couldn't stop thinking about it. Even after he'd switched off the small bedside light and the room was completely dark, he could still see the blue, patterned material of the mattress next to the white, even when he closed his eyes, he could still see the unmade bed next to his. Was it indifference? No, up till now he had always felt some part of himself there beside him, in spite of the brown rings in the saucers, the coffee stains, the cake crumbs, the fences, in spite of the superficial piety, the ostentatious display of hand-folding and kneeling and eye-lowering, in spite of the nightly plea of tiredness and headaches after a day spent in daydreams, the sight of the bed and the thought of the cessation of all that distressed him, even if he had already begun to notice that her thighs were growing wider, fatter, wobblier, from one Sunday to the next, even then he had still felt something between them, had felt more than the mere physical presence of the other person, the other sex, no, it couldn't have been just those thighs which had seduced him out at the girls' work camp, mind you, back then they had been covered in silkier softer, smoother skin, no, he could have had all that cheaper and without complications down at the *Blue Lantern*. Or was it the attraction of having a personal maid on duty twenty-four hours a day, taking care of his socks and his shirts, making sure his collar was straight and his suits got brushed, someone on hand to take care of him when he was ill and look after him in his old age, someone who listened when he was in the mood to share his words of wisdom and someone who consoled him when he got angry at the stupidity of the rest of humanity? Of course, of course, there was all of that too, but in the end it was all nonsense, no, if that's all it had been, he would have thrown her his way long ago, take her, keep her, with all her wobbly flesh and see how you like having every last dropped crumb counted at breakfast time, having every last drop of coffee or any other liquid which happens to drip off somewhere commented on, meaningful looks, he wouldn't have said anything at work, wouldn't be buying a car, would have made himself scarce in the garden, worked every Sunday, ignored the children, but no, in spite of all their present estrangement, there was more to it than that, more than lust, more than narcissism, a little spark of that other

strand of eternity had come down, had descended with all the other things, a seed of love inside the lust, and this little spark, this splash, this droplet, was enough to make their life together more than a second-hand car yard, more than a transaction, more than an open invitation for a free-for-all, this spark was enough, it had been enough from all eternity, the birth, the transformation, the incarnation of the golden sister with her bright wings. It was her and her alone who had ensured that he had seen no more than the knees, or a hand's width above the knees, of those slim legs beside the kidney-shaped table, had ensured that he had talked about his children, about the problems of finding a house, and the ways of getting round them, and lust had never been quite strong enough to erase the tiny spark or the droplet - which was circulating somewhere in his bloodstream - never strong enough to make him forget. It was this tiny spark which made him suffer through the inevitabilities of their physical life together, the memories he didn't like to think of, in all their uncomfortable, coarse unpleasantness. He pulled the duvet up to his chin, stretched out his legs and crossed his hands over his stomach. He lay like that, quietly, eyes closed, and slowly he fell asleep, felt his mind drift off, felt himself become smaller and smaller, felt one piece after the other break loose, he began to hover, began to dissolve, at first he could still feel his arms, his hands, his feet, his thighs, they all had substance, he could feel their weight, then one after another he began to lose his limbs, it was as if they were rotting away, as if they had dissolved into fog, his hands were the only part of him that he could still feel and he felt them for some time, he could feel them resting on the soft, wrinkly little hose between his legs, the last vestiges of his corporeality swam before him, vague and dim, dim and shaky lines sketched themselves onto his brain, onto the iris of his inner eye, then these too began to flicker, a uniform grey fog encircled everything, drifted up and down, covered everything, swallowed everything up, swallowed him up, a foggy nothingness, a great, lost loneliness. Much later, he was already fast asleep, he was again confronted by swathes of red and blue, there was a red mountain, inescapable, he was standing right in front of it, burning red like Kitty's hair, black roads were crawling across it in peculiar patterns, like a spider's web, only much looser, a torn spider's web, criss-crossing so he couldn't escape, the black lines led him astray, he went to and fro, up and down, sometimes he thought he was zooming along these imaginary roads with the speed



of a high-powered car, sometimes he thought he was feeling along the dark walls of the houses like a blind man, until suddenly he recognised an outcrop of yellow spots, explosions of colour which provided a goal for his journey, strange lights under the peculiarly quiet white lines, the peculiarly quiet white blossoms of the night.

The old car with its five passengers ambled along towards the capital city at a top speed of eighty kilometres per hour. When the road was uphill, the pace was considerably slower. Twice it even stopped altogether. The first time, the man with the stern face was forced to take a petrol can from the large tin box which was fixed to the back of the car in place of a boot, and refill the tank, using a torch for light. The second time, the ignition cut out and wouldn't start again. The passengers didn't seem to mind the delay in the slightest, the driver laughed and said he was going to make the most of the opportunity to have a good look at the things around him. At last he could take his eyes off the road which demanded his attention, basking in the light of the headlamps. It felt so good, being able to, look around like this for a change. Everything was so beautiful! Each time they broke down, the two men who sat in the front got out, along with the two women from the back, and each time they left the car they gazed up at the shimmering ladders up in the firmament, and fell silent in front of such calmness and such greatness, and the man whose strong hands had held the wheel, at one stage even lay down amongst the full-grown stalks of a cornfield, and opened his arms wide, as if he wanted to embrace the whole universe with all its stars and distant worlds. But the poet, reclining in Dionysian ecstasy, was unable to decide whether he should leave the car by the left or the right door. He remained seated, meditating in the dark backseat of the car, able, as became clear later on, to see just as much as the others. But in order to get the car going again the second time, they had to push it for some distance. The battery was too weak to provide enough electricity for the sparkplugs to fire. Encouraged by the loud cheers of the poet, who was still inside the car, the two women and one of the men got the vehicle rolling, and after a few more attempts, the engine sprang into life.

They passed through small villages whose lights seemed to gleam like the skins of peaches, so velvety and shiny, and they could already see the red reflection in the deep-blue night sky, the reflection of the thousands of lights of the city, when they suddenly noticed a cluster

of cold blue lights directly in their path, on the side of the road, red flashes and bright headlamps mingled with them.

As they drew closer, they could see it was a police car, a traffic patrol, and a number of other vehicles which were forming a group in the small bend of the road. A police officer with an illuminated sign was standing in the middle of the road, signalling to the old Mercedes and gesturing to the driver that he needed to make a small detour and drive on. In the midst of all the men striding about with lamps, tape-measures and notebooks, the five travellers could see a car sitting a little way off the road in amongst a thicket of dense weeds. Its front had hit one of the blossoming fruit trees so hard that several of its branches had broken off and fallen onto the roof of the unfortunate car. Like a white bridal posy, the branches almost obscured the heap of battered and squashed metal. The five passengers inched past the place of horror.

"That was the car, wasn't it," said one of the women, and they all knew immediately which one she meant.

Yes, it was the car which had overtaken them at such high speed a little while ago. The image of the two passengers standing in front of the collegiate church of Altenburg flashed before each of them.

"May God grant them peace," said the poet, in the solemn tone of an ancient prayer or incantation.

"Don't talk like that," one of the women snapped at him.

"Why not?"

"I don't want you talking like that. You don't believe in any of it," the woman returned.

"And even if I didn't? Surely I'm allowed to wish it were true?" the man at her side insisted.

For a while it was quiet, all that could be heard was the chugging of the old engine, then the poet added: "Maybe I do believe in it after all."

The stern-faced man broke the silence, his voice like a caress: "Isn't it the most beautiful thing? - Dying together like that."

They carried on in silence, each lost in his or her own thoughts, it seemed almost out of the blue when the poet broke the silence: "Who knows? ... They didn't even see the stars."

Kitty felt helpless. She was worried and confused by the fact that her mother hadn't come home last night. If Heini had only known he

would have stayed longer. Oh, he would have stayed all right! But she didn't arrive that morning either, even though the girl waited until well after the time she usually left for work, and in the end Kitty had to scribble a note to her father telling him what had happened and hurry off to the tram so as not to be late for work. But when she didn't see either Herr Leidemit or Herr Pohanka there, she found herself even more worried and confused.

She sat between her supervisors' two empty chairs for about half an hour, leafing through a couple of folders which lay strewn across the desk. She wasn't used to working without direction, and didn't know what to do with herself. The other members of the department didn't pay any attention to her, so her idleness wasn't noticed. The two engineers weren't missed either at first. But the telephone's shrill ring sounded three times and Kitty had to answer it and tell Dr Mühlfeld's secretary that the engineer hadn't yet arrived when she asked to speak to Leidemit.

The tall, handsome man with the blue sports car, (he always smelled so good, did Heini ever smell like that? She had never bothered to notice) and the blond woman hadn't returned yet and one of the other men told her that Herr Pohanka was already out at the construction site, he had no idea, he'd be all optimistic, clinging to his belief that everything was going to sort itself out, just like he'd told her when she'd visited him on Saturday. Would he still be thinking like that, if he knew all that she knew? An overwhelming feeling of pity swept over her, and if he had been nearby at that moment, no doubt she would have told him everything, maybe she would have told him even more, not only the story about his wife and Herr Leidemit, maybe she would have told him that it was thoughts of him that filled her mind whenever she was together with Heini, maybe she would have told him how different he was to all those other young men she had met up till now, told him how angry she'd been with him at first, when they'd washed their hands in the washroom, when they'd travelled home in the tram together, even in the wine cellar, and when she visited him at his home on Saturday, and that it was precisely his difference that made her think of him, the absence of any of those double entendres which only ever had one meaning for instance, maybe she would have told him that she knew that the way she looked made him feel uncomfortable, it was just that she always felt as if she were playing an endless game, one which never came to

any sort of fulfilment. Maybe she would have told him all that now, not quite in those exact same words, not in that order or sequence, because in her thoughts some things were wavering or taking on a more definite form depending on the moment, other things she just had a vague sense of, but she would have told him what she was thinking, what she was feeling, inasmuch as she could put into words what she was thinking and feeling anyway. But he wasn't here and she looked out of the window helplessly, searching for help, looked in the direction he used to look, at the apartment building opposite, and she saw the two old women and the cat - maybe it was a tom cat? - the man with the pipe and the plaster ornament around the cornice, chipped, crumbling, weathered, soiled by the excrement of the birds, she saw everything as if she were seeing it for the first time, and maybe she really was seeing everything for the first time the way she was seeing it today. She could walk out to the elevator, she thought. She'd be sure to meet Heini somewhere along the way, she could talk to him, he would be surprised that Frau Mislowitsch hadn't returned last night, maybe he would even give up his lunch break to drive her home on his motorbike so that she could see whether her mother had returned yet. But no, she didn't want to see him after all. What would they have to talk about? What good would it do her to know whether her mother was back at home or not? He'd do anything, everything she wanted, everything, he'd do anything, as long as it was what she wanted! She stared at the house opposite, at the women in the window with the cat, at the man with the pipe.

She wasn't thinking about the three-room apartment any more, she wasn't thinking about washing in the basin at Heini's place, just like they did at her place, nor the blue car, nor the high-paying position. She was thinking about people now, she had known Egon and Leo and Pauli but she had only ever thought of them like the two-dimensional shadows on the film screen, even when they'd kissed in secret, or made out in a dark corner, she still hadn't known them any better, they were always just shadows, she had judged them like shadows, taken them for shadows, and they in turn had acted just like shadows. Now, suddenly, things seemed different, now she was part of someone else's fate, woven into it. And if up till now she'd been able to push everything to one side with a dismissive click of her fingers - what do I care! I'm not as silly as Frau Fink, pregnant with

her Elfi at sixteen - well, it just wouldn't work for her like that anymore.

She was killing time. Friday and Saturday had gone by particularly quickly for her, full of pressure and energy, shunted here and there by the engineer who hardly allowed her time to breathe, but on this particular Monday, the first half hour seemed to drag on forever. She noticed that the other men and women in the large laboratory weren't as industrious as they had been on other working days either, dotted about the room were groups of two or three people standing together, chatting away, about their weekend, she supposed.

Then the phone rang again. It was Dr Mühlfeld's secretary, and this time the woman wanted her, Kitty, to come up to the main office, to see the Herr Doktor.

There were two men she didn't know in Dr Mühlfeld's office, along with a junior secretary. The woman was sitting at a small table with a notebook in front of her and the two men had taken their seats at the narrow ends of Dr Mühlfeld's desk. The chief of personnel himself was sitting on a chair behind the large desk which was covered in piles of paper.

Kitty felt a little nervous. Why had she been called in like this? Normally workers entered this office only if they were being hired or fired, and even if she wasn't afraid of being able to find another job, she was in the process of working her way up to a better position, and that made her afraid of getting sacked just now. And, after all, there was Albert, and Heini, and finally that Herr Leidemit, who, even if she was angry with him, if she hated him, hated him because of that woman, well, she was hardly indifferent towards him either.

Dr Mühlfeld offered Kitty a chair opposite him and, after she had perched herself on its edge, explained to her that Herr Leidemit hadn't come in to work today, and because his absence was causing them some concern, they would like to ask her a few questions and he wanted her to answer any questions those gentlemen, and here he pointed at the strangers, might put to her.

"You've been working for Herr Leidemit for a few weeks now?" one of them asked.

"Yes," said Kitty

"Did Herr Leidemit ever talk to you about his private life?" the man asked.

"No," said Kitty, "not really," she added.

The man knitted his brows, looked at the girl's slim legs arranged side by side and said then, "He's taken you for rides in his car?"

"No," said Kitty, she sounded a little angry now, "only yesterday, with my mother!"

The men looked at each other. "I beg your pardon?" asked the other man, "Herr Leidemit took you and your mother somewhere in his car yesterday, on Sunday?"

"Yes," said Kitty, and she wanted to explain apologetically that they had driven out to Frau Pohanka's garden, but the first man had already asked her a different question.

"When was this?"

"Early in the morning," said Kitty and thought on reflection that it might be better not to mention Albert's name.

"And where were you going and when did you leave the engineer?" the other man wanted to know.

"We drove out to a little house by the Old Danube. Herr Leidemit had to collect the wife of a colleague of his, and Mother and I stayed with her children."

"I see," the man was obviously disappointed. "Have you done this before? What was the name of the woman?"

"No, we were there for the first time."

"What was the woman's name?"

Kitty hesitated, could she do that to Albert? No! "Herr Leidemit talked about someone called Frau Eva."

Now Dr Mühlfeld entered into the conversation: "And why do you suppose Herr Leidemit asked you?"

"I've got no idea," said Kitty, and, as if she wanted to assure them that she had nothing more to do with her superior, she added: "Herr Leidemit never talked to me. Mind you, he never talked to any of the other women either." It was obvious that this last bit was added out of vanity, and she paused to put right some strands of her hair. Then she continued, "Except for work-related matters. Last week was the first time he ever asked me anything about myself, he asked me what my parents did, and whether my mother worked, and then on Friday he asked me whether my mother might be free one Sunday to look after the children of one of his colleagues, then it turned out to be this Sunday, because the woman wanted to visit her husband who was working out at some construction site. He promised Mother twenty-five shillings, and he drove us all out there in his car that morning. He

and the woman would be back again in the early evening, he said. But they never came back. Mother had to stay out there all night.”

The three men gave each other meaningful looks.

“Had they mentioned that possibility that they might not return that evening?” one of the strangers asked.

“No,” said Kitty vehemently, “not at all! Mother wasn’t expecting it at all, and if I hadn’t met up with a friend who took me home on his motorbike, I would have had to walk to the tram in the dark or I would have been late for work today.” And turning to Dr Mühlfeld she asked: “Could there have been an accident of some kind, Herr Doktor?”

“It almost seems that way,” he said and looked at one of the men who nodded in Kitty’s direction.

“And the woman?” she asked.

The men shrugged their shoulders.

“Thank you for your time,” said Dr Mühlfeld. “Unless the other gentlemen have any more questions?”

“I do,” said one of them. “Fräulein, does the name Rubnicek mean anything to you?”

What should she do now? Albert had advised her to talk to no one except for Herrn Leidemit about that telephone call, but did that still apply now? There two strange men sitting here, and over there in the corner, diagonally behind her the secretary with her notebook. She glanced at the woman, who continued to stare in front of her at a piece of paper covered in stenographic symbols. The boss might get angry she thought, and she might lose her position in the laboratory, might have to go back to the conveyor belt, disc after disc, ring after ring, no, she didn’t want that anymore, mind you, come to think of it, why not? It had been fairly easy, and all her dreams about the blue car and everything else she had imagined had come to nothing anyway. She didn’t quite know. She didn’t quite know why she didn’t want to, she didn’t quite know if there was anything beyond the blue car which bound her to this place, she didn’t quite know how much she was allowed to say, she just didn’t know. She looked at Dr Mühlfeld, and saw the tall athletic figure of the engineer before her, saw his blond hair and his slim hands, the fluid way he got into his car, she heard his voice speaking English, smelled, yes smelled the clean, fresh scent of his skin and the fragrance of an early rose blossoming somewhere, hidden by the wall of the house, saw the fat legs and the full, round

hips, three children, a chin which had the tendency to form a double, hair full of little ringlets, and when she thought that this woman, that this man and this woman, oh, no, no, she didn't even want to think about it, but not the other way either, no, not the other way, she didn't want to think about Albert and that woman, didn't want to think of anything which had anything to do with that woman, his wife with whom he had three children, with whom he slept at night, she didn't want to and didn't know why, because there was also Heini, they wanted to travel to the Wachau together, even if it was just for a couple of days, when the boss was back with that woman again, oh no, again, but in spite of everything, I still hope nothing's happened to him, and Mother would have to look after the children again, but wouldn't she almost certainly lose her job? Didn't she want more than that? Did this new job mean nothing to her anymore? Or did Heini mean more to her? What about the woman and the children? And the engineer? The children? The garden? Where did Heini fit into all of that? Wasn't the work at the conveyor belt much easier? But the ambition and the idleness, the silly giggling women, and Albert's sympathy! She didn't know, she didn't know, "Rubnicek, Rubnicek, Rubnicek," she murmured to herself. She thought and thought and couldn't decide what to do. Oh, if only Albert could have been there to help her. He would have helped her, of course he would have.

But almost as if he could read her thoughts and even sense her anxiety, Dr Mühlfeld leaned forward and pointed towards the two gentlemen: "It's all right, you can tell us everything you know, these gentlemen here know all the firm's secrets. Just tell us what you know."

And now Kitty told them about Rubnicek's telephone call and Leidemit's instructions not to mention it to anyone.

As she was talking, the telephone rang. Dr Mühlfeld picked up the receiver and answered it. His facial expression grew very stern. "With whom?" he asked and it seemed almost as if he didn't want to believe what was being said on the other end. Then he put the receiver down, and as the girl started her story again, he stopped her. "Thank you, Fräulein," he said, "that's all we need for now."

Kitty got up and made as if to leave.

"Is your mother still out with the children?" asked Dr Mühlfeld.



“Yes, if Herr Leidemit hasn’t come back yet, yes, I suppose so.” The words sounded helpless, as if the girl somehow expected her superior to tell her what was going on.

“Fräulein Mislowitsch, I want you to go out to your mother and look after her. I’ll make sure the father of the children is informed.”

Kitty stared at him, devoid of understanding. “An accident?” she stuttered again. “Has something happened to them?”

“It seems that way,” the man replied. “He won’t be returning to the house, neither will the woman. Please, go and get yourself ready. Someone will take you out there in one of our cars. You’ll be able to give the driver directions, won’t you?”

“Yes, of course.” Kitty was agitated and upset. She could think of nothing but Albert, and then, she didn’t know why, she saw the red eyes of her weeping mother, just as it had been back then, when she was sitting on the coal box and Albert, but no, it was her brother’s comrade who had informed them of her brother’s death. What happened, what happened, what happened? She asked herself the same question, over and over again until the question broke up in her mind and the happened disappeared and all she could ask was: “What, what, what?”

She would stroke his hair and say “poor man”. Suddenly she felt very grown-up and felt as if her whole childhood, going to school every day, her brother and the messenger of death had all taken place long ago, an infinitely long time ago.

“He’ll be here soon,” said Kitty to her mother. The two women were standing on the veranda of the house and looking out at the children.

The air hung heavy with the scent of roses. During the last two weeks all the buds on the rose hedge had opened, there were blooms everywhere. Kitty had never before in her life seen so many flowers as she had during these last few days. That was to say, the pupils of her eyes might have passed over many more, but they had never before reached her consciousness as they did out here. “They played burial today,” she said. “They dug a grave and threw flowers in and the eldest gave a speech and Frieda was supposed to lead the prayer but she didn’t want to. Amazing how children get over things like this. They don’t even seem to remember anymore that it was their mother.”

Frau Mislowitsch nodded.

Children had always been like that, hers too. She herself had experienced it over and over again. To think that Kathy had noticed! Her mother was pleased, although she didn't quite know why. She wasn't even particularly surprised.

"He's coming," Kitty said and nodded towards the garden gate.

The children ran towards their father and pounced on him. Only Sigrid was a little quieter than she had been a few weeks ago.

The women came down the steps of the veranda. The engineer greeted them. He was still very embarrassed and grateful to Frau Mislowitsch for agreeing to stay with his children over the summer and he was full of uncertainty towards Kitty.

He turned towards the children. He had brought them all fruit, and a bar of chocolate for the youngest one. The little ones showed him all the flowers which had opened over the last few days and he listened patiently to everything. He sat down on the steps of the veranda and the little girls bobbed up and down on his knees, he looked across to the water where rowing boats splashed past, and sailing boats glided noiselessly along the shoreline. The children laughed and shrieked and radio music wafted softly across from one of the nearby houses. Everything, everything was just as it had always been and yet everything, everything was different. Dream. Was it all a dream? Where just weeks ago he had seen those bluish-white knee-hollows framed by the undulating hem of a blue petticoat, petticoat straps slipping down fleshy upper arms between the festive lilies, those white lilies, white as skin, and the sweetly scented jasmine, now he could see Kitty walking along in a two-piece bathing costume, all tanned skin and toned legs. She had gone over to the children's sandpit and was smoothing the sand out with her foot. It would be better for him not to see the grave and the children had already forgotten it anyway. But he, sitting on the steps of the veranda stretching his legs, saw neither the tanned, toned skin nor the bluish-white knee-hollows, he looked into the high, silken, blue sky, in which delicate, almost translucent clouds were scattered about like fine lace. He looked into the beautiful early summer sky and yet saw nothing but a dark, dreary, faded grey. A friend, a friend. He'd had a friend. A friend with whom he could talk, with whom he could think. He'd had a wife. A wife with whom he could live, with whom he could live through anything.

The children ran towards him again. "Papa, Papa, Papa!" They picked up a snail, showed him a flower, pointed at a lark as it rose up into the sky. His eyes followed their every movement. He nodded, smiling.

Kitty walked across the garden.

The lark rose higher and higher into an infinite blue sky.