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PONTOPPIDAN

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BY

HENRIK PONTOPPIDAN.

Translated from the Danish

BY

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PART I.

I.

When Apothecary Byberg celebrated his sixtieth birthday, he surprised his friends at his customary birthday-dinner with the announcement that he had sold his business, relinquished all his honorary public duties, and contemplated withdrawing from the world, to a far-off and remote slope near the sea, there in undisturbed solitude to devote the rest of his days to the society of Nature and his two young daughters.

"As you all know, gentlemen," the little man had said, solemnly bringing his hand up to his gold spectacles, and afterwards putting it to his breast behind his embroidered silk waistcoat, "I entertain, and I have always entertained, such an one . . . I think I may venture to say, not *quite* unfortunate love for the manly exercises of our old ancestors. From my earliest youth I have felt myself . . . felt a . . . so to speak, listened to the invincible call of the blood

which forced me out to the unrestrained life of Nature, and, let me add, to her unadulterated pleasures. To romp about in forest and meadow, in the fields and by the sea; to feel the excitement of danger and the exertion of the muscles, had from my earliest childhood a constant attraction for me. And I must confess—which, perhaps, has not escaped the observation of you, gentlemen, either—that old age has not made this my old love lie less deep. . . . On the contrary, . . . since our Lord, two years ago, called my dear Nathalie to His heaven, I have more than ever felt a desire—as the poet says—to seek consolation in 'Mother Nature's big bosom.' The merry prating of the brooks, the birds' melodious voices, the grave discoursing of the woods has been that everlasting fountain-head from whose miraculous depth I have gathered aid and strength. . . . When I now, therefore, dear friends, after so many years faithful relationship, and, I may add, affectionate intercourse, must bid you good-bye, it is with the sincere hope, the full confidence that you, my friends, will comprehend these my feelings, and forgive me my decision."

Now, in spite of his age and position, it was really true that Apothecary Byberg was an incorrigible Nimrod, who, on beautiful winter and summer days, had delighted the peaceable village by wandering through it in Scotch gaiters, boots with nailed soles, and smoke-coloured spectacles,—now with a double-barrelled gun across his back, a pearl-embroidered game-bag over

his shoulders, an old long-eared pointer at his heels, and a murderous look behind his spectacles,—or at other times with a newly-ironed Nankin jacket, a puggeree round his hat, followed five yards in the rear by his faithful Sancho Panza, the stout "Apothecary John," both loaded with an arsenal of rods, lines, buckets, and nets, as if they were embarking on a small whaling expedition.

As soon as they had commenced to ramble out in the enclosed fields round the town, a peculiar commotion was invariably raised in its outskirts. Women looked out for their poultry; mothers gathered in their children; while at home, in the apothecary's shop, the little weak apothecary's wife shuddered in her roller-chair, although she knew that Sancho Panza, according to her own express demand, was close by in case anything unusual should occur.

This uneasiness was all the more inexplicable as scarcely any destruction had ever been caused of any kind whatsoever; if we except once, when, by a pardonable oversight, the apothecary had had the ill-luck to mangle a lady's old brown muff, which, together with some old hairy stuff, was laid out for an airing on a lawn behind the furrier's garden; and another time when a small shot, in a yet undiscovered manner, went astray into the calf of a passer-by. With these exceptions, nothing between heaven and earth had the least serious molestation to complain of.

But Apothecary Byberg's heart swelled every time

that he, through his spectacles, noticed the flurry which the mere sight of his person on these occasions caused around him. He triumphantly enjoyed the sneaking fear with which dogs and cats slunk past him along the house-walls, when, with manly steps and the gun-barrel peeping up over his shoulder, he walked along the resounding flags of the street; and he felt a cruel rapture at the thought of his own dear Nathalie's care-worn heart, which was not appeased until she again heard her "gallows-bird's" merry voice in the hall, and had personally satisfied herself that he had returned with uninjured limbs.

Fortunately Apothecary Byberg had also other and more peaceful inclinations. He was also a great lover of flowers.

Now this, to be sure, was a passion which he did not in the same degree expose to view—a passion, indeed, which had clearly caused the old sportsman many a painful self-reproach. It appeared to him a passion not quite worthy of himself. He considered it a kind of unmanly weakness which he would not quite recognise—a breach in his nature which he did not understand, and whose existence, therefore, he as carefully as possible had kept secret from his friends, as one conceals a glaring fault in an otherwise pure and regular face.

Notwithstanding this, a bed of full-blown roses or a well-cut hedge would secretly make his heart throb within him. In unguarded moments he would

catch himself in the act of admiring, with an almost fatherly tenderness, the luxuriant splendour of bulbs and hyacinths in his neighbours' window-sills. Yes —though he would in no way admit it to himself, far less to others—this apparently hurriedly-formed resolution to flee the hubbub and noise of the town-life was but the secret dream of a whole life, in which he had seen himself as a peaceable gardener, busying himself in a paradise-like garden with cucumbers, tulips, hotbeds, and strawberries.

Yet another, and, if put to the test, perhaps the most important reason for his mysterious departure, was the ultimate consideration of his two young daughters.

Apothecary Byberg had already reached a ripe old age when the not too young daughter of the pastor of the town aroused a yearning within him. On the whole, his was that kind of nature which only matures very late—which indeed seem sometimes never to get quite grown-up. His wife was a pretty, fine, delicate creature, who hardly appeared to be made for this world; and when, therefore, after sixteen years' matrimony, he again stood alone, his eldest daughter had just laid aside her short petticoats, while the younger still skipped about in pantalets and crochet corset.

It had been one of his dear Nathalie's most serious anxieties, while at the point of death, that she had to leave these two children at a time and at an age

when they more than ever needed a mother's care and love. She never tired of speaking to her husband about the two poor ones' future lot, and of earnestly impressing on his mind their inexperience and helpless youth. With her last breath she had solemnly confided them to his care, with the prayer that he would direct them and protect their hearts against the worldly vanities of life.

Apothecary Byberg had taken this charge with the clear understanding of its serious responsibilities. With that energy which, on the whole, was peculiarly his, he had since then very closely watched the education of his children, and promised himself that, just as our Lord had created them free of blemish, so it would be his task to let them grow up in His image, as a couple of genuine, unsophisticated children of Nature, who in health, innocence, and undaunted joy should become models for degenerated mankind to admire and to copy.

But the older they became, the clearer he saw the impossibility of keeping their hearts pure and unblemished amid a town's bustling stir and in its alluring atmosphere. More especially he could only think with horror on the dangers which everywhere in the bustle and frivolity of social life would assail their primitiveness. Gradually the apprehension ripened within him that only a free, quiet, and simple life in the society of Mother Nature offered sufficient guarantees against the impressions which might act detrimentally

upon what he called "the harmonious development of their spiritual life."

When, therefore, he had made up his mind, he did not hesitate to carry his resolution into effect. He hurriedly convened the principal citizens of the town to a farewell banquet at the club, founded a bequest for the support of the children of the free school, humbly accepted the order of knighthood which, on that account, was conferred upon him, and then disappeared to a small country-house, which in the meantime he had quietly fitted up, far away behind the large Northern forests. In the little town nobody had seen him since.

II.

"NATHALIE'S VILLA" lay well sheltered under a high green slope close to the main road, and was, reasonably enough, a regular gamekeeper's lodge, built in old-fashioned Swiss style, with hartshorn over the door and broad down-falling eaves.

Everything was already half-way covered with a close texture of tendrils and creepers, the whole of the house being almost hidden underneath the most luxuriant network of honeysuckle and roses.

The entrance gate was right on the main road, and consisted of two ochre-plastered stone pillars, which terminated above in yellow terra-cotta vases, each with an aloe in it. Between these and the two rows of pointed poplars a small alley led up to the side of the building. In front of this, the large, quite level, and sunlit garden extended right down to the main road, where it was barred by a tall, white-painted, iron-wired lattice, through the open meshes of which one could see from the road a nicely cut circular lawn, with a gilt sundial in the centre and magnificent "carpet beds" of flowers along the border. At the back of this, two fine, ingeniously constructed

rockeries, with ferns and trailing plants, rose on each side, in the shade of and under large rowan trees; and between these again might be seen a smaller heart-shaped lawn, with leafy plants and Japanese gilly-flowers around a small red-and-white painted flag-staff. Behind these the perspective was finally closed by four green steps of a staircase and a half-hidden veranda, under the yellow climbers of which might often be caught a glimpse of the dresses of the two now quite grown-up daughters, sitting opposite each other at a small round table with a work-basket upon it.

It looked so pretty, almost doll-like, when the afternoon sun shone down on the gravel walks, the well-cared-for hedges, and the variegated specimens of flowers in the beds. There was never a leaf on the lawn, never a withered flower to be seen. For from early morn the faithful Sancho Panza went about busy with hoe and rake, and behind the lime-tree arbours and syringas Apothecary Byberg sneaked about with a huge sun-hat over his spectacles and a pair of gardener's shears in his hand, clipping and cutting, planting and pruning, as happy and occupied as if the small roguish forget-me-nots, the animated roses, the Juno-like tulips, at length had vanquished all prejudices, and triumphantly brought the old savage into port in their peaceful odoriferous harbour.

Three years they had now lived here in this little

idyllic Eden, and it had really been a life full of bliss. The apothecary himself was as if new-born. Even the last trace of grief for his dear Nathalie had vanished from his peculiar gutta-percha-like face.

The two girls, the elder of whom was now nineteen years of age, had here, too, truly developed a charming grace, and passed their days in such secure, joyous, and undisturbed peace as a healthy, free, and regular life in time imparts to the mind.

They did not mix with any people of "society" as yet. There were, it is true, in this part of the country, a dean, a district physician, a magistrate, and a manager of an estate; but, in accordance with his plan of education, the apothecary had, as far as possible, kept his children away from their society.

The manager of the estate was, besides, a bachelor; the magistrate was rather a jolly fellow, with an embarrassing tendency to utter vulgarities; and the dean was almost mouldy with age.

To make up for this, the apothecary had in another and better manner tried to fertilise and develop his daughters' intelligence. In the long winter evenings, when the snow piled itself up against the garden hedge and darkened the windows, he gathered them round the lamp in his own room, where he solemnly, and with a voice resembling that of N. P. Nielsen,* recited various ennobling passages from Danish classical writers, like Hagbarth and Signe, Axel and

* A well-known lecturer.

Valburg, the romances of Ingeman, and—and that chiefly — his own favourite reading, Johnstone's "Sportsman's Life in the Prairies."

But their best entertainment was Nature itself.

Regularly every afternoon when the weather was fine, Kamma and Betty tied their silk-lined hoods or broad summer bonnets under their chubby chins; the apothecary took his spiked stick, put a compass and a map of the district in one back-pocket, a pair of dust-spectacles and an india-rubber goblet in the other, stuck a small "travelling thermometer" in his hat-band, a pair of glasses in a strap round his waist, and thus equipped they started on excursions into the country.

While the apothecary every now and then stopped "to take an observation" from the thermometer, or, with a scientific air, made investigations into the structure of a flint, the two young girls skipped about gathering flowers, drank water from a well, jumped the ditches, and spoke with the peasant women. And wherever they went, the two fresh, beautiful, and (in spite of difference in age) quite similarly dressed girls excited the same flattering attention.

The country itself did not offer very much of interest. It was flat, barren, monotonous. But towards the south and west the forests gravely rolled their dark masses up against the horizon, and towards the north one might catch a glimpse of the blue sea.

Towards the east, not far from the beach, and hidden by a small shady grove, lay a manorial estate, "Guderslovholm," a fine two-storied building, with a flat roof and stone vases along the cornice, but with a very large and gorgeously laid-out park, to which the owner liberally admitted the public.

They therefore often, and especially towards sunset, ended their excursions here in a tall arbour at the extreme end of the park, from which they could gaze out over the great bright sea, which washed its gold and purple against them on the beach.

Sometimes it happened that the owner of the estate rode past on the road underneath them, and, when he discovered them, he generally pulled up his horse for a moment to have a chat with them.

He was a handsome man, with a sunburnt face, between thirty and forty, with a rather formal yet winning address. He sat erect as a dragoon on his tall brown mare, and, in resuming his ride, he raised his hat with the finest civility of a man of the world, which particularly made the young Betty blush with bashfulness.

Most often, however, they made their trip towards the forests. To reach these, they had first to cross a large, brown, knotty swamp, filled with cotton-grass, resounding with the cries of lapwings, and with small deep pools, at the banks of which the apothecary regularly stopped with his hand at his side, as if challenging defiance, to stare down in their inky

goblin mirror. From here the road led over a piece of heath, which, at the season of ripening, fairly blushed with bilberry and dog-roses; and it was only after almost an hour's laborious walk among bush and bramble that they reached the forests at the point where they rose highest above the waste.

Here, in a deep, gloomy cutting in the edge of the wood, was the only really remarkable thing of the country—a large, red, weather-beaten castle, with heavy towers rising above a rush-grown moat and a moss-clad orchard, truly an old, mouse-gnawed monument of antiquity, which, almost ghost-like, like a forgotten piece of middle age, concealed itself here in silence, while the dismal howling of the forests passed over its roofs like a chorus of departed spirits.

It would scarcely have given rise to astonishment had a knight with blazing red plumage and gold jingling spurs suddenly appeared on the drawbridge, or had a lady with sleeves of silver tissue and satin shoulders been seen to lean over the frame of one of the many small-paned windows. Betty, who was but sixteen, did not, on the whole, like to come here at all. On Kamma, on the contrary, this picturesque scene exercised a peculiar attraction. To her bold soul it conveyed all sorts of fanciful dreams about the life of ancient knights and feats of chivalry. And her interest was not impaired when one day a romantic description of the owner accidentally slipped inside the otherwise well-shut home of the apothecary.

There had, in fact, always rested a peculiar fate over this castle or "convent," as it was commonly called, although it had scarcely had any clerical connection whatever, and in reality carried quite a different name, reminding one of tournaments and stately jousts.

The fact is, that in days of yore it had been the illustrious seat of one of the oldest and proudest Danish aristocratic families, who, however, superseded by the German nobility, some time at the close of the last century, had to bring their estates under the hammer, owing to their being unable to pay their liabilities in taxes. On account of this, the large landed properties in all directions got broken up, and "the convent," with adjacent forests, fell into the hands of a very rich Holsatian cattle-dealer, who quickly understood how to be ennobled, whereupon he, with almost princely splendour, commenced to restore its decayed interior. Unfortunately, he met with his death before he succeeded in putting its exterior into a corresponding state of repair, and his son, as well as his present grandson, had been too busy with other and less sedate occupations to continue the work.

The surrounding country was filled with many singular stories about this "convent-baron," as he was called, and it was one of these which at length had reached Kamma's ears and excited her easily aroused imagination. She had gradually come to

form an imaginary conception of him. He was a kind of romantic savage, who spent his time in hunting in the thick of the forests with bugle-horn and a barking pack of hounds, and who during the night gave great banquets and festive drinking-bouts in his richly gilded halls. She pictured him, in accordance with this fancy, as a proud, hero-like figure, with a large fair beard reaching below his chest, aquiline nose, and large light-blue dancing eyes; and she was therefore a good deal perplexed when one day in the church she really saw a man, of very much the appearance of her ideal, enter the pew in the gallery which belonged to the manor-house. And she was soon after, in another and plainer manner, convinced that it was the same.

One day when, together with her father and Betty, she was out on one of their usual excursions, they had just seated themselves in the shade of some beeches on the border of the forest, when suddenly two shots were heard in quick succession in their immediate vicinity. A fox out of breath, sharply followed by two baying hounds, came rushing just past them from the interior of the forest, crossing the road, cutting a somersault in the air, and finally tumbling down dead into the ditch on the other side.

Simultaneously voices were heard approaching from the thicket, and before they had time to recover from their surprise and fright, a fair-haired giant stepped out from the shrubbery just in front of them, with

a gun in his hand, a cock's feather in his hat, and followed by an old unsavoury greybeard of a gamekeeper.

As he caught sight of them and saw their fright, he involuntarily burst out laughing—a regular merry, forest laugh—which he, however, instantly repressed; and then, with a comical bow, raised his green-bordered hat, and in a few words begged their pardon for the fright he had caused them. This led to a brief conversation, which ended by introductions; and, after scarcely two minutes' conversation, he asked them if they would not like to have a look at his house, and there refresh themselves with a glass of wine.

Apothecary Byberg felt altogether too flattered not to accept at least the first part of this invitation, although Betty anxiously pulled his coat-tails from behind. He had, to be sure, always had a secret longing to become acquainted with this man, to whom he, in his character as sportsman, felt especially attracted; and without any further formalities, the hunter whistled for his dogs, handed his gun to the respectfully approaching gamekeeper, and accompanied them, with many gay questionings, up to the castle, which lay close by. Here he first showed them his grand establishment for the breeding of dogs, which was renowned even beyond the frontier, and a couple of tame peacocks which ate bread from his hand; and then, with the same droll, open cordiality and irre-

sistible plainness, he showed them round the labyrinth-like endlessness of the whole of this extensive building, from the very topmost little tower-room underneath the copper-bat, down to the pantry and brewery, —yes, he even accompanied them with a candle down into the deep-vaulted and damp cellars, to show them the blood-stain which, according to tradition, had its origin from one of the mistresses of the castle here one night causing her husband to be murdered. At last they went into the extensive half-dark "Knight's Hall," with its gilded pilasters and grave pictures, and here a servant in livery poured out for them cool Cyprus wine in Venetian cups.

On the way home, Kamma's dark eyes shone with a festive reflection of all the grandeur they had seen. She went pensively by herself, and her cheeks flushed.

Betty, on the contrary, felt almost ill. She had become giddy in the head from all this strange magnificence, this confused variety—the noisy voice of the host, and the damp darkness and dismal reminiscences of the cellars. She did not quite recover until the sunlit plain of the coast lay again free and open before her eyes, and the gentle blue of the sea gleamed toward her out there behind the small grove where the friendly Guderslovholm stretched its stone vases up above the tops of the trees.

As one may easily understand, these two manorial seats cut no small figure in the society of these parts.

They gave them that life and stir which they would seriously have felt the want of—threw, besides, a trifle of stately grandeur over this otherwise so dreary and poor stretch of country. But they acquired a special interest at certain places from the fact of both the young squires being still unmarried.

It is not saying too much that people of the best families in these parts, for the last ten years, had hardly spoken about anything but the possible plans for the future of these two men. A tissue of intrigues and cabals, of the adulations of persevering mothers, the gossip and calumny of supposed rivals, had spun its mysterious but active net around them. Now you would hear mischievous whispers about one, and then about another, who was said to have pulled the net in the belief that one of the gold-fish at last had been caught. Hardly a day passed but you heard something about its having caught fire there, and how it was put out somewhere else.

But nobody thought that in the little apothecary's home there now sat one who blushed every time that she heard the report of a gun roll over the "convent" forest, and another who grew pale if she but heard the sound of hasty clatterings of horses' hoofs on the road.

The fact is, that Apothecary Byberg had been too polite a man, and too discreet a parent, not to return the "convent-baron's" courtesy; and the latter had presumably found something attractive in the

depth of Kamma's dark eyes; for in the course of the subsequent winter presents of flowers, fruit, and even game, were frequently received from his hand, and he "met" them with an extraordinary regularity as soon as they but put a foot inside his grounds.

As a matter of course, this did not in the long-run escape the vigilant eyes of those busy female tale-spinners. They were at the same time startled in their nests by reason of a disquieting attention which the lord of Guderslovholm had shown Betty at a bazaar in aid of the poor of the parish, which the apothecary, contrary to habit, had attended. And as on the same occasion there were whispers about a certain rising affection which this gentleman had lately shown for the bridle-road underneath the tall arbour of the park whenever the apothecary people were up there, the impatience broke into a regular panic.

What did it mean? . . . Goodness me! what was the idea? . . . What were these girls? . . . What sort of people *were* they, these strangers? . . .

But before they got their minds properly settled, first one and then the other of the two gentlemen was accepted by the apothecary.

III.

It now happened, as was only to be expected, that it was Kamma, the elder, who came to the "convent." There was, in fact, a something in her tall, erect, stately figure which had apparently destined her for the dignity of a lady of the castle. This beautiful full-grown girl was meant to wear silk and brocade, to walk over polished floors—these bold lily-white shoulders to shine over dark velvet in bright festive halls.

Betty, on the contrary, was, in spite of her seventeen years, still small and coy, with something of the child's charming and animated bashfulness. White and red, like milk and blood, she kept herself under the shelter of her elder sister, over whose shoulder she timidly peeped from the soft-shading silk trellices of her curved eyelashes.

On looking at her, one was reminded of a small rosebud hiding behind moss and leaves, until one day a ray of sunshine finds its way to its quiet retreat, when it opens, half reluctantly, disclosing a dazzling flower, replete with the most pleasant sweetness.

At her sister's wedding, which was celebrated immediately after harvest, with almost princely pomp, in the fresh polished halls of the "convent" itself, she had looked almost supernaturally lovely, with her violet eyes, and in her bright, silver-white satin dress, and a lonely little rose in her chestnut hair. And on this occasion it was, too, that the lord of Guderslovholm at length threw himself at her feet in one of the side-rooms.

Now it was this last and inexplicable victory of these formerly superciliously-treated apothecary girls which fell on certain people like a thunderbolt.

The "convent-baron" had, to be sure, weightier coffers and a nobler name than the owner of Guderslovholm could ever expect to become the possessor of. But Mr. Anton Drehling, on the other hand, possessed personal qualities which involuntarily drew the women to him. There was something peculiarly silent or discreetly passionate which formed an under-current in his otherwise faultless appearance. He was strikingly handsome; erect, slender, elegant; the shape of the face a regular oval; the forehead tall, arched, halfway covered by a downfall of dark brown hair. Under the stately arched eyebrows flashed a couple of bright, brown, softly-dreaming eyes, which, together with an elegant, tenderly-cared-for moustache, and the delicate mocking lines of the mouth, gave his face its expression of fieriness and intelligence. He was, in fact, not like his fellows—those stout, hunting and

drinking young men, whose interests he did not share, and whose company he neither sought nor shunned. He belonged to a race who by their intelligence and tastes had always risen superior to their homely surroundings; who from travel, studies, and the trusted posts of ambassadors at foreign courts had through several generations brought home a breeding and a thorough knowledge which were not at all common; and who, finally, in their lordly seat, the beautiful Guderslovholm, had led a free, enjoyable life, replete with foreign customs and refined habits, in which the fine arts and scientific culture had gone hand in hand with fêtes, banquets, and all sorts of gallant adventures.

These latter had indeed played a conspicuous part in the history of the whole family. About Mr. Anton's mother it was freely said that she had had a lover. His grandfather had been one of the most noted "fast-living" men of his time, equally renowned for his patronage of young talent and for his taste for fair women. And about Mr. Anton himself it was generally known that he had led a particularly stirring life at home as well as abroad.

Three grey hairs on the temples, and a certain apathetic smile which now and then—through recollection, as it were—would pass over his face, were (according to the whisperings of the ladies) the interesting reminiscences of women's favours in bygone days. He was sometimes spoken of as the most graceful dancer and most elegant fencer of the metro-

polis; but he was, besides, a passionate admirer of art, particularly of music, and he played with good taste on the violoncello and the oboe.

Finally, in spite of his youth, he had for the last couple of years, after having taken possession of his inheritance, been returned a member of the Landsting * by the people. And although without any particular interest or ambition, he had on one or two occasions attracted the attention of the public by his short, lucidly-expressed speeches, coupled with a certain amiable satire.

It was, therefore, beyond people's comprehension how he, in the name of wonder, could have become infatuated with such a nonentity as this little silly apothecary's daughter. Anyhow, such was the case. One could scarcely believe that it really was seriously meant. The magistrate's little fat Cecily was almost overcome with wrath when she thought of her own perfections in comparison with this "baby," and out of sheer spite the doctor's long Albertine instantly went and engaged herself to the curate.

Now it was by no means without a severe struggle that Mr. Anton Drehling had at last given way to an inclination to which he himself for a long time would not confess, and which turned so completely topsy-turvy everything that he had hitherto contemplated in view of his future happiness. With the experienced man's distrust of his own feelings and

* The upper house of Parliament.

anxious reflection before every decisive step, he had for a long time tried to present it to himself as a caprice, a foolish fancy—a consequence of a long summer's lazy life, without any excitement out here among these primitive surroundings. But every time he again stood before Betty's touching, child-like grace, he was seized with an unknown fascination. Every time he looked into the innocent blue of her eyes, it was as if a new and nobler world revealed itself before him and irresistibly drew him to it.

For all that, it would hardly perhaps have come off had they not accidentally met each other on the evening of the wedding in the empty cabinet, where the loneliness and the festive feeling had given him courage to give utterance to his decision. But even when he awoke next morning, he lay a long time in gloomy, restless thoughts, with a dull feeling of shame, as it were, at what he had done. It was with difficulty he could comprehend that he—Anton Daniel Frederick Drehling, was now really no longer free, but was now really "engaged!" He called to mind the many jokes that he during his lifetime had cracked about matrimony, and felt them recoiling upon himself as so many barbed arrows. And he smiled nervously at the thought of what his friends would say when they learnt that he, too, had at length allowed himself to be enrolled in the God-pleasing society—a matrimonial stupid with a wife!

On the other hand, to find a person more childishly

wild with rapture than Apothecary Byberg one would have had to search a very long time with a very good pair of spectacles.

Not even the thought that his home would now soon become lonely, and that he would have to trip about solitary in his rooms—the rooms which had witnessed so much domestic happiness—was equal to subdue the smile on his face—the lively, sly-triumphant smile which was so thoroughly at home there, that even when he slept it lay and quivered round his lips as on those of a dreaming child.

The "convent-baron" was especially the object of his worship. He appeared to him the ideal of a genuine, unsophisticated child of Nature. His imposing grandeur, which reminded one of the ancient giants, his manly beard, his bold, viking-like figure, that brought along with it a breath of the fresh, forest air, filled him with rapture. Yes, even when the baron at the dinner-table emptied his two or three bottles of wine to half an ox and a decanter to the pudding, he was almost crushed with awe and admiration.

But at the same time, a sudden cloud would now and then pass over Apothecary Byberg's face, and for a time shadow his happiness; severe fits of anger and self-contempt would secretly pass through the old man's mind when he thought of the life of pleasure to which he had gradually sunk down. In his own mind he promised himself from now to

combat every unmanly weakness in real earnest. Side by side with this man he would yet with energy shake off this pithless soft-heartedness with which he, in spite of everything, had been infected. And as a kind of training or preparation for a new and better life, he had for the twentieth time just commenced his Johnstone's "Hunter's Life in the Prairies," when an unexpected occurrence painfully upset all his expectations.

IV.

It was in the middle of August; the peaches in the garden had begun to ripen.

Kamma had been married just a year, and had had a good time in the magnificence and abundance of the "convent." Betty, on the contrary, went about fidgety, busying herself with her trousseau; for her wedding was fixed to take place about the end of September, and immediately after that event the newly-married couple were to go to the South, and remain there the whole of the winter.

As perplexed as a young bird which for the first time stands on the edge of the nest, and, with a sweet shudder, looks down over the dizzy height, almost afraid to venture into the blue space beneath, so Betty passed this time of preparation in a heart-palpitating emotion. She was very happy; only, she did not understand how it could all be justly due to her. Her life lay suddenly open at her feet, like a rose-gilt fairy-tale, in which she, quite undeservedly, happened to play the part of the princess. She sometimes felt a vehement desire to throw her arms round somebody's neck, and, with all her heart,

confess her happiness. But Kamma, to whom she had previously confided her little heart affairs, had become singularly strange since her marriage, and appeared to her much older and entirely engrossed by other and different thoughts. She scarcely knew her again when she came driving home in shining toilets, with her altered style of dressing the hair, and pearls in her ears, familiarly leaning on her big, bearded husband, who appeared to Betty every day to become stouter, redder, and more sleepy and odd.

As regards Drehling, she still constantly felt a little oppressed. In spite of all her fighting against it, his presence at once made her confused, and, if she but felt his eyes resting on her, the blood rushed to her cheeks. It was, in fact, only when he had gone away that her thoughts and her love could freely gather round him, and up in the little gable-room overgrown with vine-leaves—called the "lady's bower," which since Kamma's wedding she had had all to herself—that she often shut herself up when he had gone, and lost herself in the contemplation of his picture on the bureau, recalling to her mind the words he had spoken, the ring of his voice, and the fragrance his hair had brought. No night did she close her eyes before she had in her last thoughts sent him her most tender good-night; and every morning when she awoke, she immediately slipped on bare feet behind the curtain to see the sun rise over Guderslovholm.

Regularly every afternoon Drehling would come on horseback to Nathalie's Villa on his brown English mare Cora. Betty received him at the foot of the steps, where she blushingly caressed the animal's neck whilst he kissed her on her brow. Then they would go together to her father, whom Betty had beforehand awakened from his afternoon nap, and who awaited them with the fragrant coffee ready for them at the table on the veranda.

At this time of the day Apothecary Byberg felt especially comfortable. The little round cheeks, which were yet red after the "short nap" (as he invariably called his two-hours' long snoring), bloomed with health and desire of communicativeness. And while the aroma of the coffee pleasantly mingled with that of the flowers from the garden into a sweet pot-pourri, a couple of tranquil intimate hours were passed, during which the apothecary all but exclusively took charge of the entertainment.

Mr. Drehling was seated opposite to him on a low garden bench with a support for the back, from which he now and then politely smiled as if he listened; but his attention was in reality undividedly directed towards Betty, who sat by his side on the edge of the bench, and whose hand he kept in his. He wore a broad-brimmed white summer hat of fine straw over his dark hair, and looked very handsome, very, very happy, and very much in love.

In the course of the last year there had, in fact,

come something peculiarly bright—rejuvenating, as it were—over him. Every little nervous smile, every anxious doubt, were as if swept away by this young bashful child, who day by day drew him closer to her heart by a peculiar, irresistible power. And as he sat there, intently gazing at her with his little, thoughtful, enamoured smile, he looked like a man who inwardly thanked his good luck for a happiness he never had dreamt of possessing.

He could not at all tear himself away from the contemplation of her. It was as if his soul piously imbibed this gentle peace, this chaste tranquillity which shone round her. This downcast look, these rosy cheeks, the whole of this concealed, bashful affection intoxicated him. And when he sat alone by her in the arbour of the linden alley, and had put his arm round her waist, he would press her little, white, soft, and shivering hand with such a passionate but respectful tenderness, that she—half anxiously—had to smile.

Towards sunset he rode away again, she accompanying him to the end of a dyke where the roads turned. But so long as the dust of Cora's hoofs was faintly visible against the dark-blue sea, out there she stood on the edge of the dyke, with her waving veil, and a happy tear trembling in her eye.

One morning when she came chirping down the stairs from her bower, she found, quite unusually, no one at the breakfast-table. Neither was there

anybody to be discovered in the garden or in the sitting-room. But through the door to her father's room, which stood half ajar, she now, to her astonishment, saw Kamma, her sister, walk up and down the floor, pale, in a violent agitation, and with her hair in disorder.

The apothecary sat in the corner on a low stool, looking confused and stunned. The lamp was still burning in the middle of the bright sunshine, surrounded by shawls, gloves, bonnets, and different things, which were thrown in confusion upon the table.

With a strange chill through her heart, Betty suddenly remembered that she some time during the night—she thought in dreams—had heard a bustle and stir downstairs.

"Why, Kamma! Are you here?" she slowly exclaimed.

At the sound of her voice her sister started and stopped, and, with an expression of powerless pain, she pressed her hands against her forehead and threw herself heavily on a chair by the side of Betty.

Her father, at the same time, rose laboriously, took Betty by the hand, and led her silently into the dining-room.

"Go upstairs to your room, Betty," he said, with a voice stifled by sobs. "A great misfortune has happened, my child. . . . Your sister has had a great affliction. . . . We have all had a great afflic-

tion. . . . We will hope that God . . . that our Lord . . ."

Here his voice forsook him, and he left her weeping.

What really had happened was, in fact, never fully known outside the relatives' most intimate circle, although rumours and comments with particulars were not wanting in certain places.

So much appeared, however, with certainty to be evident, that the "convent-baron" was not particularly fitted for the conjugal state. And the fact that this was revealed so soon after the wedding, and, besides, in a way particularly offensive to his wife (quite a common milkmaid was openly spoken of), made his behaviour doubly shocking.

As for the rest, it did not, in fact, surprise any other, but just those whom it hit the hardest. The "convent-baron" had all his life been notorious as a buffalo, who, in the choice of his intimate connections, frequently had revealed an all but dainty taste. And all were agreed—in certain places, perhaps, with a little sprinkling of mischievousness—heartily to pity the poor family, and more so Kamma, who so undeservedly had met with this misfortune.

But now it was really as if heaven suddenly had shut its light out from the little apothecary's home. One needed only to pass by on the road to feel that here the great shadows of life had at length cast their gloom. Yellow and red the autumn leaves fell quickly down over lawns and alleys, but no one picked them

up. No little smiling apothecary, with sun-hat and gardener's shears, busied himself any longer round about the hedges, or watched over the beds. But in the room, among withered flowers, and a closed piano, an old bent man sat staring bluntly and wearily on the floor—only now and then anxiously listening to the restless footsteps over his head, where Kamma's proud heart secretly bled to death. At his feet lay "Diana," in vain wagging her tail, and at the window the linnet instinctively kept silent in its cage; yes, even Sancho Panza, the honest soul! was sometimes seen sitting musing, with a sandwich in his open hand, faithfully following his master in his sorrowful contemplations over the riddles of this life and the inscrutable paths of fate.

But the one on whom the incident had almost made the deepest and most indelible impression was Betty. When she first became conscious of what had really happened, she was completely dazed. She could not have been more terrified if the sun or the moon had suddenly appeared before her with a distorted face. It was impossible for her to comprehend such infidelity. As long as it was possible, she refused to believe that it had really happened. But when the room for guests was put in order, and Kamma constantly remained with them, and no doubt was any longer possible, she collapsed into a deep, dull stupor in which she felt everything totter before her eyes. An icy dread stole in upon her soul.

Involuntarily, though reluctantly, her thoughts turned on her own future, and the question irresistibly forced itself upon her, with quivering voice, if it were possible that she might be treated in the same manner?

She knew that Anton's life had a stain. Already, before their betrothal, she had once heard people talk about it, but she had constantly forced it out of her thoughts as something far-off and bygone, with which she had no desire to become acquainted. But every time at meals, when she now saw her sister's pale, fretting face, it was as if an ice-cold hand seized her round her heart. When their eyes accidentally met across the table, she started painfully before a look which, in its pitiful stare, seemed to cry to her, *Beware!*

Anton, who perceived her sudden shy advance, and who understood her thoughts when he in private felt the timid heart-throbbings under her dress, tried with tenderness to kiss all anxieties away from her brow. He had himself been strongly touched by this deep, bitter grief which he daily witnessed, and which lay heavily on his own conscience too.

He had instantly severed all connections with the convent-baron—yes, even in a sensational manner returned a couple of valuable dogs which the baron had once made him a present of. He had, on the whole, tried to display his most sincere contempt for his demeanour, and, to the best of his ability, to

alleviate the disappointment and pain of that family to whom he now more than ever felt himself attached.

And, as a young bird that suddenly sees threatening clouds darken the blue of the heavens, and, greatly alarmed, shuts her wings, thus sank Betty's little dizzy head on his breast, resigning herself to her fate. Their wedding took place on one of the last days of September. It was celebrated as quietly as possible at home in Nathalie's villa, in the presence only of the necessary witnesses. It was an especial relief for Betty when Anton's mother, who lived in Copenhagen, at the last moment was prevented from coming. Betty had only seen her once, several years ago, while as a widow she yet lived at Guderslovholm; but she had then inspired her with terror, an inexplicable fright, which had not yet vanished, and it was, therefore, a consolation to her to feel that Anton did not appear to be particularly disappointed at her absence either.

Forthwith, on the wedding-day itself, they went abroad in a first-class car which they had previously engaged for their own use. They went by the night express through Jutland, arriving the next morning at Hamburg in cold, melancholy, continual drizzly weather.

Here they stayed in a couple of small, luxuriously furnished, and comfortable hotel rooms until the evening of the next day, when they went to Dresden, passing through Berlin and Leipzig, and later on to

Prague, and further on by Nurnberg, Munich, and across the Alps at Brenner, and so set foot on Italian soil for the first time just a week after their wedding.

At first, however, Betty was too overwhelmed and confused by the continual changes of the last few days, and the cares of a wife, to comprehend quite clearly where they really were. She was pale and absent-minded, and looked upon all these new and strange things in a peculiar calm manner, as if she were unable to disengage her thoughts from her own heart. It was only on a moonlight night in Venice after an intoxicating voyage home through the Grand Canal's romantic waste, with the reddish columns of light quivering over the waters, and with the music of the band playing in Mars Square and the bustling din of men now dying away in the distance, that she abandoned herself entirely to her thoughts. In this town they remained a whole week, which they spent in supreme happiness.

Later on, as autumn gradually intimated its approach, they resorted to more southern parts, rode on donkeys across the Apennines, and hid themselves a long time in a lovely situated town in the mountains, among fragrant olive groves near a quiet monastery, whose monks inquisitively surveyed them on their love walks, sailed from here across little greenish lakes between dust-grey olive groves, and rode in starlit nights, with jingling post-horses, through gloomy ravines and down into green valleys, until one even-

tide at the gleam of sunset they descried the many-towered Florence in the far-off distance, immersed in blood-red sunset. And under the cloudless sky, in this intoxicating fragrance of roses and oranges, in constant change of scene during the day, and the calm stillness of the starry nights, the last tinge of uneasiness in Betty's soul was drowned.

They spent Christmas in Rome among artists and poets. With a French family, whose acquaintance they had made in Venice, they went from there to Naples and Capri, and returned again for the carnival.

"You cannot comprehend," Betty wrote in one of these little olive leaves which, from her hand, flew back to Nathalie's villa with news of her happiness, "You cannot conceive how we romp about! Do not ask that I shall describe it all. It passes my descriptive powers. If it were not a sin I would say that I feel as if I were no longer on this earth. . . . Yesterday we were in Naples; to-day the carnival commences here in Rome. . . . I already hear the music round the corner and Anton coming up the stairs to fetch me. Therefore good-bye! A thousand greetings from my beloved Anton and your happy BET."

In April they were again in the North of Italy. Across St. Gothard they made their entry into Switzerland.

"As you will see," she wrote from here, "we are now in another of Europe's lands of wonders, and live in a charming little hotel called Rose Garden, which name describes it far better than I can. To-morrow we leave this for the Rigi (which you, of course, know), passing Zurich on the way. I do not remember all the names, although you may be sure I have become an adept at languages. Next month we are (according to Anton's plan) to be in France, and there—just fancy!—remain two whole weeks in Paris."

However, they did not reach so far. Suddenly—from Geneva—they announced their return. . . . . And when, a few days later, they stood on the homely platform, and the happy daughter blushingly threw herself into her father's arms, the reason could no longer be concealed: Betty was about to become a mother.

V.

GUDERSLOVHOLM lay on a low redoubt-like hill only a gunshot from the sea. With its green blinds, its flat roof, and its stone vases on the cornice, it looked almost like a small royal hunting-lodge.

In front of the large semicircular steps which led up to the house lay a broad, prettily gravelled walk, with garden-chairs along the sides, under tall chestnut trees, while a small lake with a fountain playing in the middle, and adorned with dolphins and bearded mermen in red porphyry, stretched in front of the house. From here, small wooden stairs, five in number, led down the short, grass-sown slope of the terrace, from the foot of which the beautiful park extended down to the sea.

This park consisted principally of long, very broad and straight alleys of hundred-year-old elms, whose branches plaited themselves together above one's head into a perfect waterproof roof, and underneath which, even on a broiling hot summer's day, it was dark and cool as in a cellar. In the square spaces formed between the alleys lay little charming pleasure-grounds, a kind of open labyrinths in the old French style,

with regulated privet hedges and pyramid or globe-shaped yew bushes, and close, straight-cut linden walls, in whose artificially cut niches and grottoes were placed white marble statues, especially of women in a highly frivolous costume.

Here it was that Anton's grandfather had celebrated his notorious "Florentine fêtes," where coloured lamps and merry girls in their time had excited so much indignation. In the shade of the alleys love affairs and nocturnal love-meetings had been very numerous; yes, it was even said about a little stone bench at the end of a bower, that here a royal personage, some time in bygone days, had bowed his silk-clad knee to the ground before the fifteen-years-old innocence of the house.

For the last couple of years the park as well as the castle had, however, rested in a rather neglected state. In his loneliness, Anton had not taken any interest in the suitable repairs, he being unable to familiarise himself with the thought of settling down in earnest in this miserable corner of the country.

But in this respect the wedding had, as in so many other things, made a sudden change. Already before his departure Anton had given exact and prolix instructions; and in the course of the winter an army or painters, joiners, gardeners, and upholsterers had been busily engaged indoors as well as outdoors, so that everything might be complete for the reception of the new lady of the house.

Any extensive revolution was, however, out of the question. In the upper storey of the castle lay the same old suite of bright airy drawing-rooms, with polished floors and dim gilded furniture covered with crimson damask, which had witnessed the gay life of his forefathers, and over which there yet hovered an aroma like a powdered odour from those stylish days when hoop-skirts and clocked silk stockings were reflected in these floors, while gentlemen with silver-brimmed hats and gilt-fastened rapiers brought the velvet white hands of chubby ladies to their lips with respectful gallantry.

Only in the lower rooms, intended for their daily sojourn, you could trace efforts of a more modern comfort in the shape of carpets, heavy curtains, commodious arm-chairs, palm-trees, and knick-knacks. As there, so here also, in the choice of colour and the decoration of the walls, had been undertaken a few characteristic alterations.

A large bold copy of Correggio's "Danæ," which had hung over the sofa in the sitting-room, was, at Anton's special directions, put in the loft, and replaced by a pretty picture, full of warmth, of a young peasant girl from Zealand who was surprised in her perusal of a love-letter.

Thus it then stood all smartly finished according to appointment, ready at every day and hour to receive the young master and mistress.

They came back to the Danish spring's most bloom-

ing splendour. Just the very night that for the first time they rested under the home-roof the beeches about Guderslovholm were in leaf.

It had originally been their intention to make the journey back by way of Copenhagen, so that Anton at last might have an opportunity to present his young wife to his mother. But when it was to come off, Betty asked fervently to get permission to defer their visit until another time. And as Anton, besides, had taken offence at a letter which his mother, on the occasion of the wedding, had written to him, and in which she, as it appeared to him, had alluded in a frivolous manner to that happiness which he would now enjoy in his young wife's arms, he at the last moment sent from Hamburg a telegraphic excuse, taking advantage of Betty's state as a pretext for their not coming.

For the rest, both of them now really longed to get settled in their new home. When Betty, that first morning, opened the bedroom window and looked out over that sea of new-born green which beckoned to her as a welcome greeting of Nature, and when she felt the fresh, strong fragrance of the mould which bore up to her from the garden, she was seized by such a rapturous joy that tears started to her eyes.

The whole of this first summer they therefore lived almost exclusively alone. To the great displeasure of several who had hoped for sociality and festive

enjoyment after the style of the old Drehlings, they all but imprisoned themselves at Guderslovholm, making themselves there a little independent sphere of bliss, as it were, to which, in fact, only the apothecary and Kamma were admitted.

To make up for that, these two were, to be sure, fetched almost every afternoon by Betty in her little pony-carriage. And in the grottoes and alleys of the park (which had now been closed to the public), and under the chestnut trees at the fountain bowl, where they regularly took their tea, they enjoyed in common and undisturbed the rarest, most wonderful summer, which literally did not have the heart to obscure their sky with a single cloud.

The old apothecary was especially a great diversion.

With the remarkable elasticity peculiar to this man, he had, as a flower in Betty's sunshine, again raised his down-bent head. Called to life again by the first happy letter from Betty's hand, he had, so to speak, instantly recovered the whole of his youthful self-confidence of old days; and, with his now almost white-yellowish hair, his smooth, round, ruddy-cheeked face, and his lively, peeping eyes, he almost looked like a child who in jest had put his grand-father's square spectacles on his assuming little club nose.

He was, however, not quite the same old man.

The fact is, he had now in earnest, and for ever, interred his savage dreams. It even seemed as if the mere sight of a gun was distasteful to him, as it

reminded him of the disappointment he had suffered. But as he could not possibly do without something which might in people's eyes make him another and a more important personage than he in reality was, and as his true hobby, gardening, even in its most developed character, could not satisfy his zealous nature, he had lately devoted himself to a new speciality, which he practised with increasing passion.

In company with Sancho Panza, who faithfully and with almost motherly devotion followed him everywhere, as if he were in reality but a helpless child, he hunted about in fields and swamps, gathering frogs, insects, and reptiles, which with the greatest conscientiousness he put in spirits of wine or on pins when he came home. In this manner he had gradually procured a real terror-striking collection of all sorts of abominations, which was the pride of his heart, and which filled his room as a complete museum with bottles, boxes, and glasses, on which were pasted numbers and long Latin names, which he bragged about at every opportunity.

But not satisfied with this, he had, in addition, fitted up a "laboratory," as he called it, a small, queerly-equipped room, a former cloak-room, in which he at times, with mystical air and dressed in a peculiar dismal-looking black blouse, shut himself up with some dead vermin or other; whereupon circumstantially, and on large sheets of paper (which always lay ready on his writing-desk), he wrote down the

most interesting observations he meant to have made. With the same object he had procured a microscope and various small sharp instruments, about the use of which he preserved a kind of dismal, painful silence. But that which excited the greatest attention of the select few who were trusted to enter this sanctuary was a glass case with a lid, in which were three large inflated frogs, over which his eyes watched with a particular tenderness, he himself hinting darkly that on this point his studies at the moment were concentrated.

With these it also was that he daily entertained his manorial son-in-law, with many a little whispering in the corners, when the "delicate nature" of the subject—as he expressed himself—did not permit him to disclose it before his daughter's chaste ears. As for the rest, he asserted that he had already discovered a (for this part of the country) peculiar kind of leeches, whose existence hitherto no one had suspected; and on this subject he, in return, expatiated before the assembled party at the tea-table, depicting in the most vivid manner the surprise he would give to the men of science when he got ready his manuscripts concerning it.

Anton listened to his nonsense with true angelic patience. As he sat there, sunburnt and smiling, underneath the fragrant trees, and let his dark eye glide over the surroundings and the rurally laid table, at one end of which Betty herself stood at the urn

pouring out the tea, he looked like one who, without thinking or apprehending anything definite, enjoys the pleasure of the quiet melting away of his own being into a gentle, irresistible harmony.

Did it not all, on the whole, appear wonderful? Never had he imagined that life could be so smooth —could shape itself so uncompounded, so simple! Here he sat, in his own ancestral home, among old familiar surroundings, and yet he would not have wondered more if you had gradually revealed hitherto invisible worlds outside his own front door. He felt his happiness as if he had got new eyes, new ears, quite renewed senses; and day by day, with the rapture of a discoverer, became aware of fresh enticements of his Eldorado. A hundred little features in life he had taken no notice of formerly now absorbed his attention all of a sudden with a peculiar power. A hundred little innocent joys, concerning which he had formerly been blind, now filled his days with an unknown fascination.

He could sit for hours at his window, and in happiness listen to the far-off roar of the sea, or amuse himself with the sparrows that rolled about in the gravel around the fountain-bowl.

He accompanied Betty out in the forest, and they picked flowers, or read aloud to each other underneath the warbling of the birds, and regularly every afternoon they practised duets together on the grand piano in Betty's little cabinet. He had procured new sport-

ing implements, a flock of pigeons, and an expensive poultry yard with fine Chinese breeds, the careful tending of which was his daily diversion. But above all, he had with ardour devoted himself to his agriculture, the business of his estate, his horses and his cattle, which he formerly never had troubled himself about; and when he thus went about in his fields and stables, or stood among his poultry, or taught the pigeons to eat out of his hand, he then enjoyed peace in his thoughts, this salutary equilibrium in his mind which made such an innocent entertainment possible.

How delighted he was!

He who, tired of the world, had fancied that his life was half finished, felt that it was only now that he had really commenced to live—only now that his life had got an importance, a goal, a meaning. Only now did he see how poor, how base his former life had been; he did not understand now how its mock pleasures could have satisfied him, that its rent-up voidness had not for ever ruined him.

And, thinking of his fast grey-turning hair and his wasted youth, he was filled with an unspeakable gratitude towards this child, to whom he owed a happiness he did not deserve, who, forgetting everything, had given him her young, fresh love, of which he had imbibed health and rejuvenescence.

To his own amusement he perceived, too, that he commenced to get stout. His healthy, regular life

had gradually laid a not unbecoming fulness over his slender figure. He also returned home to every meal with an appetite like a thrasher, and slept every night like a stone; and when at night, after the long day's doings, he sat here underneath the fragrant trees, he felt a salutary fatigue taking hold of his limbs as he had never before known it. Only when his look met Kamma's a flash of sadness passed over his unchangeable smile.

She had her place at his right, where she sat equally silent and inaccessible whatever might take place around her. In the manner of disappointed women, she had, in sheer defiance, turned her inside out, as it were. With her cold, pale, motionless face, her simple, smooth-combed hair, and her severe black dress, which was plainness itself, she looked like one who mourns for the world. She had, however, never looked more charming, more imposingly beautiful than just now. She had become fuller and taller; her skin had got a transparent brightness, her eyes this deep jet splendour which is the consequence of grief and many a night's weeping; her mature form rounded boldly, her fresh lips were full of blood. And in this swelling bloom of youth the coldest chasteness.

With the convent-baron, her husband, every connection was for ever severed. In spite of his sincere repentance, yes, even remorse of his act, she was unapproachable to every effort at reconciliation.

He had several times in the course of the winter written letters to her, in which, with the most tender and penitent expressions, he implored her to take him into favour, but she had returned them unopened. Later on he had even, by the aid of commissioners, tried to affect her heart, but she rejected everything with utter contempt.

It seemed, in fact, only now, when she was gone, that it fully dawned upon him how dear she was to him. It was said that he roamed about at home in his empty rooms uttering fearful imprecations on himself. Yes, one day at church—where he now constantly went only to see her—people fancied they had seen a tear trickling from his eye down upon his large beard.

It was only when all hope was gone that he suddenly departed. No one knew whither.

VI.

MEANWHILE the hour approached when Betty was to become a mother.

September had already set in; the trees had turned yellow; in the fields the starlings gathered in thousands for departure, and out from the sea the gulls and the little nervous sea-swallows with their shrieks announced that now the tempest was coming over the seas. The sea itself turned grey. In the forest the warbling of the birds became silent; even the hawks grew mute. But during the dull, dark nights the weather-cocks tore themselves loose over the gables and raised their plaintive, dismal voices in the darkness.

As for Betty, there lay in the whole of this spectacle something like a mysterious foreboding of that which constituted her own heart's delight and tremor. When she sat in her little cosy boudoir, from where, over the tops of the trees in the park, she could see the streaks of foam of the sea approach the beach, it seemed to her as if these dark, grave clouds, this still soundless falling of the leaves, these sighing sounds of the wind through the trees, spoke to her about the

event that drew nigh. And when during the nights, tired of rest, she awoke in her bed and heard the dismal howling of the owls out over the moor, she would start, greatly alarmed at their yells, as at an omen of the near approaching advent of something strange and expected.

Anton almost carried her on his hands. Every day at noon, when the sunbeams forced themselves in through the thinned foliage of the park, they went arm-in-arm to and fro in one of the alleys, every day more slowly, step by step, along the gravel where it was most even and most soft. And at night in the twilight he seated himself by her at the chimney and tenderly kissed her little weak hand.

They did not speak much. But there lay in their silent look, their mute pressure of the hand, an unspeakable hope, a joyous expectation which spread itself, as it were, from this little room out over the whole of Guderslovholm.

The only strangers with whom during all this time they associated were the new parson of the parish and his wife, who had arrived when the aged dean at last had died "of mouldiness," as the magistrate, with his accustomed abruptness, all too plainly said.

This young clergyman was a handsome, pale-looking man of about forty, with fair curls falling over the collar of his coat, a soft, short, parted beard, and, for the rest, with the meek, almost embarrassed address that prominent ladies' men often have.

But far more interesting, undoubtedly, was his wife; a short, warm-blooded, energetic lady, who not undeservedly went by the name of "The Puff," or "The Fire-cracker," and who also had quickly managed to become the terror and fright of the surrounding country.

She belonged to that class of people whose blood is constantly at boiling point, and whose head only seems to hold one single thought, which, in return, fills it to explosion. Open and noble-thinking as she was, filled with the holy fire of truth and justice, with the ardour of her whole nature she had seized a thought of the time and made it her gospel: the thought of woman's emancipation, her escape from stunting and unworthy degradation under the self-assumed sovereignty of men. With the courage of a lioness, and the passion of a deeply-affected woman, she had thrown her whole soul and body into this cause. She felt it her especial mission, to the best of her ability, to preach against the humiliating compliance of women with men's excesses, which, in her opinion, was the real root of the evil.

Directly on her arrival in the parish, she had started a movement which was reckless, almost brutal. Indifferent to scoffing as to the manifest scandal, she hunted her victims without respect of persons. She overwhelmed people with scorn and contempt, she fired into a debate with the heaviest ordnance, and at every opportunity drove with such an arsenal of

proof-material into the field of discussion, that her adversaries lost their breath. She appealed to the Bible—yes, even to the Koran and the Talmud. She quoted celebrated authors, cited novels, judicial treatises, and special scientific works. She knew in this connection no shame, no bounds. Peasant women who came on business to the parsonage she enticed into her room and subjected them to a regular examination. She found out every instance where a woman had been wronged or a girl seduced. She tried to incite them to revolt, to arouse their feeling of honour; and in the town she had, with her few but faithful apostles, formed a society—"the great gunpowder plot," as the magistrate called it—for the vigorous furtherance of the cause.

Kamma, too, was convinced as to what she owed to herself as a woman. On account of her unfortunate fate, her participation was felt as particularly significant. Her beauty, her innocence, her proud and persistent refusal of any reconciliation with the man who once had deceived her, was well adapted to enlist the heartfelt sympathy and admiration of all similarly disposed. Gradually she had become like a banner, a symbol, an emblem of the violated pride of woman herself in desire-creating majesty.

She it was, too, who had first introduced the new parson and his wife to Guderslovholm.

Betty, and particularly Anton, had at first not been over-anxious to make their acquaintance, which

—considering everything that was told them about these persons—would only have seemed a source of trouble to them. But gradually they had both learnt to respect this peculiar woman's energetic character and unselfish philanthropy. However strange, almost bashful, Anton even felt before her doughty manners and her plain way of expressing herself, he had many a time, and almost against his own will, been compelled to support her theories, and to a certain extent, to admire that thorough insight and knowledge of human nature which lay behind her exaggerations.

In no other way did she, however, enliven them. In a common every-day conversation about trifling matters she took no part. She then sat apart in an absent-minded pensiveness, and bit her nails. But, on the least allusion to her favourite subject which she accidentally caught, the least expression which would justify her intrusion, she exploded like a rocket. Before you knew where you were, she had always led you far away from the original subject of the conversation deep into a wild whirl of great social questions.

Apothecary Byberg would become quite crimson with bashfulness and confusion when she at last—as she was wont to do—in her ardour seized him by the coat lapel to give her words increased force, while such words as notions of morality, requirement of morality, Stuart Mill, prostitution, fallen women and the like, whistled about his ears. He did not, in

fact, feel very much at his ease on such a night until he was again safely at home by his frogs.

In his capacity as legislator, Anton was, however, the one for whom she especially spread her net. It had not been without a purpose when she had persistently asked Kamma to introduce her to the family.

She had also twice marched up with voluminous projects of new laws, on whose behalf she impressively beseeched him to exert himself; manuscripts in many sheets carefully worked up with references to old laws, lines of red chalk, and a countless number of paragraphs. There were laws for divorce, for the increased obligations of putative parents, for natural children's rights of inheritance and complete support —laws about separation, about punishment for unchastity, about the abolition of prostitution and many others.

Anton received them with polite attention. When she at length had gone away, he sank, exhausted soul and body, in a chair, and smiled in a sympathetic manner to Betty, whom all this talking as a rule made nervous, confused, and peculiarly restless.

After the exertions of such a night it was, too, that she suddenly felt unwell just after retiring to rest. In the course of the night Anton had to get up and call the servants out of their beds; and a messenger was sent to the town and to "Nathalie's Villa."

And towards morning Betty gave birth to a fine boy, who had her own lovely blue eyes.

VII.

In all this happiness there was but one black spot, one little cloud, which now, however, with disquieting rapidity rose on the horizon.

The first Monday in October the sessions of Parliament were to commence.

What would Anton not have given to be able quietly to enjoy his paternal happiness! What of political ambition he, after all, might once have possessed—and he had really had moments in which dreams of a parliamentary career had hovered around him—it had all now so completely vanished that he did not even understand how its laurels could ever have tempted him.

He didn't care a straw for it all now! Here in his home, on his estate, with his wife, his son, his servants, and his poultry—the only place in the world that interested him any longer—he had found a problem, a task that seemed more natural and worthy of him. And it was, in fact, merely a sort of bashfulness, a certain shyness and shrinking from taking such a sensational step, initiating the public

into his domestic happiness, that kept him from giving up his position.

But now it also happened, in addition to the rest, that Betty did not quite recover. Although the birth had been natural, and even easy, she could not pick up her old strength. Once, when she tried to get up, she even fainted. And sometimes she would have such a strange look that Anton—who even had commenced to hope for her company—was filled with real anxiety.

An elderly doctor of high standing from the town, a specialist who had been summoned, reassured him, however. He called it an apathy of the nerves, an explicable consequence of a series of rather strong impressions that during the last couple of years she had been subjected to: grief over the unhappy fate of her sister, the restless changes of the wedding trip, and the inauguration of a new large home; and finally the birth of the child and the anxiety and excitement inseparable from it. Anton might, he said, safely leave her; her recovery was dependent on two things: time and rest. And he added smiling, that, if nothing unexpectedly occurred, he could promise him to find, on his return, his wife fresher and more blooming than ever.

Nevertheless, Anton, in all probability, with his disinclination to go away, would have availed himself of Betty's state as a pretext for his absence, if he had not during the whole of the former sessions taken

leave on account of the wedding trip. But the sessions having now commenced, and as the newspapers, with disquieting trumpet-blasts, summoned all men to their colours, and as even his own electors, in the shape of a little blue-bespectacled agent of agitation, with flat feet, politely reminded him of the gravity of the times, he felt that he could no longer keep back.

At last, one morning when Betty herself had assured him that she felt a little better, he decided upon his departure.

It was a cold, damp, and dark October night when the hour of parting struck. When darkness set in a peculiar nervous stir predominated over Guderslovholm. Anton himself went about with his manager down to the stables and storehouses for the purpose of once more examining everything and giving the necessary orders; in the yard a servant was busy putting his trunks on the closed carriage which at two in the morning was to convey him to the station to catch the express train; and down in the kitchen amongst the servant girls there was a gentle bustle on the occasion of a small family fête by which his departure was to be celebrated. This last was a device of Betty, who, in spite of Anton's entreaties, with morbid persistency had fought for permission to arrange it. All day long she had from her bed conducted the secret preparations; and now, when everything was in order, she had during this hour

of twilight taken a short rest for the purpose of gathering strength for the parting.

She was quite alone in the large, dark-wainscotted room, which was but faintly illuminated by a lonely little night-lamp. She had made the nurse with the child withdraw to the side-room, from which the monotonous creaking of the cradle came to her through the stillness. No other sound from the surrounding world penetrated the well-covered windows and curtained doors of the room; and the little yellowish flame from the lamp threw quietly and undisturbedly its sharp fan-shaped glare over the large, broad, antique-carved marriage bed, over which a canopy of long light blue silk curtains hung down as over a mighty cradle on whose sea of laced sheets and pillows Betty's little, light, childlike body seemed rather to float than to rest.

How pale and suffering she looked!

She had put one of her tiny hands on her breast; the other lay languidly on the quilt with slightly bent fingers. The eyelids which during the day-time she usually kept closed, so that nobody should read her thoughts, she had here in privacy opened; and the large dark pupils stared motionlessly forward with a shy or pondering splendour.

It was as if an old doubt, an old wound, during the lonely hours of this long bed of sickness, had again troubled her soul. The thought of this long bitter separation—which appeared to her endless—of

these far-off strange places where Anton was now to travel, and meet his mother and his old comrades; of the whole of this motley, restless Copenhagen which she had never seen, but which had always inspired her with a secret inexplicable terror—it all filled her with an uneasiness, a fear which she could not contend with.

The sight of Kamma, who during this time had been about her early and late, poured daily oil upon the fire. However much she struggled against it, however bitterly she reproached herself with it—every time she encountered her sister's cold, petrified face, a chill seized her heart. Yes, as she lay there, exhausted by long restless days, tortured by the musing of sleepless night hours, there was a moment in which she had a presentiment, as it were, that she would never see him again.

At the same moment she heard his steps in the side-room, and returned to sober reflection.

With a sudden summons of strength she swept all foolish thoughts from her. And when Anton on tip-toes had slipped over the floor and bent down over her, he found a moved confident smile on her face.

"Is that you?" she said lovingly, regarding him from underneath the half-closed lids. "Are you now ready with everything? Sit down by me a little while. I have been lying such a long time alone"——

But instead of answering, he laid his hand cautiously on her forehead, and kept it there for a while.

"How are you getting on?" he then asked anxiously. "It seems to me you look so tired."

"Oh, that's nothing," she said, now closing her eyes entirely. "It is only—I have been lying such a long time alone—and then"——

"But you look really very bad, Betty," he interrupted, clasping her pulse.

"Don't worry about that, dear. I feel really very well. Tell me, have you now packed everything up properly and not forgotten anything?—Did you recollect the basket for your mother?"

"Oh, Betty," he answered despondingly, letting himself glide down on the edge of the bed, and nervously kissing her hand, "I would that I could stop at home with you."

"But you must not do that. You must not remain at home for my sake. You may be sure it will do you good to go away for a short time. It has just occurred to me that you have no doubt felt too much occupied since we returned home; and I am afraid it is my fault. But it was not at all right, I think; and when you now only get away you will be pleased by it yourself, you may be sure."

"But you then—yourself, dear Betty?"

"I? Well, just wait, and you shall see I will soon get quite well again. You must not be anxious on that account, Anton. Remember what the doctor said. But you men are always so impatient. And when I only get well, two months will soon pass

away, especially when one has something to busy oneself with. For you will return at Christmas, won't you? I have already decided that I will take care of your pigeons and poultry myself, and I shall be very good to them. I shall also look after Cora every day. Then I have got your flowers, and mine as well—and my music to practise; I have neglected it such a long time that it will be quite a treat to get time enough to revive my pieces before you come home. There is also enough to look to in the house; and when I have no more to do I can sit in my chair and think of you who are far away, and of your mother, and of what you are doing, and of the day you return."

While she spoke a slight tremor had come over her quiet, monotonous voice; but Anton was too absorbed in anxious meditation of her pale, motionless face to notice it.

"Besides, I have got Fritz," she continued shortly afterwards, in the same train of ideas, "and papa and"——

"Yes, Fritz!" Anton suddenly exclaimed. "Where is he?"

"Haven't you seen him? Oh, that's all right; the nurse must be dressing him. I thought that he, too, should make a little show to-night at the feast for his father. You may be sure that you will be all astonishment when you see what I have arranged. But it's a surprise; I won't tell you anything. Oh,

I forgot to tell you that I have asked the manager and the clerk to take supper with us. I thought they ought to be present at the feast. Anderson is such a nice man; he will, no doubt, be of much use to me when you are away. I hope you are not angry on account of that? As we have never had them up here before, I thought this would be a suitable occasion, now that you—— Hush!—Isn't that a carriage coming? You may be sure it is papa and Kamma coming now."

Anton rose. And, sure enough, wheels were heard rolling on the drive below. And shortly afterwards there entered first the apothecary, with (according to Betty's command) his ribbon in his button-hole and a bouquet of fresh flowers in his hand; a little later Kamma, in her customary dark severe dress, but on this occasion adorned with a large, splendid brooch, which suited her admirably.

Simultaneously a maid with white apron stole in at the door and whispered something to Betty, whereupon she again hastily disappeared. And, in the course of a few minutes, was opened first the folding-doors into Betty's cabinet, which was completely dark, then the folding-doors from here into the sitting-room, from which at the same moment a dazzling sea of light poured forth.

In the centre of the room in there, underneath the mighty crystal chandelier, the table was laid with candelabra, vases, and fruit and flowers in great

abundance. All the oldest and heaviest plate of the house—wine-jugs, trays, and magnificent cups—had been ferreted out after a long rest, and shone between grapes and cut glassware on the snow-white cloth. And at the top of the table, behind Anton's high-backed chair, the footman stood in his finest livery and with a napkin on his arm.

The surprise was so overwhelming that all of them at once burst forth in a cry of admiration.

But over there in the bed Betty closed her eyes to conceal her emotion.

"Is it really nice? Do you like it, Anton?" she asked.

While Anton with emotion went to embrace her, the apothecary folded his arms over his chest, and with his eyes on the table he muttered half to himself, "It is—it is, indeed;" whereupon he smacked his lips, turned on his heels, flung out his arms, and exclaimed, "Betty! you are—you are a genius! you are really an angel!"

"No, no, no—I would have done it much better. I am so sorry, Anton," she said, retaining his hand; "I would have liked so much to have got some field-fares for you; but I have sent in all directions without being able to get any. I even told the gamekeeper that it was my husband's favourite dish, and that he *had* to procure them for to-day, but it was of no use; there were not two to be had, he said. I must tell all of you that the whole entertainment will, in fact,

be in all frugality. You must not have any great expectations. And that you may not be disappointed, it is just as well that I tell you at once that you wont get anything but fish, sweetbread, and partridge. Well, go in now! Anton will be good enough to take Kamma to the table. You, papa, must put up with going alone. But let me see that you toast and touch glasses properly, so that I can hear it in here: do you hear it, all of you?"

Anton once more tenderly kissed her hand, and then obediently went up to Kamma, who seemed much overwhelmed, and offered her his arm.

The apothecary pulled up his collar, threw a kiss to Betty, and followed them into the sea of light where the manager and the clerk were respectfully waiting.

A screen was, on account of the draught, placed before the end of the bed; but both the doors were left open so that Betty—although she could see nothing—yet, through the ear, could be present. And as now everybody in there was seated on that particular seat which *she* had beforehand exactly determined on, and which the fully instructed footman pointed out, she followed the proceeding of the meal with a listening attentiveness which put a splendour in her eyes and a fine blush on her cheeks.

Above all, she intently followed the sound of Anton's fork and glass, which she—with that of the long sick-bed's sharpened quickness of hearing—every-

where could distinguish from the others. Her ear did not for one moment lose him. She saw him before her at every sound, every movement as clearly, as fully, as if she sat by his side. Yes, to the maid who remained standing behind the screen so as to be at hand she would say, "I think my husband is looking for something;" or, "Isn't there sauce wanting? Is the footman in there?"

Meanwhile the meal proceeded in profound gravity. The apothecary was, in fact, the only one who did justice to it; for the manager, a short, chubby-cheeked gnome, whose eyes, nose, beard and ears ran together in a nondescript mass of red—and the clerk, a long, thin pencil with pointed head, appeared both so embarrassed and bewildered that they hardly dared to move.

At the dessert the apothecary carefully wiped his mouth, cleared his throat a few times, and sitting, invoked the blessings of heaven on the journey—a wish they all silently shared by clinking glasses, the manager and the clerk, besides, rising from their chairs. In this Betty also took part, the maid shortly afterwards showing herself in the door, and saying—

"Madame told me to ask you, sir, if you would come in and touch glasses with Madame."

Those moments in which Anton, taking his glass, silently got up from his chair, and, deeply moved, went away—in which he lingered with Betty, and

then returned with a flower in his button-hole and bedewed eyes, made a deep impression on all of them. Even the apothecary was moved; and Kamma, who all the time scarcely had touched the viands, had to leave the table.

Shortly afterwards they all rose, and, having quickly taken coffee in Anton's room, the manager and the clerk withdrew with many profound bows.

The apothecary, on the contrary, remained, so as to be for the last hours together with Anton, who gloomily and restlessly paced the floor in the now only half-lit sitting-room; while Kamma—under pretext of a headache—had concealed herself in the darkness of the cabinet, there, unobserved, to alleviate with weeping that cold pain which the sight of all this love had revived afresh.

But as towards midnight a gale rose, and a fine rain began to patter on the panes, these two also decided to break up. They took a hearty leave, and Anton accompanied them himself down the stairs.

But as they reached the last landing, the apothecary, suddenly overwhelmed, as it were, drew Anton aside, seized his hand with both of his own, and shook it with great feeling.

"My dear son-in-law! As you are going away, I will confide to you a secret which during the last few days has filled me with indescribable joy. My Alexandra is—as far as human eyes are yet able to decide it—going to give birth"——

"Who?—what?"

"Hush! Don't you remember my Alexandra—my spotted *Bufo vulgaris*—frog, plainly speaking? I thought I would not let you go off without knowing it. In view of the season of the year, it may surely be called a scientific victory of no mean consequence. Well, good-bye, my dear son-in-law; and God be with you!"

When Anton again came upstairs he found Betty alone and lying in the same position in which he had left her—with her hands loosely folded over her breast and her eyes closed. But the faint crimson which in the course of the evening had risen to her cheeks had now disappeared again quietly, and a little regular movement in her left side betrayed that her heart was beating fast.

There was perfect silence around her. Only the rain rattled at intervals against the windows. Anton had given orders that everybody should retire to rest until he had to leave: he would himself watch during the couple of hours that were yet left.

He seated himself quietly on the edge of the bed by her, and soon began with cautious, sorrowful hand to stroke her soft hair, and she smiled faintly.

"How are you getting on?" he asked gently.

"So so."

"Do you feel pain anywhere?"

"No—not at all."

"Do you think you are a little better, dear?"

"Oh, yes."

"And you are not sorry that I am going away?"

Instead of answering she pressed him tightly with the little cold hand he had seized, and attempted to smile.

"That I should also have to leave you in such a state, Betty? Will you solemnly promise me that you *every day truthfully* will let me know how you are getting on?"

"I will, dear."

"And not conceal anything from me?"

"I shall not, Anton."

"Well—then I must hope for the best, and be off with good courage. Where is Fritz?"

"I made the nurse take him away. I thought you would prefer quiet."

"You are right—we do prefer it," he said gently, and at the same time bent down over her, while both hands he placed round her head and kissed her on the brow.

Thus they sat a long time and spoke quietly about the child, about Christmas, and about the day of his return, while Anton now kindly stroked her hair, now kissed her hands, until the old rococo-clock in the sitting-room announced by its chime of bells that only half-an-hour was left.

Then he let himself slide down on one of his knees at the bedside, and, in quietly embracing her, pressed her close to his bosom. She laid her head against

his shoulder, and while many little kisses covered her forehead, ears and neck, a fresh and stronger colour rose to her cheeks.

Precisely on the stroke of two the carriage rolled up before the door.

He pressed her once more passionately to him and tore himself away. In the nursery he stood a moment devoutly over Fritz, who slept quietly in his tester cradle, and then went hastily into his room where the valet was waiting.

Below in the thick darkness stood the manager and a couple of men round the carriage, and a man on horseback kept in front with a lantern for the purpose of accompanying them through the forest ravine. For it rained continually with a fine chilly rain and little sudden squalls.

Anton came downstairs, touched his hat silently, and the carriage rolled off.

But while all this was going on Betty had not moved from the position in which Anton, after the last embrace, had laid her back on the pillow. She lay with the neck back, the arms extended over the quilt, straining every nerve to listen for the sound of the rolling wheels as it died away on the road.

Only when the last feeble sound had died away afar off, it was as if her body slowly relaxed. For four nights she had not slept; four days' anxious excitement had exhausted her last strength.

Shortly afterwards the maid stole in from the side-room and approached her bed.

"Madame!"

But she did not move.

The nursery door opened too, and then the nurse poked in her head.

"Madame!"

But then the maid turned with uplifted finger—

"Hush! Madame is asleep!"

PART II.

I.

It was during the exciting and interesting time in which the Danish metropolis casts off her summer slough, and makes herself comfortable in the old winter dress, as it were.

There is for many a Copenhagener something irreconcilably strange about this summerly Copenhagen. When now and then, in the course of his holiday, he is forced in there from his romantic slope in the woods, or his idyllic fishing-village, he hastens away from there again as soon as he possibly can. These clean, dry, peculiarly quiet streets, with their glowing hot paving-stones, and white blinds sleepily clattering over empty shop-windows—these long rows of lowered blinds and chalked panes—these market-places, which look as though deserted, where a solitary, petrified foreigner stands moping over his red-covered guide-book—it all rushes past him with a feeling of unreality, as a phantom he will hardly acknowledge.

Only when the sky lies as a black hood over the

town, and while every half-hour drags its close veil of showers across the streets, he recognises again his Copenhagen. And the proper homely feeling takes hold of him the day that he again, with drenched umbrella, and dirt-bespattered even to the crown of his hat, works his way through Ostergade's crowds of people, or finds himself standing in the middle of the Halmtorv waiting for a tram.

Now, the summer had this time continued unusually long. More than once it had looked as if it had already passed; but people had hardly, in anxious haste, poked their noses into their winter wardrobes and plunged into their goloshes, before the sun again capriciously peeped out from behind the clouds and triumphantly placed its protecting hand over the trees of the boulevards and the municipality's flowerbeds. Inch by inch, leaf by leaf, the autumn had had shyly to conquer its prey; during nocturnal hours it had sneaked through the streets, roared over the market-places, and rattled on the panes, as if to announce to the sleeping community that it was already master of the city. But when, in the morning, you pulled your blinds up, the golden sun lay bright and shining across the pavement of the street, and in the shade summer-clad people went about, hat in hand and groaning under the heat. The sky was blue, the birds sang, and the grass became green, until now, at length, the battle was finished by the pitiless set-to of the October south-west.

Soon then the last leaves rushed in tufts across the field; and while the wind choked the last faint smile of the sun at its chilly bosom, life was awakened on the dead squares and in the quiet streets. The shop-windows displayed themselves, the restaurants became filled; from the sea-side they all came streaming in: merchants, officials, artists and idlers, and last of all, the lazy students from Jutland, sunburnt and filled with new milk. Day by day fresh, familiar faces emerged from the crowd, at the old places and at the old hours. Bows were exchanged and eyes met, manly shakes of the hand and tender promises for the coming campaign were given and exchanged.

It was like a renewal of life, a rich regeneration, after the long, idle summer lethargy!

What an intoxication for the sun-satiated young man to step once again into the buzzing of the theatre, and—supported by the balustrade of the stalls—to inspect the ladies in the dress-circle! What joy of recognition for the old regular customer, as he opened the door into the usual restaurant and found everything, down even to the position of the spittoons and the bows of the waiters, exactly as of old, in spite of the long separation! And the young wives and the young daughters! How sweetly their hearts beat at the sight of the wrapped-up dress from the last winter ball, which, with every sign of impatient haste, lay flung down at the bottom of the wardrobe? How their cheeks blushed with a fine

peach colour on opening the white cardboard lid of the box containing the ball cards and fans with this feeble, laid-by odour of perfume, just strong enough to arouse happy memories of light, music, laughter, and lovely little mustachios.

For they had longed—they had all longed out there on their romantic wood-slopes and at the idyllic fishing-places. They had feverishly counted the hours to that day when they might decently let themselves be seen again with their furniture van in the streets of the town, and impatiently they had peeped out for the first little yellow leaf, the first joyous proclaimer of the true developement of life, its *proper* flourishing in the town's gas-suns and electric moonshine.

Lady Drehling, too, had returned from a summer visit to one of her lady friends at Vemmetoffe Convent and moved into her large, airy second flat in Broad Street, where she for four years had led a highly peculiar existence together with two maids and an old footman from the manor-house.

On a sleety and stormy evening in the middle of the month she sat at a window facing the street, absorbed in thought.

Anton had just left her. The fires in the white porcelain stoves, which were lit in all four rooms, threw their flickering glare through the darkness upon the high, picture-adorned walls; and through the folding-doors, which were all left open, a lively cannonade of dry wood sounded from this row of

large, deserted rooms, in which, with the accustomed pretensions to space and comfort of an old Jutland manorial lady—"elbow-room" she called it here—she had fitted up her house.

She was, on the whole, a rare, a remarkable lady.

She belonged to a time and generation that was on the point of dying out—yes, which had, in fact, long ago been interred under the thunderings of the cannon. But, in spite of her sixty years and her rich stirring life, she had retained a freshness of youth, a natural charm, such as few ladies of forty can boast of.

The pretty abundance of ash-blonde hair that in former days had infatuated so many hearts, had, it is true, now turned grey, and from the brows the fine wrinkles lay fan-shaped up over the forehead and over towards the blue-veined temples; but the dark eyes yet shone with an almost youthful splendour; the open sagacious features had not yet reached the apathy of age, and over the whole of her fine, full figure, her speech and movements, there was something so fresh, so bold and gushing, that all were astonished.

Nevertheless—or perhaps, more properly, on account of this—she lived during the latter years more and more lonely, yes, was even regarded with a certain fear even by those who stood nearest her. This hearty joy of life, this inveterate humour, but, above all, the clear good sense and whole free mental development, did no longer fit into the gracious, earnest and severe discipline of the new generation.

In return she often, too, in her amiable way, shook her head at this sort of life from which all light, all youthfulness, all festive joy was as if scared away. She did not understand the dark spirit of forsaking which had seized hold of a part of her contemporaries. She laughed openly at that costume of penitence in which even some of her former merry lady friends in their old days had disguised themselves.

When she—as she was fond of doing—sat at the window and looked down upon the passers-by, on the straight, regular, peculiarly old-fashioned youths, and the automatic, doll-stiff ladies whose downcast eyes seemed to do penance for the extravagance of their toilet; or when she—which she was also fond of doing—slightly opened the window and heard the vulgar jabbering of the dry, hacking, every-day voices about the politics of the day, and the bad times, then it seemed to her as if the world had suddenly grown old, that the generation in a strange manner had become stunted; and then she would often long and sorrowfully direct her look at a picture of a slender, handsome man, with smiling brown eyes and the commander cross round his neck, which hung on the wall over her writing-table, the picture of her own proud Louis Fritz, who still, in his fortieth year, had had fire and youth sufficient to set her eighteen-years-old heart in flames; but who had also had intelligence and manliness enough to comprehend that this flame had not lasted for ever.

In this dreary autumn, during which the days appeared to her darker, the fog denser, and the common woeful impression more disquieting than ever before, her thoughts had always more intimately gathered round her dear son and his new home.

Anton was her only child; and day by day she felt how he also more and more became the only tie, the last tender thread that linked her to this world.

She had longed exceedingly to see him again. He had been her pride from the first day he opened his beautiful eyes in his lace cradle. With the utmost motherly happiness she had enjoyed the development of his beauty, his sound sense, his manly address and his fine conversational powers. With secretly palpitating heart she had read the triumphs of his youth and the commencing fame of his manhood in the eyes of women, in the envious looks of men.

It was only the sternest necessity (the express protest of her doctor) which on his wedding-day kept her from getting up from a burning fever bed to hasten to him. When he, together with Betty, disappointed her in the spring, although she had so surely expected them and prepared everything in the most festive manner for their reception, she had wept like a child. And more than once in the course of the summer she would have surprised them on Guderslovholm had Anton not indirectly prevented it by constantly hinting in his letters that Betty's state needed the greatest possible quiet and circumspection.

And now he had come. The sound of the voice still hovered in the air about her; she felt still the pressure of his cold hand in hers. And while the rain beat against the pane behind her, while pedestrians trudged on the pavement below, while carriages hastily rattled through the street, and the wan glare of the street-lamps penetrated the heavy folds of the curtains—the blood slowly left her cheeks and her heart grew stiff.

She did not understand it. Was it really possible? Was it not a dream? She could hardly believe that it was really he, *her* son, who had stood here—a stranger in her own room, abstracted, stammering—with this look which seemed to gaze at her from afar off.

She did not understand it. But there rose in her an instinctive rancour, a bitter hatred towards that unknown being who had taken her only child, her last support, away from her. Her heart filled with spite against the stupid and bungling connections which had taken him from her side. What had she done that she should suffer this? What was her sin, that she, whose life had been one long pleasure, should end here—lonely as in a prison?

When a tall, wrinkled maid, the old Catherine, came in with the lit lamp and put it on the table, she saw that her mistress had been crying.

"Are you ill, madame?" she asked.

"Oh no, Catherine," Lady Drehling answered with a peculiarly strong effort, keeping her pocket-handkerchief against her forehead. "Not I! *Not* I."

II.

ANTON had hired a couple of rooms at an hotel in King's Square, and he had already been here a whole month, but his heart had not yet come over here from the two he had left behind on the other side of the sea.

When he stood at his window, and through the mist viewed the lively bustling on the Square down below, he thought, "What are they doing now at Guderslovholm, I should like to know?"

When at night he sat in his rocking-chair underneath the lamp, and heard the gale whistling and rattling round the corner, he dropped the book he was reading on his knee and thought of the deep, wild spruce ravine at home there in the forest, through which the wind drove in from the coast. And while his eyes gazed into the lamp, in thought he followed its flight over the fields and roads, saw the savage dance of twigs and wan leaves which it whirled before it through the paths of the park and along the large carriage-drive up to the castle. And further on he followed it over the enclosed home-field and in through the courtyard, where he heard

it throwing itself against the barn-door, as it were, and shaking the rusty hinges of the pole shutters, until finally, tired and moaning mournfully like a dog, it laid itself before the steps and fawningly glided over the gable to the feebly-illuminated windows of the bedroom, behind the closed curtains of which lay Betty and Fritz in sweet undisturbed slumber in the quiet glare of the night-lamp.

And every time this last picture rose up in his soul he smiled sorrowfully.

For the rest, he had hitherto had only the best and most cheerful tidings from there. It really looked as if the prognostications of the old doctor would be fulfilled to a nicety. Betty had already, fortunately, left her bed, and daily sent him long letters that were full of health and confident courage.

So far from proving an additional consolation, this made him, however, only doubly impatient.

Especially towards evening, when the shadows grew large in the dismal hotel rooms, he would become attacked with the most awkward home-sickness. He lived very much by himself, and did not deeply interest himself in anything. The stirring political and social life, into which involuntarily he had fallen, left him completely cold. Even the theatre and music would hardly occupy his thoughts any longer.

His old bachelor friends he avoided entirely. Their entertainment, their stupid slang bored him,

their wildness excited his disgust. He felt especially hurt by the rude manner in which they generally spoke about women and everything appertaining to women.

He visited his mother seldom. It had during this stay properly dawned upon him how differently they were constituted in everything, how strange they had become to one another during the latter years. However much it pained him, he had to confess to himself over and over again that literally he did not know what he had to speak to her about. But it was particularly painful that she, on her side, constantly led the conversation to Betty, over whose name he persistently watched with a tender carefulness.

He therefore preferred, whenever he could, to remain at home at his hotel. Between a couple of books, a few flowers, some newspapers and a heap of photographs from the wedding-trip, he spent the dreary mist-grey and monotonous autumn days like a convict in his prison. Here daily he wrote long and detailed letters home to Betty; and from here he took regularly every day after parliament-hours a solitary walk through Broad Street out to Long Line,* and from there back through "Eastern Bridge" and the new parks along the Boulevards. These latter he generally frequented during the hours before dinner, when nurse-maids were on the move with their young charges. And he would always stop

* A well-known promenade along the Sound.

at a distance to regard the swarms of fresh, smartly-dressed children, and compare them with his own little John Fritz. He could stand, he himself did not know for how long, leaning upon his stick and amusing himself with the many manikins, small and big, busily tripping and waddling, running and playing, in the dim noon-day sun, until suddenly the sight of a little pale cheek amongst these many red, or the sound of an ugly cough between the peals of laughter, nervously woke him up from his reveries. A pang would then shoot through his heart, and while he continued his walk his head would fill with all sorts of anxieties and concerns for the future of his little son.

Thus a month's time had passed, when he was surprised by a little adventure.

One day—one of those days which the year seems to deliver in the wrong place, which come tumbling headlong in the middle of snow and sleet with an azure sky, as on a July day, and summer-like chirping of birds in the leafless trees—overwhelmed by the heat and his heavy fur pelisse, he had seated himself on the middle of one of the semicircular arbour-benches at Long Line to watch the people who passed, the white sails which skimmed over the Sound, and the gulls which yelled and dived along the coast, when a lady holding a little girl by the hand, both dressed in black, took a seat at one end of the bench facing the promenade.

She did not see him until she had sat down, and even then, apparently quite unaffected, she lifted the child upon the bench by her side and started a cheerful prattling with it.

But imperceptibly a faint blush had passed over her cheeks.

Through Anton, too, a sudden thrill had gone, which he just as instantly suppressed. Pressing his lips against the ivory handle of his stick, he looked stubbornly at a big silver-white gull that gambolled in the sunshine over the surface of the sea.

The fact was he had now regularly met this lady every day when he walked out here. And as she was very pretty, had an unusually erect carriage, and dressed with a peculiar elegance and with a certain foreign style; and as, finally, the child whom she always faithfully held by the hand was also a peculiar pale beauty, with large, dark blue melancholy eyes and a little sickly smile, she had, on the whole, made a sensation among the promenaders.

For the rest, it was from the beginning quite an accident that had aroused Anton's attention—a cursory likeness to a Parisian actress for whom he had once, long, long ago, entertained a violent but never-returned passion. And to this circumstance he also attributed the impure feelings which the sight of her vigorous figure had more than once produced within him, and for which he with shame reproached himself.

Nevertheless, she had lately more and more occu-

pied his thoughts. Without it being quite clear to himself, there was, quite innocently, an indefinite satisfaction for him in his daily meeting with this unknown beauty. He would know her black pearl hat and costly sealskin jacket far away amongst others; and there was a fragrance about this jacket which he would unconsciously long for. Yes, although he, for his own reassurance, denied it to himself, he had yet in reality chosen this time for his walk on account of his then meeting her most surely and regularly.

For the rest, he had only quite in general perceived that she was slightly over middle height, light blonde, and of a light, youthful fulness. He had not had courage to look her straight in the face. In passing her he even turned his head slightly away and looked forward with a severe and indifferent air, while he secretly caught the perfume of her body and drank a volatile intoxication from the rustle of her dress.

When he, therefore, had sat here for a short while with the ivory handle of his stick in his mouth, apparently observing attentively the big gull that circled over the surface of the water, he, unnoticed, and without changing the position of his head, turned his eyes on her to regard her more minutely.

It then immediately struck him that she was a little older than he had imagined, and than her bearing and the fashion of her dress would have suggested. To his surprise he saw that this youthful vigorous

body was connected with a face that had already lost its first freshness, but over whose severe regularity and correct outlines there rested by way of compensation the quiet superiority of the mature woman. She kept the eyelids slightly lowered, and had at the corners of the mouth a trait which gave her a mysterious expression of mockery and desire-arousing chillness. Her pretty head sat proudly on the magnificent shoulders, and there rested over her the conscious mastery of the lady of the world, from the large light curly hair which, in front of the little bonnet, rose up above the forehead, down to the narrow point of the foot that protruded from underneath the gown, and on which she carelessly rocked her parasol.

Strangely in contrast to this again was her voice, which was deep and sonorous. As Anton sat there, as quiet as a mouse, and listened to her prattle with the child, it appeared to him that he had never heard such a melodious tone.

He was convinced that she did not in the least take any notice of his presence. It had, in fact, never occurred to him that on these daily promenades she could have taken any notice of him, not to speak of his person having made an impression on her at all answering to that which she had made on him. There was not a movement in her face that betrayed the least agitation; and he could therefore the more boldly and completely abandon himself to his contemplation.

There was—he could not conceal it—a peculiar satisfaction for him in this solitude, instinct with feeling; it was a delight to let his eyes glide over this pretty woman, to follow the firm-drawn lines from the low forehead down to the completely straight nose, the full chin, the small delicate ear, and the drooping lids which concealed the proud melancholy of the large grey eyes; to catch the faint glimpses from the narrow lips and seize the little sudden tremblings of the muscles which simultaneously appeared at the mouth and at a place down on the dazzling neck. There was for him something like an innocent robbery in this slow contemplation, in this impressive appropriation. Who could she be? Where did she belong to? The pale face and the completely black dress indicated the young widow. But this bold coldness? This foreign cut?

When she at last rose, and while he with his eyes followed her beautiful firm pace underneath the gown, the thought rose within him to follow her at a distance, to track, unseen, what became of her, where she belonged to, and, if possible, to learn who she could be. Something of the old inclination to persecution, the old bias of freebooting—half inquisitiveness and half instinct—again fired up in his breast. But he had hardly conceived the thought before he with scorn repulsed it. He remained quietly sitting, and began to sketch in the gravel with his stick.

But his heart had taken to palpitating in a strange manner, his blood was boiling; the whole of the afternoon he went about with a light disturbance of the nerves, in which the sight of every blonde neck of a woman made him start.

But on this occasion it became quite clear to him how far he had been enticed, and he felt greatly ashamed of himself. He learned, and impressed upon himself, that however safe he felt he was, he could not in future light-mindedly play with such dangerous fire.

He comforted himself that it was perhaps this sort of little relapse which was necessary before one could be completely cured of an old vice. But from this day he never promenaded on Long Line any more, and had never seen her since.

III.

"GUDERSLOVHOLM.

"MY DEAREST ANTON,—How you cheer me up with your dear, long, lively letters, which I can't thank you enough for. I do not know how I should manage to live if I did not hear from you every day. I long, as you may conceive, every day more for you, and think that it must soon be an eternity since you went away. How slowly the time passes when one is alone! There is such a void here since you left, and for all that it is as if you wandered invisibly amongst us constantly, and this only makes the separation doubly strange. To-day it is just five-and-thirty days to the 23rd December, when I expect to see you again *for certain*. Not a day longer will I wait, I tell you that. I have got my almanac lying on my night-table, and every morning when I awake I cross a big line over the past day. On the 23rd December I make the last stroke, and if I then do not die for joy I shall illuminate Guderslovholm from top to bottom to receive you.

"Our little Fritz, you may be sure, longs for you too. When he awakes he opens his darling eyes and looks about as if he missed you. As for the

rest, he gets so stout and fat, the little dear, that you will scarcely be able to recognise him. Everybody says he is like you. And I rather like it, too.

"As regards myself, I can happily still report everything all right. Yesterday I tried to stop out a short time during the mid-day hours, and all went quite well. My cheeks have also become a little red, but they will get more so soon. As regards that malt-syrup you write about, I think I do not need it now; if you, therefore, have not already caused it to be dispatched, I think you had better not send it. But many thanks all the same because you thought of it, and also for that "health-cradle" you write that you have inspected. If the doctors really think it is beneficial, Fritz might give it a trial.

"For the rest, we live here as usual. Kamma comes here daily, and is a great help to me. Mrs. Carlsen (the parson himself is not at home) has also been here twice. But, unfortunately, Kamma is constantly unwell; for the last week she has even been quite ill, and looks very bad. Father, on the contrary, is in his old good spirits, and is so busy, Kamma says, that he has hardly time to attend to his meals. The day before yesterday he sat up writing until two o'clock in the morning.

"From your poultry I can send you the best greetings. I visited them yesterday directly I went out, and shall in future myself attend to them exactly according to your directions. It will divert me much,

and I hope you will be satisfied with my management when you come home. They are now rather going off as far as the eggs are concerned, but yesterday I collected at least twenty-four (I may as well tell you that the little yellow-spotted hen, you know, has now commenced to get on amicable terms with the cock).

"From the manager I have to report that the old white horse has got the croup (isn't that the name?), not, however, in any serious degree. We also lost a cow yesterday, which died suddenly. From Annie I can also send you the best greetings; she has relieved me, having the other day surprised us with four nice little puppies. Out in the park everything now looks quite gloomy and wintry. There is hardly a leaf left on the trees. The roses on the terraces have been wrapped up, the gardener having been very conscientious, and you will, no doubt, find everything to your satisfaction when you return. This morning the first flake of snow fell. Old Anne, in the long house by the gate, died yesterday; I know you took some interest in her. But an amusive item of news I have also to chronicle: Nielo, the coachman, has been engaged to Mette, the chamber-maid; *they*, I think, will become quite a nice couple.

"Good-bye now, my dear, beloved Anton, and dearest love from your

BET.

"*P.S.*—Fritz has just awakened in his cradle; he sends a thousand kisses."

IV.

One forenoon when Anton came in to call at his mother's he saw a lady sitting in a rocking-chair by the side of his mother, talking eagerly.

He needed all his power of self-control not to lose his composure, for while yet in the doorway he had recognised the black pearl bonnet.

"Mrs. Conerding," his mother said, introducing her.

Anton tried, in spite of the beating of his heart, to give his face an expression of social complaisance, but responded to the lady's placid obeisance with a bow, the natural stiffness of which made Lady Drehling —who sat at the window with a piece of embroidery, and as usual secretly eyed him over her needle— frown with an expression of displeasure.

"We were just talking about you, my friend," she said, in a voice in which lay something of that pugnacity which lately had come over her. "Well—I suppose you know Mrs. Conerding again from bygone days, Anton?—Miss Molmark."

Anton again made a stiff courtesy and attempted a few phrases; but the well-known sonorous contralto voice interrupted him from the rocking-chair.

"Oh! don't trouble yourself! It is so long ago that it would be unreasonable if you still remembered me, especially as I have no doubt changed a great deal. I, on the contrary, knew you at once."

A thrill went through Anton. It appeared to him, with his bad conscience, as if the words "at once" were pronounced with a peculiar accent, and his eyes looked shyly down upon her. She had laid herself back in the chair, and sat with both hands concealed in a small, long-haired muff, which rested on her lap like a little dog. She boldly met his look, apparently without the least emotion. Only underneath the large downcast eyelids he seemed to trace something like a little lurking flash which went through him like an arrow. Did she suspect anything?

"Besides," she continued equally composedly, "the Baron has in this long interval lived to see all sorts of things, so that"——

"Have I?" inquired Anton with a forced smile.

"Oh, let us hear," Lady Drehling said, and sat farther back in her chair.

"Well, at any rate, I pride myself that in spite of my exile I have kept very well apace with the events at home. Indeed, they are, after all, not so difficult to overlook."

"But let us hear," Lady Drehling repeated.

"In the first place, then, the Baron's hair is becoming grey. I saw that instantly."

"A significant symptom, certainly."

"But not an unusual one," his mother interposed. "In our time all men are born veterans. But proceed."

"Secondly, you have become a member of the Landsthing, and that interests me very much, although I am no politician. I have several times heard you spoken of as a very prominent politician.

"Well; and thirdly?" Lady Drehling asked.

"Thirdly, the Baron has married"——

"Say thirdly and *fourthly*," interposed Lady Drehling, and added by way of explanation, as Mrs. Conerding, not understanding, turned round to her, "married head over ears, I mean."

"Oh! That is one reason more why I must congratulate you the more heartily. You have no doubt chosen an excellent lady for your wife. I have heard about it from various sources."

Anton tried to smile his most complaisant thanks upon her, but his lips trembled. His heart writhed with repentance and exasperation. What was the meaning of this? Did she really know anything? Was it possible that she had seen through his secret, which he had so deeply reproached himself for?

He had seated himself on a sofa at the opposite side of the room, from where he now and then secretly, while he twisted his gloves, glanced at her with an inquiring look.

She sat, equally proud and mysterious, rocking her chair slightly, while with blinking eyes she looked into a faint golden sunbeam which from the window

laid itself caressingly, as it were, over her form. It illuminated for Anton the fine down on her cheeks and the full rounded chin, and brought a fresh colour to her pretty lips.

"And fifthly," she said.

"Is there any more?" Anton asked.

"Yes," she exclaimed, and suddenly stopped the chair, while for the first time she looked straight at him with her large grey eyes. "Haven't you got a son?"

Anton bowed his head.

"Well, there you are;—and then I should be so pretentious as to suppose that after a lapse of ten years you would recollect me? No, I know the politicians. Their thoughts fly as the clouds before the gale, as you no doubt are aware."

"Ten years, you say," interposed Lady Drehling with surprise. "Is it really so long since you were married, Mrs. Conerding? Ah, yes," she added with a sigh. "Time runs quickly! Time runs quickly! One fine morning you awake in your bed and find that you have become old."

Mrs. Conerding laughed a little, a faint forced laugh.

"Yes," she said. "And the most peculiar thing is that one never will acknowledge it oneself until some little incident or other brutally unveils your eyes. I can especially speak about it during these days, as since my return home I really have felt like being an old woman. I walk for instance every day during

the afternoon with baby on Long Line—The doctor has ordered it, consequently it has to be gone through with regularity—but I cannot tell how strange it is to me. It is the first time I have really felt the peculiar—what am I to call it?—sadness sounds so affected—but anyhow, this strange sad feeling which overwhelms one by seeing again, after a long time, the same places where one spent such happy hours in youth—and Long Line has, as you know, always had a special attraction for young girlhood. Besides, I find that it is exceedingly beautiful. I scarcely know a place in the world—at least in this part of the world that *I* have seen, and that is, after all, not quite so small—which has such a fascination for me and puts me into such a state of reverie."

"You have spent a long time abroad, madame?" Anton inquired hastily, seizing with eagerness an opportunity to change the subject.

"Yes — seaside life" — she said piteously, and shrugged her shoulders.

"Madame is ailing?"

"My husband."

Again an imperceptible tremor went through Anton; he looked aside. The brief, curt manner in which these two words were pronounced, in connection with the surprising circumstance itself that she had a husband, made such an impression upon him, about the nature of which, however, for the moment he would not have been able himself to give any information.

He began talking in an absent-minded manner about travels, the troubles of a travelling life, and about foreign countries. And as it now happened that they had visited almost the same places, and there seen the same things and met the same people, he entered almost against his own will into lively conversation.

Mrs. Conerding possessed a peculiar curt, clear, often quite pertinent, and, in talking about people, not unfrequently a light sarcastical manner of expressing herself, which involuntarily captivated her listeners. She appeared to have lived and seen a great deal more than most people; seemed equally intimate with Vienna high-life, the seaside life along the Channel, and with the Parisian theatrical news. Gradually Anton was carried away by these old recollections of places and worlds which formerly had been so dear to him, so that he quite forgot his uneasiness.

Only when the clock struck two over Mrs. Conerding's head she rose with surprise.

"Well, time runs away from me. Baby is waiting for me at home at the hotel; she will no doubt scold me very much," she said smiling; and with a strange, hearty hand-shake with Lady Drehling and a little stately bow to Anton, she thereupon took leave.

Lady Drehling, as was her wont, accompanied her guest out to the hall.

When she returned Anton stood away at a book-shelf near the fireplace turning the leaves of an album. He appeared warm on the forehead, and a few times

he passed his finger between his collar and neck, while he secretly glanced at the thermometer on the doorpost.

"Well," his mother said, making herself comfortable in her chair, and again resuming her embroidery work, "what do you think of *her* now?"

"Well—she is rather pretty."

"She *has* been very pretty. Don't you remember that she formerly used to come a great deal to your uncle's, the Baron?"

"Yes; now you mention it, I think too that"——

"I think I am even very much mistaken if she did not then have quite a fancy for you, my dear."

"Indeed! Is that so?"

"Ah, yes! At that time she, least of all, I think, had any idea of what was going to happen to her, poor creature."

"Poor creature? It seems to me she did not look particularly 'poor.'"

"No; that's just what I admire about her. And yet she has had sorrows which surely would bring most people to despair."

"Indeed! What is the matter?" Anton asked, and turned over a leaf. "I noticed that she was in mourning."

"Well—it is not that."

"I see; but"——

"It is much worse—the very worst, in fact: a husband."

"Oh!"

"A fool, a coward, an unscrupulous person, who in every imaginable manner has ruined her life as far as it was in his power to do so; who within a few years has squandered the whole of her large fortune, bereft her of every happiness, been unfaithful to her on every point except just on the only one that would save her from this misery."

"You mean"——

"It is very simple, my dear. He has—perhaps with good reason—never infringed what is called 'matrimonial faithfulness.' He has in this respect been even exceedingly careful. In fact, I think he has his very good reasons. As for the rest, I suppose you know him from the old days—Count Conerding's son?"

"Son? I don't recollect."

"Well, he took rather great pains to make himself known, though. Don't you remember a little, inflated personage with a couple of rather lively eyes and curly hair? He was said to be a genius, a great musician, and wrote some small pieces which were said to be very promising. It was no doubt the name he thereby won which so perplexed her. Perhaps vanity had a hand in it too. I mean with regard to becoming connected with a distinguished family (she was, if you remember, the daughter of an architect); otherwise I can't explain that she, who was so fresh and pretty, could have taken a fancy to that little, affected fellow.

Well, the result was, in fact, also what one might have expected."

"Yes; but—I mean—*how* did it actually come about?" Anton said. He pretended to ask this half absent-mindedly, holding the album before him in his out-straightened arm, closing one of his eyes as if he were carefully examining a picture which had absorbed his interest.

"Well, how do these things happen, dear? As soon after the wedding as he got hold of her money he became quite wild. They immediately went abroad—he was, in fact, an artist, and of course nervous and naturally overworked, and must needs use all imaginable sorts of waters and cures and so on—you know that kind of affectation. The poor child—for she was in fact not very much more at the time—was dragged from one watering-place to another; from town to town—in fact everywhere where the fashionable world gathered. He believed, of course, that he was world-renowned, comported himself everywhere with an arrogance and pomp which made him the laughing-stock of everybody, and surrounded himself with quite a little musical court of other idlers and good-for-nothing fellows, who, of course, laughed at him behind his back. Meinerts, who met him at Wiesbaden last year, said that he was quite disgustingly affected. He is, as far as I know, of some note in certain musical circles down there, on account of which he also despises everything that is Danish, and tyrannises over

his wife in every way. You can imagine what *she*, who has always been of a proud disposition and jealous of her honour, has had to suffer under such ignominy."

"Well—and now?" Anton asked, with but faintly concealed impatience.

"Now?—Well, she came back here at the end of summer, on the occasion of the death of her only sister, and lives at the present moment with her little daughter at a *hôtel garni*. What her further intentions are I have not got the slightest idea. I do not understand why she still keeps it up with him. My opinion is that it is exclusively out of regard to the child. As regards himself, it is said that he has lately become very religious, even a Catholic, I think. His parents—whom you, of course, know—are very pleased with him on this score, which you no doubt readily understand. They still, on the whole, believe firmly in his genius, and have on the other hand always borne a secret grudge against their daughter-in-law, who did not 'understand' him, 'was not good enough for him,' and whose originally so gay and free manners on the whole were always eyesores to them."

"And she?"

"She?—What do you mean?"

"I mean, *is* not she now also a little—what do you call it—I mean a little loose, or"——

Lady Drehling suddenly raised her head and looked at him.

"Have you heard anything definite?"

Anton became slightly flushed.

"It seems to me that one of my friends has whispered something about"——

Lady Drehling shrugged her shoulders.

"Well—it would under such circumstances be highly pardonable. Besides, I don't know anything definite as regards this. But, of course, she is a woman with strong passions. For the rest you will meet her at Mr. Klem's on Sunday. You have had an invitation, of course?"

"Yes. Is *she* going there?" Anton asked, suddenly closing the album.

"Yes; why does that appear so strange to you? Mr. Klem is, as you know, a brother of the Count's wife, her mother-in-law. Consequently it is quite a natural thing."

"Oh, certainly, certainly—excuse me; I was thinking of quite other matters."

He put the album back on the bookshelf, crossed the carpet a few times, buttoning his coat closely the while, and got the gloves out of his pocket.

"Are you off?" his mother asked.

"Yes; you know I sit on this committee, and it gives me plenty to do just now. We are just preparing our report."

"Well, that alters the case. Let me know when you get something done. It appears to me it is rather a long time since one heard anything from *you*, my dear!"

When Anton shortly afterwards came down in the street he stopped a moment as if considering. A cold wind raged round the corner and whirled dust and sweepings on the squares. Then he pulled his fur collar slightly over his ears and went thoughtfully home.

On his table lay the daily letter from Betty. He immediately seized it eagerly and put it involuntarily to his lips. Then he seated himself comfortably by the window, tore the envelope open, and began to read eagerly.

But when he was at the third page his hand sank —unknowingly to himself—down into his lap. His eyes gazed out through the window, and he fell into a reverie.

V.

THE Sunday following, in the afternoon at five o'clock, Anton sat by his lamp and wrote :—

"MY OWN DEAR BETTY,—This time but two words to thank you for your dear letter of Thursday, and to tell you that I am still doing well. We shall now, thank God, soon meet, and may then talk together about all the many things one can never get written in a letter. For the day after to-morrow week you will have me with you for certain. Hurrah!

"From here no news whatever. In Parliament time drags along with wranglings and nonsense. God knows what the end of it will be. Would to God I never had come into that wasps' nest!

"I sit here as upon thorns, as within half-an-hour I have to go out to a dinner-party (at a Mr. Klem's, whom you don't know). I had, in fact, contemplated sending an excuse, but at the last moment the thought struck me that it would never do. This is also the reason that you must this time be content with these hurried lines; but I thought I would not let the day

pass without my sending you and Fritz my best love. Good-bye! good-bye! Your ANTON D.

"*P.S.*—For the sake of safety I may as well tell you now that I met Doctor Lynge in the street yesterday, and then inquired of him concerning the "Infant Flour." He *absolutely* dissuaded us from the use of it, asserting that it—quite contrary to its intended purpose—often causes *serious* bowel complaints. You must, therefore, on no account give it to Fritz in case you should contemplate letting him begin to attempt a little substantial food. But I suppose it is too soon yet?"

When Anton had run through this letter he folded it neatly, put it carefully in an envelope, and stroked it caressingly with his hand before he wrote the address. Then he hurriedly rose to ring the bell.

But yet, with his finger on the button, he stopped a moment considering. Then he decisively pressed it.

He handed the letter to the servant for dispatch, and went hurriedly into the bedroom to dress.

Half-an-hour later he stopped in a cab outside Mr. Klem's gate, and ascended the carpeted stairs.

Now, it was really only after a good deal of reflection and trial that Anton had at last taken this final decision. In the beginning he had even firmly made up his mind *not* to go there, and thus quickly and most conveniently get rid of a casual acquaintance which he himself would prefer to forget. But gradually he had become sensible of the fact that, by thus deliberately

avoiding a meeting he might thus expose a weakness which he for his own sake ought to be above, a confession of fear, which, moreover, was quite unfounded. What had he to be alarmed about? Never, he thought, had he felt so sure of himself as now.

Besides, there was another point. If Mrs. Conerding really suspected anything about the feelings she at an unfortunate moment had aroused within him, had he not then an imperative obligation again to purify himself in her eyes? He felt he owed Betty satisfaction in case the least doubt about his faithfulness had been entertained by this stranger; and he believed that he never would have a better opportunity than this to remove every suspicion from her by the most consummate coldness and indifference.

As he now, therefore, entered into those rooms crowded with uniforms and costly dresses, and directly in the door caught sight of her erect figure in black amidst a group of ladies immediately at the entrance, he went past her as if he were short-sighted, and mixed quietly with the guests. With great cordiality he shook hands with the host and hostess, and with several friends and acquaintances, and then withdrew to a remote corner and engaged in political talk with a colleague from the Upper House. When the door to the dining-room was opened he offered his arm to the elderly wife of a professor with eight children, and during the whole of this long and laborious meal he conversed with this lady about the nursing and

education of children without once turning his head towards the place from whence his vigilant ear through the din caught every sound of Mrs. Conerding's sonorous voice.

There was, however, another circumstance which gradually absorbed the attention of his eyes and aroused his reflection.

Just opposite to him, on the other side of the table, sat the Baroness Conerding, a short, stiff, plump lady, with a coarse voice, an almost peasant-like figure, and keen eyes; and not far from there sat the Baron himself, who was also short, but with a big, stooping head, large, protruding under-lip, and a peculiar sinister look which hid itself underneath the projecting grey tufts of his eyebrows. The eyes of both rested attentively on the place where—according to Anton's calculations—their daughter-in-law would be seated, and from her slipped thoughtfully round to all the young gentlemen who sat in her neighbourhood. The faces of both seemed to reflect every one of her words, every movement she made; and when she laughed—her slightly dry, unharmonious laugh—they secretly looked at each other over their plates.

In the meantime the meal proceeded with its dull gaiety and heavy courses. There was no end to the dishes which were carried in and the bottles which were quietly emptied, and the air gradually became such a dense fume of meat and wine that Anton almost felt sick. One of the last courses was knot-berries with cream.

This was in honour of a celebrated Norwegian singer who had given concerts in the town, and whom the host had conducted to the table—an imposing blonde—with arms resembling those of a baker, and with double chins hanging down as a bag or a reservoir for her vocal stores. In the long series of toasts and unctuous speeches which now, like eructations, succeeded the heavy viands, she, too, was the first to be honoured with a string of flattering words.

It was not until past nine o'clock that everybody rose from the table.

Coffee and liqueurs were then served in the rooms. And while Anton stood there in conversation with an old deaf and half blind colonel of the reserve, who in a long-winded manner expatiated upon a tour of inspection he had recently undertaken, his look suddenly and unexpectedly fell upon Mrs. Conerding who sat in a little Turkish cabinet behind the adjacent drawing-room. As she did not appear to have discovered him, and as he thought himself well concealed behind a group of broad-leafed plants, he at length took courage to look at her.

She reclined in the corner of a low cushioned sofa, attended by a couple of loud-speaking gentlemen, and with a discreet orange-coloured glare poured upon her from a shaded lamp under the ceiling. She was dressed in a black velvet robe trimmed with sombre black lace; the high neck and the upper part of the back and magnificent bosom were bare, as also the

arms from the shoulders to a little above the elbows, where the gloves ended in a wreath of black swan-down. An arched branch of lilies-of-the-valley daintily touched her temples in her light hair, and on the sofa by her side she held unfolded in her hand a rich fan of bright black satin embroidered with Japanese birds. In front of her stood a blonde tight-laced officer of the guards, with a face full of pimples, twisting in an ingratiating manner a small perfumed moustache, while two gentlemen in plain clothes incessantly giggled with a short cackling laughter, perseveringly manipulating the fingers of their big gloves, which were wet through with perspiration. Over her own figure, however, rested a strange impression of distraction and mastered anxiety. She sat with her temple resting on the tips of the fingers of one of her hands, and when she stole a glance around her, or heard steps approaching from the other rooms, it was as if she were expecting somebody or looking for an opportunity to escape.

Suddenly she raised her eyes through the door towards the spot where Anton stood, and, although not a change was observable in her features, he was convinced that she had seen him. He himself felt how he flushed; and, after having gently released himself from the colonel, he withdrew to the smoking-room, established in the host's private office for the occasion, where he then staunchly remained among half-a-dozen elderly quiet gentlemen who, like pictures

representing consummate "harmonious enjoyment," sat profoundly lost in themselves in large arm-chairs, with their hands folded across their stomachs and the cigar smoke curling up against their half-closed eyes.

A very stout university celebrity, who had chosen the most comfortable chair in the darkest corner, benevolently took charge of the entertainment by relating, in a voice which was but an articulated eructation, an endless story which nobody understood or cared to understand, but which was taken advantage of as a means of increasing the pleasure of digestion, while only now and then somebody prevailed on himself to utter an "Oh!" or an "Indeed! is that so?" or even give way to a genuine laugh.

All on a sudden there arose, however, a singular commotion among the guests in the other rooms, and a gentleman poked his head in at the door to announce that the Norwegian singer would entertain the company in the drawing-room.

The elderly gentlemen at first looked a little doubtful, but were soon agreed that they could very well hear the song from where they were, the university professor even maintaining that only at a distance did he enjoy the full symphony. Anton, on the contrary,—after a short reflection—put his cigar away and went in.

All the rooms already looked as if the company had been swept away. Everybody had rushed to the

large dining-room at the other end of the house, where the grand piano stood, and from where the first round tones now rolled through the rooms. Only on the sofas and chairs lay here and there fans and handkerchiefs which had been left in the hurry; and, while Anton softly and slowly stole forward on tip-toe, he looked several times in an odd manner at these objects, the different perfumes of which filled the air.

Suddenly, at the door of a Turkish cabinet which he had to pass, he stopped. There sat Mrs. Conerding alone, on the same spot and in the same position as before, looking pensively down at the small projecting tip of her foot, which she gently rocked to and fro.

At the same moment that she appeared to notice him she withdrew her foot and looked up with a surprised expression, which, however, it struck him instantly, was scarcely natural.

They silently bowed to each other; after which Anton stopped a moment, at variance with himself whether he should pass or not—when at the same moment the tones from the drawing-room suddenly melted into a dying *pianissimo* which forced him and his creaking boots to remain where they were. Shortly afterwards the song ended amidst dead silence from the audience.

Mrs. Conerding again raised her head to him, and shrugged her shoulders, smiling.

"You don't think much of her, madame?" Anton asked.

"Well, I don't know—it is perhaps *my* fault—but I must confess that I am somewhat of a heretic in this peculiar line. These perpetual popular ditties, with their river spirits and bogies, and I don't know what, they—well, what shall I call it?"

"It does not amuse you?"

"It appears to me in the long run at least a trifle monotonous. Here in Copenhagen you are, however, so enthusiastic about her, that it is no doubt I who lack the deeper understanding of all this shouting and booming which puts the others in such ecstacies. Do you know, by the way, what on the whole has struck me since my return home?—But won't you take a seat?" she interrupted herself, with a movement of the fan in which there might lie a faint indication of the vacant space by her side.

Anton rolled a large velvet chair towards her. He did not, however, sit down on it, but merely reclined with one arm on its back.

"You were going to say, madame?" he asked.

She hesitated a little while, and looked down at her fan on her lap, as if she expected him to sit down. Then she said, looking out into the room—

"Well—I only meant it has struck me how everything has become Norwegian here at home. Everywhere I find Norwegian books only, Norwegian artists, Norwegian music; even in the social tone there has come something singularly—don't you call it mountain-heavy or mountain-straitened?—I don't know—at

any rate something that tastes of eternal ice and snow. How is that?"

"If it really is as you think, madame," Anton replied with the same artificial tranquillity, "I suppose one might look for the reason in the politics of the day, which have gradually come to engage the attention of so many different people of the country that"——

"Oh yes, to be sure—this unfortunate policy!" she said thoughtlessly, as it were, and commenced absent-mindedly to fan her cheek.

Anton meant to understand that an allusion must lie concealed behind the words, and looked at her askance with an attentive look. But simultaneously a fresh tune was struck up on the grand piano, and with a somewhat forced vivacity she exclaimed—

"Now they are at it again—I am certain it is the one about the little Astrid; people can't resist that one." And when shortly afterwards the first sadly quivering tones of the little song about the maiden who, with her hair turned grey, still faithfully awaited the sweetheart of her youth, really sounded in to them from the drawing-room, she almost laughed outright.

When the first verse was finished she turned her head slightly towards him and said—

"I really think you don't even cry! Have you, too, really become so obdurate?"

Anton smiled constrainedly. He felt it was not quite natural, this tone, and he pondered anxiously on what could be behind it. Was it another trap?

What were, on the whole, her intentions with him? She sat fanning herself slowly, with her head thrown well back and half-closed eyelids; the yellowish light streamed down over her bare arms, and threw a fine shade underneath her chin down over the white, swelling bosom, which Anton's cast-down eyes involuntarily sought.

In this position she laughingly continued the conversation, during the subsequent verses, until the song finally ended amidst tumultuous applause from the drawing-room.

Simultaneously Baroness Conerding's short, plump figure appeared in the doorway.

"Nanna," she said sharply, "the carriage is ready."

"I will be there directly," the young lady answered curtly, with a proud toss of the head, which Anton took note of.

Only when her mother-in-law had again disappeared she rose. But when Anton wished to accompany her out she stopped him.

"I would ask you to remain," she said, holding out her hand to him with a sudden familiarity, and looking at him with a look and a pressure of the hand which went to his head like strong wine. "My father and mother-in-law—well, you understand. Perhaps we shall meet another time."

A few minutes later Anton, too, had left the company. He did not, however, go straight home, but first sauntered a while about the moonlit streets.

He needed, as it were, to get thoroughly chilled by the cold air which swept through the town from the Sound; and several times he stopped, with his hat in his hand, to cool his burning forehead.

When, past midnight, he returned to his hotel, he observed with surprise from the street that there was a light burning in his room. He did not understand who, at this time of the night, could be visiting him; and while many strange thoughts ran through his head, he slowly ascended the stairs. But the sight which met him on opening the door made him for a moment as white as a sheet.

On the table the lamp burnt with a long smoking tongue right over the funnel; around it lay boxes, neckcloths, a fur cap, and a pair of fur gloves; and amidst these things stood several tall cylindrical glasses covered with bladders. Scattered about in the room were a big travelling fur coat, trunks, a hat-box, and a pair of fur boots; and finally, over in the rocking-chair lay Apothecary Byberg, with his hands on his knees like a frog, his spectacles on his forehead, and snoring loudly in a safe and undisturbed slumber.

Directly Anton's eye fell on this figure a terrible fear had rushed through his heart. In an instant he was by the side of the sleeping one and shook him most unmercifully.

"Get up! get up! What has happened?" he cried breathlessly.

The apothecary rubbed his eyes and looked about him surprised.

"For heaven's sake speak!—speak! Has anything happened? What is the matter?"

"My dear sir," the apothecary at length exclaimed in a husky voice, "I verily believe—I think I must have fallen asleep—I have no doubt fallen asleep." And then he commenced, not yet quite awake, circumstantially to relate how he had arrived in town by the half-past ten train and immediately had taken a cab from there to the hotel; how and in what manner the waiter meanwhile had informed him that Anton was out to dinner, but would no doubt soon be back; how then, after a good deal of—more precisely explained—deliberations, he finally had decided to await his return, so that Anton at once might get the fresh greetings from home; and then how during this waiting, "quite contrary to habit," he had no doubt "taken a nap" in the chair.

"But Betty?—the child?—how are they getting on?" Anton cried impatiently. He had not yet let go his hold of the apothecary's arm.

"My dear friend, I am of course the bearer of a thousand greetings to you. Everything is well—quite well."

"Oh, thank God!" Anton said to himself, and held for a moment his hand to his forehead. His heart still throbbed so violently that he had to lean against a chair. "What am I about?"

"They of course only long now to get you back again, my dear friend. Betty has, in fact, not spoken about anything else ever since you went away. On the whole, we have, I dare say, all missed you. I had no peace until I had promised that I would go over and fetch you. And here I am! We would not let you know anything about it; and I hope you don't object to it. We wished, in fact, to surprise you!"

"Surprise me?" Anton repeated with a start, and looked fixedly at him.

"And I also think we have succeeded. Ha, ha!" the apothecary laughed, having now completely regained his equilibrium, and rubbing his hands with delight as he commenced to pace up and down the floor. "Besides, I have another little surprise in store for you—of another nature—ha, ha!—in the trunk"——

"For me? But really—let me at least see it. Is it from Betty? Or Fritz? Let me by all means hear something about it. Take a seat, please. Let us get all that stuff off the table. What glasses are these?"

The apothecary, who had gone over to his trunks, turned and uttered a yell.

"For heaven's sake don't touch them!" he exclaimed, and rushed up to the table. "I have had them on my lap during the whole journey, so that they might escape any injury. They are *very* great curiosi-

ties, my dear friend!—very precious curiosities, you may be sure." And carefully seizing one of the tallest glasses, and holding it up to the light, he solemnly continued: "This, for instance, is a discovery by which I expect a great deal. I have destined it for the museum. If you will just look at this little lap here"——

"No, no," Anton interrupted; "let that wait. We will look at that to-morrow. To-night I will only hear about the others."

He rang the bell for the waiter, and although the people in the kitchen had gone to bed long ago, the porter procured some tea. The table was soon cleared and laid with a white cloth, and toast and butter upon it. The apothecary was placed in the sofa; Anton himself sat down in the rocking-chair. And now the old man had to tell everything about everybody at home, from Betty and Fritz down to Flora and the poultry; there was nothing about which Anton did not desire to get exact information.

At four o'clock the apothecary still sat talking. But Anton had become very tired. When the first surprise was over, the first thirst for news satisfied, he soon became weary; and the old man's continual long-windedness and endless repetitions made him nervous. At last he had himself to ask him to leave off and remind him of bed. He accompanied him then with a candle into a room that lay next to Anton's bedroom, and which the apothecary had

secured for himself beforehand. Here he bid him good-night, and closed the door between them.

When Anton was alone he did not, however, go to bed himself. He again seated himself in the rocking-chair by the table, and while he sat there he fell into a reverie.

But that picture which, as if in a dream, hovered before his look, was not that of Betty. It was the picture of a little Turkish cabinet with dark colours, through the dim light of which two large mysterious eyes stared at him above a pair of snow-white shoulders.

VI.

About a week's time after this event, one forenoon about twelve o'clock, some people were gathered in Lady Drehling's sitting-room.

One of them was a tall, muscular, masculine-looking Baroness who, dressed in full black, sat stiff and immovable in an armchair underneath the clock, and who, with her gloomy severe look, her knitted brows, and a rather prominent grey moustache on her upper lip, looked like an old cavalry general in woman's clothes.

"The dragoon of virtue," she was secretly called by Lady Drehling, who had been a friend of hers in their youth, but with whom she now for a long time had not associated very much.

The other one was a young, very pretty, and elegant lady of the highest aristocracy, who, in spite of her scarcely completed twenty-four summers, had already gained a certain renown for the zeal she had shown in the service of the Christian Mission. She was a niece of the Baroness, and they had both come up here on the occasion of the preparations for the inauguration of a society for the furthering of morality in the metropolis.

Lady Drehling sat at her usual place by the window and looked pensively down at her beautiful white hands, which she held up in front of her, turning feverishly now one and then another of the precious rings on her fingers. A masterful, warlike uneasiness was reflected in her face, and now and then she stole a glance, as it were, across the floor at Anton, who stood leaning against the mantelpiece and looked downwards.

On him, too, rested intently Apothecary Byberg's attention. He sat modestly at a little distance behind the ladies, with his feet drawn in underneath his chair, his hat on his lap, and followed with a despondent look every movement of the pale, exhausted face of his son-in-law.

"My dear friend," Lady Drehling at length said absently, after the Baroness in a lengthy manner had explained the object of their visit, "I am, honestly speaking, not excessively in favour of these kind of—kind of measures. It seems to me—why are we always to go about thus plastering our fellow-mortals? The world is not one huge hospital as yet!"

"Dear friend," the Baroness said with dignity, slightly raising, like an automaton, one of her black-gloved hands and pointing at a little printed pamphlet which lay on the table, "if you, as I said before, during a leisure hour would take the trouble to peruse our pamphlet, I don't for one moment doubt that you would immediately be of our opinion. You would

then comprehend that it is *even high time* we should earnestly begin. As I told you, the question has, besides, gained the warmest sympathy in the very highest places, and several of our most influential men have already promised their best and strongest support—not least your own amiable son, Mr. Drehling."

"Have you, Anton?" Lady Drehling asked, looking intently at her hands.

"Yes."

"It was just that circumstance," the Baroness continued, "that inspired us with the thought to apply to you too. Do me the favour now to read our pamphlet. You will there get an insight into a depravity the extent of which you, no doubt, never have suspected. The materials have been collected, we dare to say, with the greatest care and by fully reliable persons. If you, amongst other things, will open at page seven you will there find accurate information about"——

"But, my dear," Lady Drehling said, forcing the words out, as it were, "I don't quite understand. What are, after all, your intentions with them—these"——

"We want to save them," the young Baroness suddenly said, in a voice so hard and unfeeling that their hostess involuntarily looked up. She had, being a stranger to the house, not taken much part in the conversation, but contented herself with watching Lady Drehling with a cold and disdainful look.

"Yes, we want to save them," the old Baroness

continued. "We will, in fact, throw light into the obscurity of these places, the corruption of which threatens to undermine society, and, above all, that which is the main pillar of every society, our homes. You will in this book—page fourteen—find statistical tables, which Professor Wegner has been good enough to procure for us, and which give information about how much and by whom these Venus-caves—as he pertinently calls them—are frequented. And when one now reflects that it is the young people of the country, our own sons, the future husbands of our daughters, who are exposed to this danger—— My dear friend," she continued very impressively, "if you should have the least desire to acquaint yourself personally with the matter, it will be a pleasure to us to procure a guide for you. The young Pastor Nomme, a highly amiable gentleman"——

"No, no—don't," Lady Drehling interrupted, nervously pushing a ring formed like a snake up and down her finger. "Don't trouble yourself as regards this. I have, of course, heard about it before, and don't doubt that there, too, a good deal of improvement is needed. But in the act itself, I must confess that" (and she suddenly raised her head and clasped her hands with a little clap) "I cannot really see anything so dreadful, when young men and young women"——

"Lady Drehling no doubt misunderstands us," the young Baroness said in her husky voice; "the talk is about 'pleasure-girls.'"

"Ah yes, pleasure-girls!" Lady Drehling interrupted, and looked out into the room with a sorrowful splendour in her eyes; "pleasure-girls! It seems to me it sounds so pretty! After all, are they really such a serious danger? I can hardly believe it. When I think of our own homely 'don't-touch-mes'—well, honestly speaking, then, I really don't blame our young men if they seek more pleasant company."

The young Baroness sat as if petrified.

Her elder companion, who from days of yore was used to the paradoxical outbreaks of her old friend, merely frowned, as if to indicate that the joke was not appropriately suited to this case.

"Mother is jesting," Anton also said, gently moving from the chimney to the piano.

Lady Drehling looked at him with a quick glance, and again bent her head, while a dark cloud passed over her face.

"My dear friend," the old Baroness exclaimed, struggling to keep her composure, "it can hardly be possible that it is your opinion to want to defend vice—barefaced, audacious vice! I assume it, as a matter of course, that it cannot be your intention to desire to give countenance to impurity and depravity. And therefore I certainly don't understand how you can be so much against an association which has for its object, as far as possible, to save society, and especially our young people, the young people of the country, from such ruin. It can only be in the interest of all

moral people that, first of all, our young people, and through them our homes, as far as possible"——

"Ah yes!—these homes!" Lady Drehling sighed.

This remark escaped her, as it were; she had, in fact, not intended to utter it. But it was a long gathered resentment and bitterness that gave vent to this outbreak.

"Dear me!—what do you mean?" the old Baroness said, terrified, with clasped hands.

"I will tell you," she answered, after a brief reflection, and slowly weighing, as it were, every word before she pronounced it. "I think that if the cancerous ulcer of this our blessed country lies anywhere, then it might perhaps just be in these so very much extolled and lauded homes about which you yourself, too, a moment ago, remarked something or other very pretty. You used on the same occasion the word 'Venus-caves;' but *they* are possibly just our proper Venus-caves, which enervate our men, rob their energy, and make our women weak and silly. There we closet ourselves with our bad habits and stupidities, and make ourselves unsuited to the society of other people. Our young husbands have scarcely left the altar before they feel themselves bound to walk about with blinkers and talk like nursery-maids. Well, well, I know what you are going to say, my dear, and you too, my dear son—but I only desire that young people should be young, and not walk like knights of the most rueful countenance. In our time

one hardly knows whether one dare look a pretty lady straight in the eyes when she is not one's own wife, or admire the stature of a gentleman when he happens not to be one's own husband. It is this intolerance which is so nauseating."

"I am sorry," the young Baroness said. "It seems, then, that we have troubled you, Lady Drehling, in vain?"

"Don't worry yourself the least about that, madame," she replied, laughing, and mollified, as it were, by her own vehemence; "but I am an old woman who is used to giving her opinion without beating about the bush. Besides, it has really been a true pleasure to look at your pretty face: I only think it is too young and pretty for that kind of dreams."

The young Baroness knit her brows, and bowed in silence.

Her companion shook hands coldly and reproachfully with her old friend, murmuring some words to the effect that she did not despair of seeing her arrive at a better understanding.

Lady Drehling accompanied them herself to the hall.

When she returned Apothecary Byberg was alone.

"Where is my son?" she asked.

The apothecary pointed at the adjacent room, where she found Anton standing by the window and looking down into the street. On her entering he turned and stared at her, pale, gloomy, almost in a threatening manner.

"What is the matter, Anton?" she asked, terrified, involuntarily closing the door behind her.

"Mother," he said, after a brief struggle, "I must speak a few words with you. I cannot quietly listen when you in such a way and with such expressions attack ties which have become dear to me. I well understood at what your words were aimed, and also presume that it was your intention that I should understand it. But I will tell you this much: that what Betty—whom *you* don't know—has been for me, what her love, her fidelity has brought me, you have not the remotest idea. I owe her more than my happiness, more than any other being on this earth. Therefore I will not tolerate that you speak thus about it. You don't know her; for had you but known her, mamma—you would—you *could* not have the heart to speak as you did just now and have done before. This I have wanted to tell you for some time, so that you might understand how deeply your words have wounded me."

He held out his cold hand to her, and while Lady Drehling irresolutely sank down on a chair he left the room.

In the hall he met the apothecary, who, quite pale with confusion, was groping about to find his overcoat; and in silence they then, side by side, walked along the street.

At the corner of the King's Square the apothecary stopped. "I have a few little things to take charge

of," he said in a low voice, and looked pensively and anxiously at his son-in-law. "I think it would be best if I got rid of them. For it is decided, then, that we go away to-morrow night—is it not?"

"To-morrow!" Anton started from his reverie. "Yes—very well; yes, of course."

They separated; and like one in a dream Anton sauntered across the square.

The apothecary went a few steps along the pavement, but then stopped and looked after him.

VII.

A GREAT and eventful change had taken place in Anton during the last week.

He had felt like one who with exultation had seen his edifice rise proudly, and had safely rested under its shadow, and who then one fine day had perceived that the foundation was giving way underneath it; that those pillars, on the supporting power of which he had so implicitly counted, had snapped like reeds; and that he was sinking helplessly, annihilated.

He had suffered intensely. There had been times when he had struck himself on the forehead and said that it was not true, it was impossible. He could not, day by day, believe that there really was any danger; that in any case it could hardly be more than a passing error, which would disappear as quickly as it had come. Morning after morning he had risen from his bed and said: "It is past! I am free!" But at noon, when the hour approached that he knew he might meet her, might see her again and be near her, he had taken long walks to other parts of the town, in sleet and mud, to run away from himself and his own thoughts.

His first thought, when he saw the danger approach-

ing, had been to escape by at once returning home. He knew what was at stake, and would have done it in spite of everything, if he had not to the very last been convinced that he could subdue his passion, and if he had not felt that, before every trace of its contamination had been cleansed out of his senses, he had no right again to take Betty in his arms and implore her forgiveness.

But for the last few days he had fallen into a gloomy, hopeless melancholy. As a last desperate attempt at rescue he had resolved to bid defiance to temptation, had found her out on her walks, saluted, spoken to her and accompanied her home to her door. But every time he had but found fresh attractions in her figure, fresh beauties in her features; and at last, in holding out his hand to say good-bye, the blood had rushed tumultuously to his heart at the sight of the little flash in her eye and the red spots on her cheeks, which betrayed more than words what he had dimly suspected—that she might become his, that if he but held up his hand the rare fruit would fall ripe into his lap.

When the apothecary now had left him he walked at random about the streets without being able to find rest.

He did not dare to go home. He knew there would be a letter for him from Betty, and he had not courage to see it. He had pulled the fur collar close around his neck, and sought all the little streets where

there was least noise. He felt cold, like one in a fever. His heart was so tortured, his nerves so overstrained by the restless musing of the last few days, that the mere sound of a carriage brought him real bodily pain.

He had reached that point when for a minute at times and in earnest he had intended to become unfaithful to Betty; and then he pondered upon the possible consequences of such a step, and calculated the probabilities that Betty would get to know about it. At the time when he had given the apothecary his "Yes" with regard to the return journey the next day, he had just devised a suitable pretext for a possible postponement; and he felt now that the hour had come when the die had to be cast. He knew that this day would decide his fate, and he went about preparing himself, tarrying, as it were, on the surrender which would sever the past from the future by a wide gulf.

In the meantime he had, without knowing it himself, come into the vicinity of the Parliament House, and when he discovered it he seized with eagerness a means whereby he might possibly divert his thoughts.

When he reached it he found, however, that the Upper House was closed; the sitting was already over. And he then, mechanically, went down to the House of Commons.

There were crowds of people in the hall as well as in the chamber. A short, emaciated man with hair mixed with grey combed back stood in the middle of the hall speaking. With a voice trembling with indig-

nation, a look that lightened with ecstasy, he threw his words, as it were, towards the secretary of state, who, pale but calm, stood leaning against a pillar with his hands behind his back, looking up to the ceiling.

Some members of the House had gathered in a circle round the orator, and there was, as it were, a seething agitation all over the hall and up between the closely-packed heads of the auditory, over the excited, listening, and convulsed features of whom the electric lamps cast their strange white light.

All on a sudden the little man raised himself on tip-toe, held his thin, sinewy hand, with the fore-finger stretched out, towards the secretary of state, and cried—

"The right honourable secretary of state did not know what he should call the conduct of the opposition. Very well! But *we* know what we shall call *his*. And it must be said here—it is *treacherous!*"

The word became the signal for an extraordinary commotion. While the speaker rang his bell, several members jumped up from their chairs, and from the long row at the back where the peasants were seated a strong concordant "Hear!" sounded.

The secretary of state advanced, quivering, a step.

"I call the house to witness"——

"It is perfectly unnecessary," the other one overbore him, in such a passion that his voice died away. "On that this ministry has called the entire Danish people to witness for the last ten years!"

Renewed storm. From the auditory "bravos" and hissing sounded between each other; the members thronged together, the speaker rang and rang again.

Anton rose and went away. This stir, these strong words, this white light bobbing up and down, attacked him and made him feel sick. When he had again reached the street the clock of St. Paul's church struck two.

He trembled. He knew that now she walked out there at the usual places, waiting perhaps for him. Hadn't he said the last time that he would come? And had she not then lowered her look, as if she, too, had suspected what this would mean? Should he go out there? Was it indeed of any use to continne to fight against a power which was too strong for him?—Or—or—?

He slackened his pace.

He turned into the poor quarters in front of Nyboder, where he forced himself to stop before all the scanty shop-windows and attentively look at every one of the articles exhibited in them—to try to deceive himself for the time and to lull his troubled blood into silence. When once he stood before a modest toy-shop, whose Liliputian world carried his thoughts home to his own little Fritz, the tears rose to his eyes, and it was as if the little pictures and dolls and the little Christmas-tree with its candles—yes, even the carriages in the street and the basket-woman in the lanes cried out to him, "Go home! go home!"

He sauntered back by the same road that he had come, looked at the same things, and stopped at the same places. But he had no longer control over himself; inexorably the decision ripened within him; slowly he was dragged, as it were, step by step, out towards that spot on which his thoughts were fixed, while stronger and stronger the delicate voice of his little son seemed to cry to him, "Papa! papa! come home! come home!"

Near the entrance to Long Line he caught sight of a little thin gentleman with light grey gaiters, a certain Mr. Meuse, one of the old friends of his youth, who slowly came walking towards him in his customary manner with a silver-mounted cane under his arm, a tiny little mite of a white trained dog close at his heels, and a square glass in his right eye—sniffing at a distance to every lady that passed him. He was a man of about Anton's age, without a beard, with a yellowish complexion and enervated features, but a quick head, an unusually acute intellect, who, with an ability and energy which had made him notorious, filled a highly respected office in the department of the chancellor of the exchequer, but who, nevertheless, was constantly seen sauntering about in the streets and in society as if he had nothing to do, intoxicating himself by the ladies' dresses, and especially confusing the quite young girls with his doubtful conversation.

Anton tried to avoid him, and turned towards the

Custom's Square; but the other one had already seen him, and steered slowly towards him.

"My dear fellow!" he said, "tell me at once candidly if I possibly disturb you in some interesting little chase or other; I shall then instantly disappear! Well, come on! don't take it in bad part. I merely ask the question, otherwise I would take the liberty to shake hands with you. It is now almost half an eternity since we last met. Indeed, I have several times thought of giving you a look-up, but I have come no further as yet than to this fine intention. But what's this? What's the matter with you?"

"With me? Nothing at all—I am perfectly well."

"Well, you *look*, at least, very bad, my dear fellow."

"Well, yes—I have so far passed a rather restless night—the stomach, I think."

"Ah! always the stomach! Our bad stomachs have really gradually become a regular plague to the country—more disquieting than both democracy and socialism. You ought to follow my example: circumvent your stomach as much as possible, take your meals as medicine, a spoonful of soup every alternate hour, a pill of fish twice a day, and so on. It would, on the whole, be highly profitable to our financial position if all would follow that rule. We consume in this country at least 90 per cent. of our energy to digest; it is therefore not to be wondered at that our stomachs at length protest against doing almost all the work alone. Are you coming along down the street?"

Anton followed him, having no will of his own.

"Any news?" his friend asked.

"Nothing particular."

"You came from parliament?"

"Yes: mere wrangling and balderdash without any result. God knows what the end of it will be."

"Well, a crash, I suppose. By the way, have you heard about the crack by our mutual friend, Munk? An ugly affair, a disgusting affair. It was told to me this morning, and I assure you I have had something like a rancid taste in my mouth ever since."

"What has happened, then?"

"Well, simply just what one has foreseen; only it was the afterpiece that became the prettiest. You know his wife? Well! she was a little more naïve than I can properly appreciate; but *enfin*—there was body! Only devilishly jealous—quite uncommonly jealous. Of course, he was no Joseph either, God knows that; but what was worse, he acted as stupidly as an ass, so that one gets quite vexed with him. Do you recollect Nelly?—a trifle too full in the bones, but—hang it! the long and short of it is, *there* he was at length caught. Madame had conceived definite suspicion, followed him secretly one fine day, and caught him in the most flagrant manner any man could be caught in. A great scandal, of course! The whole list of his sins was brought to light on the same occasion—and it was both long and motley. The details of the affair are differently reported,

though; but—as I said before—the sequel, which is the prettiest, is unfortunately true enough."

"Well?" Anton asked. He had become attentive.

"She has become mad. This morning she was taken to the lunatic asylum."

"Indeed," he said, in an inaudible voice.

They had turned down St. Anna Place, and stopped now.

"Really a very annoying affair for our old Munk, who, after all, is quite a nice fellow. Hang it! our good daisies, which ordinarily are rather hardy, are too damned sensitive on that special point. But I say, my dear fellow, you look really bad. You ought to go home and lie down. As I told you before, it is the Mesopotamian country-life that ruins you, my dear fellow. It is really not for civilised people."

When Anton shortly afterwards left him he faltered no longer. This casual meeting became decisive of his resolution; the dismal narrative of his friend struck him with terror which with one stroke restored his sober reflection. He would at once go home and arrange everything for his departure. The next morning he would be away from here, not to return for a long time. On the way he would go to Mrs. Conerding's apartments and leave his card while he knew she was out. She could then hardly entertain any suspicion as regards this, on the whole, so natural departure; and as for himself, there would be something like a slight compensation in yet once more feel-

ing a breath of her living presence, by seeing once more the rooms over which his thoughts now so often had hovered, and actually there take the last mute leave of her who from this hour should be dead to his thoughts. Then he would go home to his country-seat, forget everything that had happened, and only think of mending what evil he had done to Betty.

Soon he stood outside Mrs. Conerding's little hotel, and slowly ascended the stairs, where a servant in livery immediately received him.

If madame was at home?

No!

Anton pretended to be surprised. He asked permission to go into her rooms to write a few words on a card.

A servant maid appeared and showed him the way, opened the door in front of the stairs, and left him there alone.

It was a bright, rather spacious room, resplendent with sun. A light carpet in flowery colours covered the entire floor, chintz curtains hung before the windows, and a chintz tapestry covered the walls. A little chandelier in the shape of a lily hung from the proportionately low ceiling, two gathered roses stood upon the writing table in slender glasses basking in the sun. On the brackets between the windows, and on a bookcase by the chimney, stood phials in many shapes, and Anton recognised at once that acidulated stupefying odour which filled the room, and which he

lingeringly inhaled in thirsty draughts while for a minute he closed his eyes. Through one of the walls he looked between a door curtain into a kind of boudoir that lay in front of the bedroom, which was partly used as a dressing room. On a broad carved chest of drawers with gilded mountings, that could be seen from the drawing-room, lay all kinds of articles of dress: jars, powder-puffs, and again phials; a pair of blue silk slippers rested on a black fur rug in there; and everything lay in a subdued greenish light as if behind a lowered blind. Anton stood immovable and looked at it almost devoutly. His eyes glided over the pictures on the walls, the books on the table, and fixed on a tiny little embroidery which, covered by a rose-coloured tissue paper, lay in the window-sill among balls of yarn. There was not a thing that escaped his attention, and that did not leave an impression upon him. In an arm-chair lay a pair of black gloves, turned inside out, and a fan; on the sofa an open book with the red cover turned upward showing the title: *Chansons d'amour*. A card basket with a single card, that of a lady, stood on the middle of the table, and a little dashingly painted portrait of a child in water-colours hung on the wall underneath the large lithographs of the hotel.

At length he tore himself away. He went over to the writing-table, took a card from his pocket, a fine ivory pen in the shape of a quill from the little silver inkstand on the table, and wrote, after a brief reflec-

tion, only "p. p. c." in one of the corners of the card. Then he put the pen back exactly in the same position, looking, however, first a moment at the black monogram at the top of the handle—and kissed it.

He put the card up against the stand of the writing-table, so that it might at once strike the eye, looked yet a moment at it, and turned away.

But as he turned round he had almost uttered a shriek: in the middle of the room stood Mrs. Conerding, in cloak and hat, looking at him.

A carriage had just rolled through the street, and he had not heard her coming. She was alone, and the blood had left her cheeks.

"I hope, madame," Anton said, stuttering, and after having stood speechless for a long time. "I hope you are not surprised at my presence."

She motioned him silently—with a movement of the hand—to be seated, and took a chair herself a little distance from him.

Anton began in incoherent sentences to explain to her the cause of his visit; but before he had yet finished she turned towards him and asked—

"Are you going away?"

He raised his head; and as they looked at each other it appeared to him as if in this look their bare souls stared at each other.

"Yes," he said.

She looked down and smoothed the muff on her lap with her hand, while she bit her lip.

Suddenly she rose, held out her hand to him, looking the while in the opposite direction.

"Then good-bye," she said briefly.

Anton seized her hand and kissed passionately the glove up underneath her sleeve; but she tore herself violently away and hurried into the cabinet, where he heard her throwing herself down on the sofa.

He sank down on the chair; and with his hands pressed against the temples sat a long while staring rigidly at the floor. From the cabinet no sound was heard. A street-organ played in a yard close by, and down in the street a fish-woman cried her wares.

At last he rose, tottering, and went in there. He found her sitting immovable on a sofa, hiding her face with one hand, and her head drooping, turned away. He seated himself by her side, took the vacant hand that rested on her lap and stroked it, trembling. She made no resistance.

"Nanna," he whispered, "will you love me?"

She did not reply at once; but when he repeated it, and she slowly raised her head up to him, he noticed with some surprise that her eyes were dry.

VIII.

While this took place a little man walked several times up and down the pavement and looked at the house with a suspicious look, went restlessly in and out of the gateway, and posted himself at last like a sentry behind the nearest street corner.

It was the apothecary.

He had not been long in the town before he had discovered that there was something unusual and serious the matter with his son-in-law. In vain he had tried to get scent of what it might be, and fearful suspicions had struck him every time he saw his absent-minded look and gloomy air.

When he, therefore, this same day had taken leave of him at the King's Square the thought rose within him to follow him at a distance, and, if possible, in this manner get at his secret. And he had faithfully carried out his purpose; not a moment had he lost sight of him since; he had followed him through all the streets and attentively observed him everywhere.

When he saw Anton disappear into this house he had posted himself in the gateway; and when shortly afterwards an elegantly-dressed lady went past him,

and he heard from the staircase above the porter tell her that a gentleman had just gone into her rooms, he promised himself not to give it up until he had thrown some light on this matter.

This purpose, too, he carried out staunchly. Only by midnight did he leave his post; but then the tears trickled down his cheeks.

At home, at the hotel, he found a card that had recently arrived. It was from Anton. It said: "Some pressing business in the Finance Committee, of which you know I am a member, necessitates a short journey to Falster. Don't know when I may come back. Leave in case you are unable to await my return."

Yet the next morning the apothecary went to the house where Anton was, and learned there of the porter himself that the same gentleman who had gone up there the previous afternoon still was there, and had hired a couple of rooms.

In the evening the sorrowful and broken-down father left Copenhagen. He only left a slip of paper on Anton's table, saying: "Have left by the evening train."

Some hours later Anton returned to his customary hotel. He did not even light the lamp, but threw himself, without taking off his ulster, on the sofa, and immediately fell into a dead-like sleep.

But in the middle of the night he suddenly awoke and wrung his hands convulsively over his head.

"Betty!—oh, Betty!"

CONCLUSION.

It was an early, grey, cold winter morning. A close mist had spread over the town; the scattered street lamps winked their eyes like one who is about to awake. Here and there in the streets lonely persons went about sweeping the pavements or cleaning the sewers; but up in the houses the inmates still lay asleep underneath the heavy blankets and behind the closely-drawn curtains. Only in one place—out at the railway station—bustle and stir predominated, and a sea of light cast its rays out in the mist as if from a fairy palace, whereto carriages and people from all directions thronged. There was a fearful noise. The whole of the lobby was crammed with all sorts of people, a motley crowd of wrapped-up Christmas travellers, who, like shapeless bundles of fur and woollen neckcloths, squeezed each other and forced their way to the booking-offices. The money-takers swore, the porters yelled; a poor young mother, ready to cry, accompanied by a crowd of restive children hugging her closely, stood in the middle of the crowd, being unable to move on; and a young merry student excited, in the midst of the confusion,

a loud peal of laughter by his rush shoes and his Chinese parti-coloured dressing-gown, which he had thrown over his ulster and tied together round his waist with a crimson sash. At the last moment a cab came dashing along, and a tall pale gentleman in a sable overcoat leapt out of it. Amidst the curses of all the functionaries he was bundled into a carriage, and the heavy train started off.

Gradually, as the day broke, it became lively in the overcrowded carriages; people got jostled closely together there, and laughed at their troubles; the students spread rugs over their knees, and brought out cards; even the face of the young anxious mother lightened up with a smile as she sat amidst her little ones and convinced herself that she had really got them all there. In the course of the forenoon the face of the sky cleared up too, and none but joyous holiday people crowded the deck of the steamer across the Belt, which was as bright as a mirror. Only the tall gentleman in the sable overcoat remained brooding below in a small cabin where he had locked himself up.

But by degrees the crowds thinned; already on the green land of Fuhnen they diminished perceptibly, and when Fredericia was past they sat scattered about in the carriages stretching their legs agreeably on the seats and sofas. Then the darkness announced itself afresh, and the mist came drifting from the Jutland moors, enveloping the landscape. In close vibrat-

ing drops it settled underneath the sooty roofs of the carriages and dripped with a melancholy sound down on the closed window, behind which the sable-clad gentleman now sat in solitude with his thoughts.

It was Anton. He had put his hat on the seat beside him and hid his face in his hands, supporting his elbows on his keees. Only at intervals he was quite conscious of where he was and how he had come here. He felt wretched, that his life was wasted, his happiness gone. He would think of nothing except this, to get home—only get home; and he remained sitting immovable while the train groaned on between hills and through forests, and the cold darkness closer and closer forced itself around him.

In the meantime a fidgety bustle prevailed at home on Guderslovholm. Already in the forenoon Betty had received a telegram from Anton which briefly announced his return; and from the same moment she had been in full activity preparing, according to promise, a festive reception for him. She was almost half-crazy for joy. She had during the last weeks thought of nothing but that moment when she again should hold him in her arms; and as the hour now approached light beamed from all the windows of Guderslovholm so as to bid him welcome at a distance. Four torches were planted on each side of the entrance, thrusting their red

flames of joy up towards the black sky; in all the passages and on the stairs the lamps were lit, and in the sea of light in the rooms Betty herself rushed about with burning cheeks to give the last discreet touch to the work which for days past had been her dearest thought.

Suddenly the noise of a carriage was heard on the pavement below. She started. Could it already be he?

"It is madame's sister," the servant-maid said, who stood on a little ladder fixing a heavy spruce branch over the door.

"Oh yes, to be sure!" and she threw away the flowers she had in her hands and ran through all the rooms and down the stairs to receive her. On the last step she threw herself about her neck, and, too overwhelmed to notice her painfully-contracted features, or to hear the apothecary, who had remained standing outside the door in a fit of violent weeping, she dragged her sister with her upstairs.

"You are a good deal surprised, I hope. But you will be more so when you come into—— Oh! I am so happy!" she said, and put her arm round her waist and kissed her passionately.

They came into the sitting-room. Underneath the large, lit, crystal chandelier stood a table festively laid with plate and fruit just in the same way as on that night when Anton left; fresh flowers lay as a border round the table-cloth, and all the doors were

decked with spruce branches and the Danish national flag.

"Well—do you recognise it again?" Betty asked laughing.

Kamma had to support herself on a chair; her heart writhed within her. But Betty again put her arm round her waist, and took her into the cabinet. Here all was lit up by little Christmas-trees with cotton-wool snow and gilt stars, which stood in groups in the corners; and down from the ceiling hung a crown of gilt cones of the spruce full of little candles.

"Isn't it nice?" Betty said.

She was going to show her the bedroom, which was decorated too, and where the festively-dressed nurse had been shut up with Fritz; but at the same moment slow steps were heard near them, and the apothecary glided in.

Betty let go her hold of her sister and stared at him as if he were a ghost.

"But pa'—— Have you arrived?"

He bent his head. And Betty looked at them—from the one to the other—while the colour slowly changed on her cheeks.

"What is the matter? Why do you look so?"

"Papa arrived this morning," Kamma at length said, turning away her face.

"This morning! But why? Why didn't you come with Anton?"

"Because—papa wanted to tell you beforehand, Betty, that—your husband has deceived you."

"Anton!" She stared again from the one to the other. "Is it true?" she then said, scarcely audibly.

"Papa at once suspected him when he went over there, and has assured himself of it."

"Is it true?" she repeated, and sank at the same time quietly down upon a sofa she had seized hold of.

Here she sat a long time, stunned, as it were, looking down at the floor, while the apothecary went into an adjacent room to hide his crying. But Kamma went up to her and put her hand on her shoulder.

"Betty," she said, "I do not doubt but that you now know what you owe to yourself to do. Is that not so?"

Betty raised her look, with fear, as it were, towards her sister, and lowered it again.

"Yes," she then said, firmly decided.

"And you understand that you cannot remain an hour under the same roof with a man whom you can no longer look upon as your husband."

"Yes: I must go away," she said simply. A triumphant light passed over Kamma's pale face, as it were. She caught her sister with both hands round the head and pressed her to her, kissing her on the forehead. "Poor little Bet, my own sister!"

Simultaneously a servant-maid appeared in the door with two big branched candlesticks with lit candles. But at the sight of these Betty at once regained her consciousness.

"Put them out! Put them out! Put them out!" she almost shrieked wildly, and held, averting like, her hands out before her. Put them out! Put them out! Oh God—Oh God!" she groaned, and hid her face in the corner of the sofa.

Kamma went up to the maid and gave her orders quietly to let unnecessary lights be extinguished all over the house, and enjoined a footman to be ready with a carriage at the first sign. Then she took a seat next to Betty, so as immediately to settle everything necessary for her departure.

Half-an-hour later Anton drove into his ancestral home. He ascended, tottering, the well-known stairs, but no one received him. Only in the semi-dark sitting-room, which only a lonely lamp lit up, he found Kamma standing by the table, supported with the knuckles of her left hand on the table slab. She did not move to receive him, and he shuddered at the look with which she looked at him.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Where is Betty?"

"Your wife, sir," she said slowly, and with bitter pride, "is not here. She has charged me to tell you that there are things so contemptible that they

release from every consideration. I am sure I need not explain myself any further, and you will therefore understand why it is I and not she who receive you here."

"Where is Betty? I want to speak with her."

"My sister does not want to speak with you, sir. She will not even suffer your name to be spoken in her presence. You have dishonoured her as deeply as any woman can be dishonoured, and she knows what she owes to herself and her station—my sister is no longer your wife. She releases herself of every tie that has united her with you."

"It is not true! Betty won't do that—she has not the heart to do it. I want to speak with her. She must listen to me. Where is she? What does it all mean? Who has given you a right to speak here? Tell me where she is: she must hear me. I *will* see her; I *will!*"

The sound of a carriage was heard rolling away below on the drive.

"What is that?"

"That, sir, was your wife and son, who now have left you. And that there may not be any misunderstanding, I may as well tell you that my sister has heard our conversation behind this door. It was her object from your own mouth to ascertain the truth for your sake; that was all. When she heard it, she has, as you see, not wavered, and I expect therefore that you do not entertain the least hope

by persuasions to be able to affect her decision. She is no longer your wife, and she curses the hour she became so."

. . . . . .

"NICE.

"DEAR MOTHER,— . . . To your discreet question concerning Mrs. Conerding I shall give you a frank answer. Yes, she is my mistress. As you perhaps know, her husband and his relatives have instantly demanded a divorce and, after having spent the last farthing of her fortune, left her, so to say, without the most needful. They have taken away her child from her, under the pretext that she was not worthy to educate it, and from all sides she has been the object of a contempt that has no limits. Yes, I have at last to confess that you are right, that this is a strange world, and that our moral, especially on this point, is for savages and Hottentots, and not for civilised people.

"As regards myself, I am living here quite pleasantly. I should tell a lie if I denied it. Here are a lot of excellent people, by whose society I profit very much. I have now given up every hope of any renewed cohabitation with my wife, and perhaps it is best thus. I am told at second-hand that the apothecary has sold 'Nathalie's Villa' and that they will remove to Copenhagen. When this has happened I shall probably return home to further

arrange my affairs. I sometimes think of joining the diplomatic service, but I am told that I am too compromised. I shall lose my seat in the Upper House, too, of course, for the same reason; but I shan't worry about *that*.

"The weather here is splendid. We had a picnic yesterday out into the mountains, a whole party from the town. It was very pleasant. The ladies here are really extraordinary. On the whole, time passes quickly, faster than I had expected. I take long walks every day in the magnificent neighbourhood; but next week I think I shall go to Switzerland. From there I shall send you another letter.—Your

ANTON."

THE END.

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