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ALONE

Music is made from sorrow,
modeled upon grief.

We had eaten supper and were sitting in the parlor. It was approaching midnight, and the entire evening had been rigidly formal and our conversation inane.

Talk was dwindling away and threatening to end completely. When the wheels of a driver out on the street no longer broke the silence, the only sound was the puling song of the lamp wick.

I saw Anna conceal a yawn with her hand. Her brother, who lolled in a rocker with his legs extended, made no effort to conceal his yawns, for we were old friends. I could no longer remain sitting here, although I would still have wanted to stay and watch her from the half darkness of the lamp shade where she sat near the light, bent over her knitting. Now she set it down on the table and seemed about to rise. I rose first, took my hat from atop the piano, and bowed to her mother.

“Are you going already?” she asked, but at least she reached out her hand to me.

“It’s that time already,” I said, lacking enough pride to hide the melancholy in my voice, although I knew I should have.

“Well, goodbye then, and have a good trip!” She further wished me good health and bade me bring back many new ideas from abroad.

“How many — a knapsack full?” I tried for a note of bitter disdain in my voice.

“Well, stay well then, live it up, and as we said, write all kinds of things,” said her brother, shaking off the lethargy that had troubled me all evening.

Anna had been sitting between them. In going from her mother to her brother, I had passed her by. I wanted her handshake to be the last before I left my home country.

“Goodbye...”

“Goodbye. Have a good trip.”

How dryly, formally, and coldly she said it! How limp and devoid of any feeling her hand was!

When the others came to escort me to the hallway, she stayed in the parlor to close the piano, where she had sat dreaming in the dusk of evening when I arrived. I had heard her playing out on the sidewalk, and stood listening to it for a while in back of the door, winded, my heart pounding. I could see her take the lamp from the table now and was already hoping that she would light the way for me down the dark steps. But she merely took the sheet music to a shelf, then turned away, went through the parlor to the door of her own room and closed it — mercilessly, I felt. The last I saw of her was her fine profile, her clear face, and a curl at the base of her ear.

No, I thought as I descended the steps, if you don't care, then neither do I. And I let the spring on the outer door have full play. Let it slam! And it slammed so hard that the windows in the wall rang and the long dark passageway responded angrily.

Thank God it was all clear now! Until the very end I had been tormented with hope.

From now on, there would be no more suffering. No more than for a wanderer in the desert, when the mirage suddenly ends and he sees nothing but the shoreless sea of sand around him, and knows that he cannot quench his thirst.

Be content, then, I said to myself. Why is your breast there mangled and your heart crying out! There can be no panic since there is no hope of rescue.

A dozing driver sits slouching on his buggy under the flickering gas flame at the corner of the street.

The thick trees of the Boulevard form a gloomy arch over his head. Some day-worker creeps along in the cemetery of the old church with his girl friend.

A solitary woman wearing a headscarf slows her pace and slips cautiously past me. She has such humble, pleading eyes. Had you taken her with you, she would have been so thankful — maybe she is waiting for you, almost standing there under the light. Tomorrow she would have come to see you off on the ship, sought you out with her eyes from the crowd of people, and secretly waved her handkerchief goodbye. Why did you let her go?

Anna! She cannot come. She would gladly come, but she cannot! But don't take it to heart, darling! You can't! Don't weep, and don't die of sorrow. Try to be happy. I'll return in a couple of years, bringing many new ideas with me.

The entire Erottaja market place was in a hubbub as the buggy drove down from the triangle, which was filled with lively university students who had just arrived in the city.

They were young people, shouting and cheering. They were still enjoying themselves, and the world lay open before them.

But was I out of my mind? Bitter toward, and envious of them, who could hardly know her and who perhaps cared not a bit for her, as she for them! Did I envy them simply because they were staying here? But the one nearest me was wearing his white cap thrust down toward one ear so carefree and bumptiously. He had such powerful shoulders and black, curly hair. I was wearing a hat like an old gentleman, and I was fat and heavy and clumsy.

I forced myself to laugh scornfully at the comparison, and putting on a show of energy, I crossed the Esplanade toward the Kämpi restaurant, over which there glowed a bright electric light.

What a sweet feeling to go to a restaurant, then find one's number and climb to one's lodging! To have a bill handed to one in such a friendly manner "daily, in order to avoid the possibility of error." What a homey sense in this room! What an extraordinary impression of order conveyed by the pair of unused candles of exactly the same length, one on either side of the table mirror, and the porcelain ashtray in front of it, on the bottom of which I read mechanically, "Northern Manufacturing Sales, Helsinki. – Large supply of domestic articles for private homes and restaurants."

Why is it that a room in a restaurant is said to lack personality? Is it because one does not see in it the stamp of a resident, that it does not awaken memories of events in his life? But I have lived one half of my life in restaurants. Those mute chairs, sofas, and tables, all similar, are to me like hereditary furnishings.

And there is my suitcase wide open before the alcove, my suitcase so steeped in memories. When I packed it a week ago as I leaving the countryside, we were still good friends. She brought me clean clothes from the laundry when I was involved in money matters. She was a little out of breath from running up to the room on the second floor, and sat down in a chair to catch her breath with her hands in her lap.

She wanted to see how one packed a suitcase for a trip abroad. "Well, is that the way? You bachelor, you don't know the first thing about it! Go away!" And she thrust me aside, dumped out the contents of the suitcase, and began packing it anew. She was kneeling on the floor, her hair attractively tousled. I had to hand her the things. White linens settled from

her hands, both atop one another and overlapping, and the smallest opening got its fill of collars and handkerchiefs.

I stood by, clumsy and admiring. She wouldn't be acting this way if she didn't love me. I would be leaving tomorrow, and this was the right day. And I would say the words that had been on the tip of my tongue all summer, that I loved her.

I cannot see her face. I can see her neck flushing. She puts in a few more handkerchiefs, tosses the whole bundle to the floor, and all I hear is her hurried footsteps descending the steps and crossing the hall into her own room, the door of which slams shut.

I manage to leave without bothering anyone — her mother is rattling dishes in the kitchen — I wander through woods and hills and when I return along the railroad track, barely getting out of the way of an oncoming train, her door is still closed. But on top of the clothing in my room there is a sheet of stationery from her. She has considered me a friend, an older brother, almost an uncle. Anything else is out of the question. She has said nothing to her mother or brother. She begs that I do the same. Because she “doesn't want me to.”

She did not come that evening. I did not see her the next day until shortly before the train left. She had left off her light summer garb, and was wearing sober visiting clothes. From a gay, mischievous girl, whom I had dared, as an old acquaintance, to swing around by the hand, she had changed into a proper miss.

So there are memories, dear beloved objects in this room. The suitcase still bears the touch of her hand. Why do they say that a room in a restaurant lacks personality and arouses no regret when leaving?

That alcove would have a story to tell, where I had spent sleepless nights during this week of torment, I, a mature man weeping into the pillow in my arms, a pillow with the restaurant's logo on its corner.

How could I bear to leave you now, the place where I have known joy that filled my heart! But I had to go! Away, away! Lock up everything! Lock up the past and throw the key into the rapids! And with my knee I pressed my suitcase mercilessly to lock it, as if I wanted to squeeze the life from someone there.

It was probably a ring for me that I heard through the open door from the bell at the end of the hallway.

Oh yes, the porter. “Please see to it that these things get to the ship.”

Goodbye my room. I asked myself half aloud if I weren't sad to be leaving home. Throw a last kiss there at the gate to your fathers' home, where the dying evening twilight glows its farewell to you.

I went down the steps to the restaurant. It wouldn't do to leave like an escapee. This was a rare, ceremonial moment, and I had to drink a toast in its honor.

Going down the stairs, where carpeting deadens the sound of footsteps, I see in the mirror, to my satisfaction, a man whose eyes are narrowed in a mocking frown and the corners of whose mouth expresses disdain. I myself enjoy that mockery, my mind's defiance, which I have managed to engender in myself after a long time. And I want to maintain it.

But I know it has no firm basis, and that the scorn and defiance will fade away.

In the restaurant vestibule, I can feel the hard fiber mat underfoot. My overcoat falls from my shoulders into the servant's hands. There she has stood last summer before the mirror arranging her hair and hat. The large dining room is lighted up as if for a wedding. Voices can be heard from a side room, women's hats can be seen, officer's epaulets, and an occasional white breast. We have once had dinner there with the entire family before they leave for the country. – The room is almost empty now. Opposite the door in the center of the floor there is a round wine table. A little old bald-headed gentleman is circling it, chewing on hardtack, with his fork in attack position. Two other gentlemen in evening dress, government clerks who have apparently come from some affair are sitting farther off at the rear of the room on opposite sides of a small, round table, their foreheads almost touching, talking in low voices.

I cross the slippery floor to the farthest corner of the room. The waiter has started out from his ambush against the opposite wall.

I don't know what to order. Well, let him bring a sling then.

But when I get it and set about drinking, I cannot understand why on earth I am here all alone having a drink in the middle of the night. Suddenly all the tension within me gives way, and my body sags into a heap. I can no longer hold my head erect, and my scorn and defiance fall to the earth from their factitious scaffold.

For all this is really infinitely sad and hopeless.

She had been my last hope. She had got me on my feet again, when I lay in a heap, psychologically nerveless. I had meant to begin living again, had dared to open another future before me. I wanted to act, to have an effect, to struggle. And I had strained to do so. And everything was as it had been. I was in this restaurant as on a barren shore from which I thought I had sailed away. I felt even older and more helpless than before. Nothing had been slashed in me, nor did I feel the pain of being crushed, but all resilience was gone. I was like a worn out and warped collar tree.

During the course of these final nights I had raged my raging and whined my whining. Now I no longer felt capable of whining or grieving. I would have been satisfied if I could have rid my head of the memories. But they were for once and for all accustomed to come at this hour of the night. They came along an already prepared channel. Just as clear, although perhaps a bit more pallid and colorless than before.

II

I have known her from the time she was little. The first time I lay eyes on her is when her brother takes me to meet the family and introduces me as his best friend. Her mother is a quiet, pleasant widow, a gentle and attractive person, with hair already gray. She seems to live only for her children.

Coffee is brought in, and the bread tray is carried by a small, bright-eyed girl who looks one boldly in the eye, who is amused and does not try to hide it. Her curtsey is brief, a mere bob, as if done out of force and performed out of mercy, but which, like short skirts, must be endured during their period. Two black braids reach below her waist. You will cause many a heartache when you grow up, I think in passing.

We become well acquainted. I go to their house often, and she goes to school at the same time as I go to the university. I either catch up with her or slow down when I see her turn a corner behind me. Often, when I don't happen to notice her, I get a snowball in the back. And when I whirl to look at her, she turns, laughing, and is already making another snowball in her reddened hands. In the fresh morning air, her hat is off to one side of her head and her muff hangs on a string at her side like a woodsman's pack. It sometimes happens that I see her at eight in the morning, when I am shambling along home after drinking the night away. She has no inkling of where I am coming from, and runs by me, bumping into me as she does. When I undress after getting home, I wash away all the night's dirt and lie down on the untouched bed, she is there before me for a short time like a clean little bird one often sees flying across the road in front of him.

She is obviously proud of her mature cavalier, who so often accompanies her to the door of the school. When she meets me, she reserves the right to bow to me, and I raise my hat as I would to a mature miss. And often she runs over to me from a group of girls on the other side of the street and tosses her books for me to carry, thus bragging of our acquaintanceship to her schoolmates. Whenever she takes a notion, she may say: "Come over to our house, please." Of course my name is in her diary along with a poem, and I think that at the time I was her "ideal."

I become engaged, and when I go to greet them for the first time after that, she refuses to come into the parlor. Her mother goes to demand she appear, but she merely says, "I won't come," and draws some pictures in the condensation on the window. When her mother tries further to coax her, she again answers, "I won't come," and rubs the windowpane clean. I see this through the open door, and hear her mother scold her: "Anna, don't smear the window there."

My fiancée is sitting near the parlor table thumbing through some photographs. I have a momentary reaction: her features seem so thick and ordinary when viewed from the front.

The next day her brother tells me with a laugh that Anna thinks my fiancée, who is a teacher in a girls' school, is "ugly" and "conceited," and that no one in her class could stand her. "And what a taste she has..."

She disappears from my mind for a number of years. I finish my exams, move away, and very seldom visit Helsinki. I have no other memory of her from these days than that of a slender, growing schoolgirl in the upper grades of a Finnish girls' school. She is shyer than before, and once when her brother teases her about some "flame," she goes off offended and does not reappear.

Only a year ago she reappears in her present form. I have tired of my situation and of life in small country towns, in a number of which I have been a teacher. My engagement has long since been broken off, and new alliances have also been dissolved. An opportunity to travel abroad has been offered me, and I came to Helsinki in the spring to learn French. I arrive with an inner rage that has developed in the country, in the far corners of small towns, where the strength of life seems to shrink and dry up, the breath of life to compress, and suffer. All my ties have been severed, my parents have died, and I have no relatives for whom I care. I have no responsibilities to anyone, and I plan to live fully, to spend many years enjoying the life of the great world for many years before yielding to old age. I come to Helsinki with much the same feelings I'd once had as a young university student.

I go straight to the old, familiar building and ring the doorbell. A fully-grown young lady comes to open the door. I still have the feeling that, in one glance, her face, her eyes, her long hair, her rounded bosoms, her slender figure ... all are imprinted on my mind as on a photographer's film.

"Oh, hello!" she shouts happily, and reaches out a hand.

I am about to say that she is a grown-up lady, and that I wouldn't have known her. But something stops me from doing so. Some vague need assures me that the difference in our ages isn't really all that great – fifteen years, at most, a figure I calculate as I follow her into the parlor.

She runs to get her mother, and turns in the doorway to look at me. Her swaying and her other movements seemed to be taking place within me, and my blood throbs along with them.

I fall in love with her at once. A mature man who has experienced practically everything, I am now bound to her with undying feelings. In her there seems to be everything I have previously sought in vain. In her there is not the slightest detail, not a movement, not a quiver in the voice that disturbs or troubles me. Earlier when I have been in love, I can feel momentary weaknesses in my emotions, some sort of rotten place. I can find faults in those others, criticize them coldly, and always with the feeling that my love is passing — and so it is. And with those others I have always had reasons for loving them. Now I can find none. I cannot define my attraction. It just is what it is. She has entered my blood with the first sip, like a powerful wine, has penetrated every cell and blood vessel, making me young and giving me strength.

I feel the same as I had years ago when I fell in love for the first time. My love is just as emotional and my behavior as childish. I seek occasions to meet her wherever I can, come up with all kinds of excuses to visit the family, and before going to bed at night I often walk beneath her window. I neglect all my tasks, do nothing to prepare for my journey, not bothering to study, which is actually my reason for coming here. My feelings toward the women teachers are almost the same as those I've had in school earlier. I try to slide through doing as little as possible.

Spring arrives, the seas open, and I am supposed to take the first ship to Lübeck. I postpone that to a later date. It is too hot in the south. Paris is too crowded during the Fair, etc. etc.

Now and then the two of us go for a walk, look at the gleaming blue sea from Observatory Hill, and at the harbor where ships glide and sails flap, and where gleaming white buildings surround the shore market. Before lunch we sit in front of the Chapel, where people flock around the fountain in their colorful new summer clothing. Little girls are peddling freshly picked flowers, and every time we are there she lets me buy her a bunch of hepatica. She fixes it to her breast, sniffs the fragrance, and forgets the flowers at once. But I am happy, and cannot take my eyes off the flowers in the buttonhole on her bosom.

If I could only know if she loves me or if she has someone else. And suddenly I am afraid to leave and go somewhere below the horizon across distant seas for a long time.

“Sometimes I don't feel at all like leaving Finland,” I say to her once.

But she notices nothing in my voice nor does she see anything in my eyes. She greets a tall, handsome university student who happens to be passing the fountain at the time. Moistening her lips with a glass, she says quite carelessly, still following the student with her eyes:

“But why? Isn’t it fun to get to see the world?”

It would be too much to demand that she love me already, I console myself. But the thought that she will stay here and perhaps be engaged when I return begins to trouble me more and more. I am envious of everyone, for I can see that people are already beginning to take notice of her. Strollers often turn to look back at her. The gentlemen of Helsinki have discovered a new beauty queen growing up in her. She has noticed it herself. Sometimes the too obvious fascination of a passerby brings a blush to her cheek. I study her from the side, following every movement and flicker of expression on her face. For no apparent reason she suddenly breaks into gay and lively speech, which seems affected to me, and is not really pleasing. Or she seems scatterbrained, looks at me over her shoulder as if teasing. For weeks I go around with the constant intention of telling her of my feelings. But day after day passes, and on the first day of Sunday they are already leaving for the country.

The station is swarming with students. She and her brother have rushed on ahead. I push through the crowd behind them with her mother, carrying the luggage destined for the train. The whistle blows three times and I still have not had a chance to say a last goodbye, when I hope to look at her and give some hint of my feelings by squeezing her hand. I barely have time to say goodbye to her mother, and she wishes me heartfelt good luck on my journey. But Anna is already standing at the window of the coach, with a group of good friends around her, whom I cannot shove aside. Furthermore, she doesn’t seem to notice me. She has forgotten that I am going on such a long journey. Only when the train starts off and I, downcast, follow its increasingly fast movement, does she notice me, nod her head gaily and complacently, and draw back into the train.

What a terrible Sunday in the hot city, which is almost emptied of people. How I hate the Esplanade, which is packed with workmen, guardsmen, and maidservants. And how the eternal clangor of the brass band in front of the Chapel, which it is impossible to get by, grates on my nerves.

I wander from South Harbor as far as the tip of Juniper Point. I sit there for a long time looking at the sea, on which the sailboats tracing their course make me more and more sad for some reason. And when a steamer, filled with people on a pleasure cruise, sets out for the open sea with its waving banners, I can stand it no longer, but go back into the city.

I take a notion to go back to their building. I pretend to have an errand, and on that pretext I get the key from the owner of the building. All the windows are chalked over, the paintings, mirrors and chandeliers are enclosed in white covers. A forgotten hat hangs on a hook in the hallway, and there is an old, torn glove on one window. The piano is closed. I touch it and it makes a sound like a sleeper whose slumber has been disturbed. I go, my breast trembling, into her room. The bed is empty, there are papers and an empty box in the stove. On the vanity there is a comb with a few hairs in it. I take them from it. I do know this is wild and laughable. The whole world would mock me if they knew that I am here. But let it be! I know only that I love her, love her stupidly, hopelessly.

I loll on the sofa for a long time. At times someone drives by on the street, making the whole building quake. Then there is total silence except for the buzzing of flies' wings.

She does not love me, I don't matter to her at all. She did not even remember to wave goodbye to me. But no matter how sure I am of that, I continue to hope. And I still try to console myself with the fact that I have revealed nothing to her and so she knows nothing of my feelings. If she is to know of them, if I were to write to her...? And lying there, I begin to think about a letter to her. I will lay open my feelings before her, I will melt her heart with my words, I will open to her the depths of my soul, and maybe she will melt, maybe she will at least give me hope.

I have the letter ready in three days, but I cannot send it. I don't dare risk everything. And so I write to her brother and let him know that I don't intend to go abroad until autumn. As I had anticipated, he invites me to come out to the country.

Leaning back against a comfortable second-class seat, I gaze out the coach window at the greening land, the leafing birch trees, the sowers out in the fields, and railway stations which look as if they have been cleaned to celebrate the summer. Some of them have been scrubbed down and painted, and when passing by one gets the scent of oil paint and asphalt. During stops one hears the forever new trill of the finch, while farther off a cuckoo calls.

Not a shred is left of my grief and despair. I am sure that she will come to love me. I feel a strength within me that she cannot resist. "With the strength of my spirit," I repeat in my thoughts. And simultaneously I am somehow able to accept the thought that she does not love me. The peace that stems from that thought increases my confidence and gives me increasingly greater hopes of success. Above all, I must remain cold and fight against being overly emotional. I have a new summer suit, which seems to improve even my short and plump body.

Nevertheless I am still trembling nervously in the afternoon as we approach the station I have been waiting for. When the train whistles its approach, that frightens me. I have wired that I am coming, and they are waiting for me at the station, all three of them. I am a little clumsy with my suitcases. Her brother asks about the news from Paris, and I can only laugh in confusion.

Anna is even lovelier in her light summer dress. She is bareheaded, with only a parasol to protect her from the sun. She and her brother walk on ahead, and I follow with her mother. I hope that they will wait for us at the fork of the road that crosses the tracks, but he shoves the gate back to keep it open, and doesn't even glance back.

"We live here all alone, almost in the wilds," her mother says. "It's so wonderful that you've come. We were all glad when we got your telegram."

The fact that they were all glad puts me in a good humor again. At their gate, Anna too turns around and shouts a question about the key to the tea chest to her mother.

"They seem to be on the parlor table," I shout the answer for her mother.

And this consoles me completely. Her going on ahead was no demonstration of her feelings, as I had feared. She does so just in order to be in time to make the tea.

We sit at the supper table for a long time. She acts as the hostess and stops only to sit opposite me when we are drinking the tea. With her elbows on the table and her cheeks resting on her fists, she listens to me, although I fear with every movement she moves that she will leave. I talk, I'm in a good mood, and I describe, cleverly, I think, summer in Helsinki, my life in the country, and the laughable conditions in the small villages. I get her into the same mood, and it seems to me that she examines me with a strange, curious gleam in her eyes.

"He knows how to describe things," she says. "It will be fun when he comes and tells us what it's like abroad."

How boundlessly I love you! When I come back, I'll set you up in a cozy little home. How satisfied and happy you will be! You'll just have to love me. You won't get a better home anywhere, from anybody. I'll enchant you with the warmth of the surroundings, with the tenderness of my nature, and with comforts and well-being.

I don't even want to touch her, just to kiss her forehead. My feeling of love for her is pure idealism and lives only in my breast.

While lying sleepless in the bedroom assigned to me on the upper floor, I become sure that this fine feeling, this almost spiritual love, is what gives me the right to have her. I, who believe in nothing, am superstitious on this

point. And as a kind of trial, I take it upon myself to be faithful to her from now on, abroad, in Paris, everywhere. After making that decision, I feel pure and innocent, and I can assure myself that I am so with a clear conscience. Living a clean life is now a moral imperative to me, although in the past I would have shrugged my shoulders at such a notion.

During the course of the summer, I lull myself into dreaming that she truly is already mine, that she loves me, and that we merely do not say it to one another although we both know it. I do not understand that the reason for thinking so lies in the surroundings. Her brother is a trifle lazy, and prefers to lounge in a garden hammock all day long reading novels. Her mother is always busy with some household chore, so I am left as Anna's sole companion, with whom she must be satisfied for lack of other company.

I spend the entire summer with them. I no longer think of my journey, but only of the present moment in which I live and have everything I have ever hoped for.

What happy days! What a dream come true! Every evening I relive in my room what has happened during the day. Every day is mostly the same, with only slight variations.

In the morning I rush down from my bedroom. Usually the others are still asleep when I come down to the hallway, go past her door, and listen. There is not a sound within. I open the outside door into a surge of sunlight. The porch is still damp in shady spots, and dew gleams in the yard. I sit at one corner with my back to the sun, which warms but does not heat one. I have a book with me, but I don't read it. There is her bedroom window, with only one of its shades drawn. I can see a chair with a bodice on its back. I don't want to look, but nevertheless I see it. Her bed is behind the shade that is drawn, but I seem to see her asleep, her hair tousled, one hand under her head and the other dangling limp over the side of the bed, her fingers almost touching the rug.

I walk down to the shore. The entire surface of the water is mirror calm. The boards of the dock splash into the water underfoot. A school of fish flees to the edge of the deep water, but soon returns out of curiosity. A sailboat that I have put into shape has not moved from its spot since yesterday. Fishing rods and spoons are ready on board. The railroad station is on the other side of the bay. The stationmaster's white ship shines at its berth in the sunlight. A freight train sits waiting there, and most likely has been there for an hour. A coil of smoke rises slowly and peacefully from the locomotive's smokestack. It, too, is in no hurry out here in the heart of the wilderness. Finally it whistles, creating an echo around the lakeshore, and

goes puffing away. Going back up to the yard I can still hear the fading clatter of its wheels for a long time.

She has not risen yet. I sit for at least an hour in my spot at the corner of the porch. I seem to read, but I don't know what I am reading. Let her sleep, I'm in no hurry. She will be mine for the entire day today, just as she was yesterday.

Finally I hear a stir in her room, the sound of walking in stocking feet. Something white appears in the window and is hastily withdrawn. A bare arm. It reaches for the bodice on the chair back, and the shade is drawn before it.

I suffer through a long and difficult half-hour, an eternity of doubt. What if she thinks I have stationed myself there to watch? I calm down only when I hear her start humming and then burst into a lively song. I rise and begin pacing back and forth on the porch. I hear her door close. She comes out onto the porch as spry as a sparrow. Her cheeks are as rosy as those of a little child just risen from the cradle.

Good morning!

Good morning!

She brings the coffee pot to the table on the porch. We cannot stand to wait for the others, and we drink our coffee together. She is my young little wife, and we have set up housekeeping together and live out here far from others, contented and happy. How I would like to let her know, drop even a slight hint of what I am thinking! But I am afraid that even at the slightest rustle, the shy deer will disappear. In the presence of others, I can speak of love and emotions. Person to person, we speak only of mundane matters.

We talk about the day's program.

First we have to raise the nets that we have dropped yesterday. I shove the boat off the rollers and she helps me at the oarlocks. She wants to take the oars, and I scull from the rear. On calm mornings we glide along the reedy shore, and the thunk of the oars is clear and limpid. Water gleams on the blades of the oars, and drips onto the bright surface when she stops rowing and says something. The talk is about fishing, about where we will set the traps tomorrow. We have soon learned the fishing reefs and the spawning grounds of the fish. We set the nets here and there with varying luck. She is totally involved, and she glows with joy when she sees the net cord jiggling as a big fish is being hauled in. And she is truly angry if it breaks loose when almost in the boat and dives down into the depths. She scolds me, calling me "this and that kind of so-and-so." But that only pleases me. She seems closer to me then, somehow more familiar. How involved she is when the nets are wound up on rods and she takes it upon herself to

release the prey and straighten out the tangles. I am not allowed to touch a thing, she wants to do it all by herself, and she toils away, her sleeves rolled up to the elbow, her skirts lifted up, and her fingers so smeared with scales that she cannot brush a hair from her forehead, but has to shove it back of her ear with the back of her hand. I stand off, smoking a cigarette and saying almost every time, "Well, we're the world's best fishermen," which has become a constant witty comment. Afternoons we often go sailing. At first her brother comes along, but he soon tires of it. Anna, however, always asks as a matter of form:

"Aren't you coming sailing?"

"I don't have time."

"You don't have time? May I ask what work is keeping you busy?"

"I'm reading, as you can see."

"Show me that book. Oh, Oblomov."

"You won't understand it, but it has the finest psychology I've ever read."

"I know — and you yourself are exactly like that Oblomov."

"You may be more right than you think."

"But we're going sailing, we are! It's a good thing everyone isn't a loafer like you."

I always attach great significance to such slight indications of favor toward me and try to interpret them to my advantage.

I am in the stern of the boat and she is seeing to the lines. She is sitting near me in the stern sheets and following my orders precisely, orders that I always give in an official, commanding voice. She is dressed in a loose-fitting sailor suit, and is wearing a round sailor cap, the ribbons of which are fluttering straight out in the wind. Against the white mainsail, on which a dazzling sun shines, I can see her black hair and her clear, delicate profile, which I never tire of looking at.

A strong wind is blowing. She does not fasten the rope to the cleat, but holds it in her hand, ready to slacken it in case a gust of wind comes. She pulls against it, bracing her feet on the bottom of the boat, leaning backward to balance the tilting boat. Her waist is firm without a corset, her hands are sinewy, and her foot highly arching. I am leaning forward, one hand on the rudder and the other on the mainsail line, my line of sight running in back of her neck and below the sail rope in the direction we are traveling in. Wave upon wave rises, and the boat rises and drops, and Anna in that position, and the sail, and the bow of the ship merge into a whole, into one being which I am guiding to some far-off rocky island or, following some gleaming white sea markers, to the tip of some far-off peninsula. Sometimes a large wave

breaks over the bow and splashes all the way back to the stern, wetting her face and shoulders. She cries out and laughs at the same time, but remains in place without drying the drops from her face.

At sunset the wind dies down, and with a gentle side-wind we sail slowly home. We can now tie down the fore sail line, and easily, fluidly, as if they were lubricated, the sides of the boat cut through the water without raising a wave. She has moved to the foot of the mast to check, has her back turned to me, and is looking forward along the surface of the lake, occasionally grazing the water with her hand. She hums a song and seems to be absorbed in her own thoughts, as if she were alone. If only I knew what she is thinking of, if I could only sense what she thinks of me! Has she never, on these excursions with me, found herself thinking that perhaps she loves me and I love her... But I have never once seen it in her look, I cannot explain to my advantage a single motion, a single tremor in her voice.

I grow sad and melancholy and cannot help commenting on my departure.

"I wonder where I'll be this time next year. And what will you be doing then when I come back?"

"Yes, that's true, you'll soon be going away. How long are you planning to stay?"

"Two years, at least."

"Two years? Is that so?"

And that was all. Her tone of voice was the same as if it were a question of going to the church village for a day or two.

Those evening hours when the wind continues to slacken, when the sail no longer billows, and the ship barely moves can at times be very painful for me. There is no longer anything to talk about, she seems bored, she wants to be ashore, although she does not say so. It is as though it were my fault, as if I had her in a cage, and that bothers me a lot. But I try to look content, as if I am not aware of the feeling, as if I am in no hurry to get anywhere. And when the sails collapse and sag down along the ship, I take up the oars and row ashore while she holds the rudder.

When we were not on the water we generally sat on the porch with the others. Like all somewhat older men in love, I tried to be polite and rush to do her even the slightest of services. She got used to my always helping her up, that I always took care of her clothing, her umbrellas, and her galoshes. I became like a weapons bearer whose master could order to do anything without ever thanking him. Once after lunch we were sitting outdoors. The women were sewing, her brother had carried a rocker out from the parlor,

and I was watching the deft movements of Anna's hands as she sewed something. She was looking for scissors.

"I'll get them, if only the young lady can tell me where they are."

"They are on my bedroom table."

I rose to get them, but then her mother spoke up:

"You're too demanding, Anna. You let people wait on you too much when you're so much younger."

And then she added:

"I wouldn't be so polite if I were you. Anna, you go and get the scissors."

"Yes, I will," Anna said, and rushed by me a bit offended, not heeding my response.

The occurrence troubled me greatly, since even without it I was already troubled because our age difference was so vast.

Although I had come here to acknowledge my feelings for her, I spent the whole summer wondering what would be better. I was just as uncertain at the end of the summer as at the beginning.

One August Sunday shortly before I left for the city is nevertheless one of the happiest days, for it gave me a bit of hope.

There is a folk festival in a neighboring village, and Anna and I attend it together. The others do not care to go. We step into a small steamship on our own shore, leaving her mother and brother on shore. We stand on the deck, I with her raincoat under my arm, and I feel as if we were leaving them like newlyweds going off together. Out of my own hopes I created a reality. She there waving her red parasol is my young bride. We have just been married and are leaving home on our first trip.

The day is warm and lovely, with a balmy south wind. The ship is filled with strangers and we sit together the whole time. There is none of the usual lack of subjects to talk about, for we criticize the people and make fun of the orchestra, whose wind instruments hit wrong notes. People look at us sidewise, they recognize us as dwellers in the capital city, but the young ladies and gentlemen make an effort to be free and indifferent to us. We feel slightly superior to the others, and that increases our self-confidence and self-assurance. Carelessly, perhaps on purpose, we talk as if the others don't exist, step ashore from the parsonage dock, which is filled with white caps and young women in folk dress. I hold out my hand to Anna, she leaps nimbly down from the ship, and the whispering group of spectators opens a pathway through them. Her dress is exceptionally stylish and fine compared to the others, her behavior is seemly and her movements nimble. Even I enjoy the attention she seems to arouse. On the shore road we meet a gentleman dressed in linsey-woolsey, apparently some public school teacher.

Seeing Anna, he acts as if he had suddenly encountered a phenomenon from another world. He is wonder-struck, stops, steps to the side of the road, and nearly stumbles into the ditch.

I have the following mind picture of our journey from the parsonage gate to the festival grounds. We are walking abreast. There is a brisk headwind, she is leaning forward slightly, sheltering her eyes with her parasol and holding on to her hat brim with the other hand. She has a flower on her breast, which I have just picked from the roadside, her skirts are billowing, and the wind presses them close to her knees. My heart quakes. I want her completely for my own, but at the same time I feel a pain in my bosom for she is not my own and I don't even know if she loves me. Within a week I have to leave her, and who knows where and how near is the one who will take her from me.

At the festival grounds we again begin to criticize our surroundings. We can hardly refrain from laughing aloud at the speaker, the public school teacher with affected high-flown normal-school rhetoric the first principles of love for one's country and its people, who in the end are encouraged to behave decently at the festival and to go home nicely when it is over. A young university student standing beside us hears our comments and casts significant glances at us and the speaker to indicate that he is not like the others, that he shares our opinions and understands how ridiculous it is. We have innocent fun with the song which is led by an erect, close-cropped woman teacher of the parish who is dressed completely in white and wears a hat with a large yellow flower in it. Anna christens her "the princess." Then she leads me over to watch her dance. It defies comparison. She keeps her head tilted mawkishly to one side, she leaps like a grasshopper, and glow with satisfaction and heat. Earlier I wouldn't have had the heart to laugh at her, but now I tried to come up with more and more that was ridiculous in all of them.

We did not part company for one minute. We wandered together around the grounds, bought chances for one another, just as we had dropped the nets together. We feel as if it were in the air that we are the heroes of the day and that everyone is curious to know who we are. It seems to me — and it pleases me — that people seem to think we are engaged.

We sit on the seesaw. Anna has a bag of candy that I have bought for her. A little girl stands before us holding on to her mother's skirts. Both of them stare at us openly, following our hands to our mouths.

"Come here, little girl, and get some candy."

The mother shoves the girl toward us and tells her to shake hands.

"What's your name?"

“Well, say your name and you’ll get some sweets.”

“Kaisa.”

“Well, take your finger out of your mouth. You’ll get a double handful of sweets.”

Well, don’t you know how to say thank you. You’re really hopeless.”

And the mother turns to thank Anna herself.

“Thank you very much, miss. Or are you this gentleman’s wife?”

I feel myself blushing in confusion but Anna laughs sweetly as if at something incredibly ridiculous and impossible. I try to laugh too, but my laughter is awkward and forced.

It was already late at night when we set out on the return journey. The ship’s cabin is full of gentlemen who are drinking, and the air there is smoke-filled and stifling. It is already a bit cold. Anna wraps herself in a woolen shawl and we search out a place on deck near a motor hatch that emits heat to warm our feet. Through it we can see the reddish figures of the machinist and the fireman every time the firebox is opened. The journey lasts many hours. Anna tires and begins to feel sleepy. We sit there without saying a word, thrust together by the pressure of the crowd. I feel the weight of her head on my shoulder. I cannot make out her features clearly. Only when the smokestack on the other side of the ship shoots out a shower of sparks on the other side of the ship can I see that she has closed her eyes. Now and then she opens them, and they are wide and deep.

The horizon begins to glow red and the sparks grow dimmer. A pale silver quarter-moon in the western sky is reflected in the water. The channel narrows, and the high, hilly shores rise on either side almost unnaturally large in this strange, mixed light of the moon and the far-off rising sun. I don’t dare even move for fear of disturbing her. I’m almost sure now that she loves me. And I couldn’t come to the conclusion that if she truly loved me, she would not sleep so peacefully on my breast.

Only when the ship calls out its approach to our home shore does she awaken, move farther away from me, wrap her shawl more tightly around her shoulders, which shiver in the morning chill. She is in a bad mood, and leaps from the ship on her own, refusing my proffered help, and goes into the yard without waiting for me.

Her mother is still awake and has hot coffee ready. I hope that we will sit and chat about the festival, and I wait for her to start telling how much fun we had had, how nobody knew us, and how we studied and checked out all of them. But she seems already to have forgotten that.

“Well, did you have fun?” her mother asked.

“We did,” she replied.

And yawning, without looking at me, she goes into her room, mumbling sleepily, "Good night."

In my bed upstairs, which is directly above hers, I cannot get to sleep for a long time. The sun has already risen and shines through the open window. I can hear the sound of rowing from the lake, and of scythes being sharpened out in the hayfield. Footsteps sound in the yard, and the kitchen door opens. Sparrows begin to chatter around the eaves on the sunny side of the roof.

Nothing will come of it. She doesn't love me. I mean nothing to her. Her affability yesterday was casual. I'm childish to find any significance in such things. And I decide to leave tomorrow.

But in the morning when I begin to pack my suitcase she is friendly again. She comes up to my bedroom and begins to help me. My hope reawakens. I'll tell her that I love her. She'll run off, disappear from sight. That's how long it will last.

She doesn't love me. She's considered me a good friend, like an older brother, almost an uncle.

How my presence must have annoyed her, for I did not have the sense to go my own way. I took the same train as she, and always went into the same coach and even tried to get a seat opposite her. And I could not stop looking at her. She didn't know which way to look. She tried to read, to look out of the window. Finally she left the coach and stood outside it for several stations, until her mother got her back.

How could I have been so repulsive to her? Perhaps she hates me, old fool that I am.

"What time is it?"

* * * * *

"We're closing up," the waiter says, his lips close to my ear. I snap out of my reverie. I have emptied my drink completely without being aware of it. I have seen one gas lamp after another extinguished. I remember vaguely that the customers from the room in back have passed through the main dining room to the vestibule. The little old baldheaded man is still sitting there in front of me with his pint. One of the government clerks is straightening his vest and collar as he leaves.

The waiter stands beside me with a napkin over his arm and begins to clear away the glasses. I am completely alone in the large room. A single gas lamp still burning over my head is reflected in a distant mirror at the other side of the room, which is already dark. The cloths have already been removed from the tables, and only bare boards are left of the wine table.

I rise and go to the vestibule, where a lone lamp still twinkles awaiting my departure. My coat is thrust onto my arms. I take my hat and run a comb through my hair in front of the mirror. I can see in this half darkness that I am beginning to lose my hair. I will soon be bald. How yellow and flaccid and lifeless my face is, how deeply wrinkled my forehead!

How could she care for me. I feel as if I could be happy if she would at least feel compassion for me, pity me.

The whole large restaurant is as deserted as a mountain in the wilderness. There is not so much as a rustle from one of its many caves. There is a black hand painted on the passageway wall, and in large letters underneath it: DINING ROOM.

So I'm going now, going abroad, to Paris. I have pictured it differently, but in reality life is probably always like this, I think as I come to Grönquist's masonry wall. From Edlund's Corner I can see the lighted clock of Nicholas Church, which shows it to be two o'clock.

I consider not going to bed at all tonight, of wandering around Juniper Point or climbing up Observatory Hill. But when I find myself crossing the harbor market, I don't feel like changing directions and pass by the Czar's statue and go on to the foot of the castle where there is some kind of large, black mound with trees projecting like masts toward the sky. On the opposite side of the harbor, a row of lamps is reflected in the calm water. Steam hisses between the pier and the side of the ship. I stumble past the watch and go below decks, where I have my own cabin at the rear of the ship.

"Oh well, life is difficult."

III

The following morning I find myself on an asphalt sidewalk behind the Chapel walking up the Esplanade. I have asked the Captain when the ship leaves, and he has answered over his shoulder after first shouting something to his men, "About nine o'clock."

Now it is seven-thirty. I pass the statue of Runeberg, turn onto Erottaja Street and follow the Boulevard on the same course I had taken yesterday evening. The presses are going in the Huvudstadsbladet building and sheets of paper fly about. A line of girls walks ahead of me at the Finnish Girls School corner.

I ask myself what on earth I'm doing here, and I have to acknowledge that I want to walk under her window once more. I tell myself that I am

insane. But at the same time another voice says: “Shut up — so what if you are!”

The stores are already open. I am walking behind a freight truck. Every time its large, heavy wheels jounce from one cobblestone to another, it grates on my nerves. I have slept poorly and am totally exhausted, and I drag my feet behind me. The hot sun bakes my cheeks, which feel weary, slack, and clumsy.

I turn the corner at Frederick Street and her window is a short distance away. The white shade is still down, and I can see flowers against it. She is still asleep, so they won't come to the waterfront. Besides, they would have said so yesterday if they intended to. And now it suddenly becomes clear to me why they had been in such a bad mood yesterday. Her mother had been more uptight than usual and her brother more absent-minded. Anna must have told them that she had been courted.

When I am just opposite her window on the other side of the street, the balcony door opens. I start fearfully, as if I had been caught in some wrongdoing, and rush forward without looking to the side. All I can see is that a woman has come out. Only at the next corner do I have the courage to turn my head. I see that a maid is shaking out rugs there.

For the first time the situation seems laughable. I am hopelessly comic. An old man behaving like a schoolboy. And I say to myself scornfully over and over again with a hand gesture: “No, this is too silly, too damned silly!”

And I cross the Barracks Market, where Guard Company is training, and see a young officer with his chest swelled out, a man who is a stupid clown in my opinion, and I hurry to the ship by the shortest route.

As I gaze from the deck of the ship at the preparations for departure and the activities in the harbor, it suddenly seems to me that I have recovered and escaped from all my turmoil. To my wonder, I can look around calmly, almost happily. The landscape looks as if it had been washed by a rain, and I feel brighter internally.

The ship is already anxious to leave. It is swallowing the last mouthfuls of its load. The longshoremen, shouting like automatons, are hoisting cartons arriving late to the foredeck, where a creaking winch drops them into a dark hold. A thick cloud of black smoke billows from the sturdy smokestack, casting a strange, yellowish shadow over the dock and the bustling people there whenever the sun strikes it.

There is scarcely a breeze in the harbor, but gazing through Bleckholma Sound, one sees the surface of the shoreless sea agleam with little waves under the sun. Occasionally a chance puff of wind brings the scent of salt from the open sea. The weather is warm. The sunshine comes flooding

down, and one's eyes are dazzled by the linen-white stone walls of the surrounding buildings and the towering spire of Nicholas Church, which forms a summit for the buildings below.

Buyers and sellers bustle about the marketplace. In back of them a red omnibus can be seen rumbling along ringing its bell from time to time. Beyond all of them is the thick green of Chapel-Esplanade and the tall Grönquist building, on the roof of which a lazy flag ripples. Across the marketplace, disturbing the harmony, runs a row of new white pillars, supporting a thick power line running from the Helsinki Hotel to the Shore Hall.

I want to take this bright picture with me as a memento of my native country. I force myself to impress it upon my mind, looking time and again at its most striking external details. I want to remember nothing else but this. Let all else disappear behind it, buried beneath the powerful colors.

The ship rubs its way slowly along the dock. Clumsily the heavy bulk heads toward the sea with the aid of its bowlines and its sails. The eyes of those leaving and staying once more meet, search and find, lose and again meet. Then the sharpness of their vision seems to evaporate as the ship moves farther out; they bypass one another and no longer find a point of contact. Handkerchiefs begin to wave, lighting up like torches in a last gesture of farewell.

The delicate face, the clean profile, and the curl at the base of the ear are suddenly before me. I long to search for them in the crowd that is seeing people off, although I know they are not there, and I focus on the landscape, wishing to see only the harbor, the buildings, and the bright sky.

I see them and I see rocking sailboats and yachts inscribing arcs on the water's surface. Mocking little steamboats in the harbor skim shrieking before the bow of our ship, like flies around the muzzle of a clumsy bull.

The bull snorts, speeds up, and sets his course toward Viapori Sound. Individual windows in the shore buildings disappear and form three lines, one above the other. The buzz of the city dies away, and the engine's deep, softly powerful throbbing strikes my ears for the first time. At full speed we pass the Viapori ramparts, from which hollow black loopholes stare out at us.

We are on the open sea. I pace back and forth on the deck in a gentle breeze. Helsinki disappears from sight. My homeland cowers into the sea. The slender strip of land that was the shore of Finland dissolves into a dark cloud. All I have now is the blue sky and the even bluer sea. Here and there, off toward the fields of Ahti, glows the bright white sail of an islander; I make note of it and it sticks in my mind that it is headed for Helsinki. Before

the bow, the sun is mirrored in the water. The waves break up the light and scatter it, creating a broad path of blinding brightness.

I constantly seek new things to notice in the surroundings. I concentrate on the images that cross my path, and draw them like a curtain over everything from the past. Each new view is like a fine veil. And indeed, during the course of that first day, past events are just that, and I recall them as distant, formless shadows, now lost, barely visible behind the fog and mist. I don't really know them as mine: they really don't seem to be mine. They must be merely old, hackneyed ghosts of the past.

I myself am like someone wandering in a trance, as if in a dream, but yet conscious of it, and unwilling to wake up. The sea induces a sweet, languid sleep in me, and creates indifference. Not a single thought is born, and every emotion falls asleep in the process of waking. I long for nothing and hope for nothing.

My attention wanders ceaselessly. I loll on deck in a comfortable lounging chair, smoking sleep-inducing, mind-veiling cigars. My eye takes in the open sea, the cloudless sky, and there, nearer to the ship, the little, lapping waves which sometimes burst into foam, by chance, as if talking in their sleep, but without the strength to raise the long, heavy hull. There are several ships within eyesight. Those in the sun are like large, black butterflies, or like large stones against a white window shade. On the other side, a ship's sails shine in full light; you can see them billow and even see the masts. Then attention shifts to our own ship, climbing the rope ladders up the masts, checking the pulleys, ropes, and sails. Then on to a dense smoke puffing from the stack, trailing the ship like a tail and settling lightly over the surface of the sea.

I find myself walking along the deck or staring at the wake, which is always the same, the same bubbles, the same sibilance, and the same regular settling of the ship's wake.

Sometimes land appears out on the sea. It keeps rising, and soon a high land mass is there, whatever it may happen to be. One can see churches, villages, and hills with green woods on their slopes. There are people there too, they live and have occupations, whatever they may be. What are they like there? A fisherman lowers his sails alongside. What if one were to leap into his boat, row ashore and stay with him in the middle of the sea in this watery wilderness, leaving no trace of himself. And create himself a new environment for the rest of his life. Could one do so? It seems to me that he should be able to. And I can try to do it in the place where I am going. The farther, the better.

But that land is left behind, disappears, and is forgotten. There is nothing but the ship again, and sails on the horizon, looking always the same.

The sun is setting. It sinks to the water line as a red ball. It touches the sea and enters the water like someone going for a swim, who first wets his toes, then goes in up to his waist, then suddenly dives in blindly and disappears from sight.

It grows darker, my field of vision contracts, and shortens. The blue of sea and sky turn gray, and mists arise here and there. But distant lights twinkle through the dusk. They are road markers, lighthouses: some shine steadily and others blink on and off at regular intervals. And between them the ship travels, directing its course from one to another. The engine throbs in the hold, seemingly self-aware, understanding its function and its significance. When everyone has gone to bed and I am still awake on deck, the whole ship seems to come alive for me. It seems as if the rush of the water against its prow is its own secret dialogue, the subtleties of which it alone really understands, but which I only vaguely sense.

But then my senses begin to adapt to the environment, the effect of the sea weakens, and the former channels of feeling and thought open up again.

When I come on deck the third morning of the journey, my eyes dazzled by the excessive light, I see the captain studying a steamship smoking on our right and threatening to overtake us. Handing the telescope to the mate, he says: "It's the Capella."

It is the Capella, which we left behind us in the harbor and which was scheduled to leave a few hours after us. It is expected to reach Travemünde shortly before we do.

Leaning against the rail and following the beautiful ship with my eyes, I find myself wandering in the following dream:

She is traveling, she, Anna, on that "Capella." I have left in the morning and she in the evening. She does love me, as I love her. When she saw me leave, downcast and melancholy, she stayed awake the whole night and could not get me out of her mind. She remembered our summer outings, she pitied me, and realized that she loved me. In the morning she rushed to the waterfront, but the ship had already left. She could find no peace until she was aboard the "Capella," until she too was on her way abroad. She left her mother and her brother and followed me. Now she is sailing there, a short distance from me and will get there before me, and she will be the first person I meet on the dock at Lübeck. We will continue the journey together; she will be my wife, and we will never part. All the rest of this has been only a bad dream.

And once I have begun, my imagination knows no bounds. I'll bring her here, onto this very ship, this very deck, here by my side! During the day we will sit on the rear deck in the shelter of the sails. I see her so startlingly alive before me, down to the tiniest detail, the slightest shift in her face, the varying shades of her eyes, that I have a momentary dread of myself and have to drive the picture away by force, turn to something else, and cleanse myself of her with a forceful gesture. But she soon returns. In the evening when the lighthouses shine and the lights of the ship wandering in the dark twinkle like red and green stars, we withdraw into one of the many nooks on board, at the foot of a mast or on the extreme point of the foredeck. There we converse quietly, sheltered by the same warm cloak, her hand on my arm, sometimes giving it a gentle squeeze to which I respond in kind.

I lapse into such a world of dreams that the twinkle of a star makes me sad, and watching the sparks flying from the smokestack, I hum a melancholy folk song like the following:

I can never forget you
Though I never can have you etc.

I know this is all mindless and silly, but I can't bear to force myself out of this mood. It's as if I don't have the heart to laugh at myself. I say out of self-pity that I have nothing else left. I am in the same state as one who drinks out of sorrow, but always knows that he does so because he does not want to awaken to reality. He shouts, carouses, riots, trying to forget his sorrow, but as he raises the glass to his lips, he always remembers, even though dimly, why he is drinking. In the morning when he has sobered up, he loathes both his yesterday's drinking and its cause. For the sorrow has not vanished; on the contrary it is stronger and more hopeless.

I also wake up in the morning with a mental hangover.

As we approach Lübeck on the last night of our journey, I dream of her as a continuation of my day's imaginings. I get to live again the sweetest moments of our fishing and sailing out in the country. My sleep is light, and broken at intervals, but I thrust my head into the pillow and manage to connect the segments to one another. Finally, however, the noise outside and the clunking on deck become too loud. I find that the howl of the steamship's warning whistle won't let me sleep; its panicky blasts, formerly heard as distant are now coming from directly above me.

I see that we are anchored in a thick fog. I learn that we are in a narrow channel, but that no shores can be seen. A few fathoms from us another ship looms out of the curtain of darkness like a giant spider. I see the name

“Capella” on its side, but that does not have the same effect as it had yesterday. I shiver from an inner and outer chill. My brain is empty: nothing is left of yesterday’s imaginings and last night’s dreams but the raw reality of the morning. All the savor of poetry, even its false tinge of yesterday, has vanished. Only the steam whistle blows its lament, and out of the distant fog other ships answer dismally, warning of danger, like birds alerting others to beasts of prey lurking somewhere among them. It adds to my despair, and drains me of my last bit of courage and strength to resist.

I know that there beyond that veil of fog, within a few fathoms, lies a foreign country, unknown and unfeeling. I am already in its jaws. I have to begin a new life, plant myself in strange surroundings although my roots are in the earth of home. I wish that the ship would not land, but would turn and go back home.

This weakness pains me. I want to overcome it, but it only increases during the rail journey. The same unprotected reality prevails there. I am like a mote blown in the wind. Horribly small and totally insignificant. At home I was at least something, a cog in the machine. Here I feel myself completely unattached, something that might fall by the wayside at any moment with no feeling of loss.

Until I gradually dull and sink into complete indifference, letting my body jounce with the jerking of the train. I let the landscapes, villages, and cities glide by without awakening a shred of curiosity within me. They are not there for my sake. I don’t think of the past or of the future. I let myself be dragged from place to place like a suspect from court to court. And I don’t awaken to any other mood except for a couple of times on the journey, the first time in Cologne, when I stop off at the cathedral with some other travelers. From the din of the railroad, from the ear-piercing shriek of the whistle, from the dust of the coach and the stinging brightness of the sun on my tired eyes, I am suddenly under a shadowy cupola, where the light is tempered and dim, where the people creep along devoutly and carefully, and from somewhere, I don’t know where, a soft, profound, and peaceful music plays. Between the columns there are dim and distant fields of vision, at the end of which there seem to be altars with slender candles burning, their light merely a gentle glow. In one side chapel a young, pale woman in a black veil kneels in prayer. She is sobbing. I walk by her on tiptoe, and both I and the tourists in travel clothing feel as if we have offended something fine and sacred here. I, who have always explained religious feelings as the captive state of a weak mind, melt like wax. I feel an urge to launch into prayer myself, and hope that I can believe and surrender to that belief. Let the train leave me, let the world go on struggling. I’ll stay here in the silence of the

domes. And how well I now understand those hermits, those monks and nuns, who, exhausted with life and the betrayal of their hopes, find themselves a refuge in the solitude of the desert. How different from seeking forgetfulness in work and in sinking into the tumult of the world.

But people come and people go, and when the door opens the world's uproar intrudes — the rattle of wagons, the whinny of a train whistle from a nearby station. Ahead of me walks a man looking at his watch, whom I recognize as a fellow traveler on the train, and I hurry out with him, worried about being late.

Like a wild beast that has broken free of its chains, the train starts out from Cologne. As the evening darkens it approaches Paris, and the thought of getting there rouses me again from the daze to which I am becoming accustomed. The train is traveling and such a wild speed that the coaches hop in the air. I make an effort to stand up, but I flop back into my seat. The train coming toward us on another track seems to tear me apart. I feel as if I am breaking up, shattering into little pieces. Is it only bodily weariness, a lack of rest and sleep? I try to explain it as such in order to get control of myself. Why can't I be like the others, who are calmly gathering their belongings and don't seem to feel anything unusual? Am I of weaker stuff, not as strongly put together? Why do I panic, why on earth am I restless? But an effort to bring on a good mood is futile. If I had some companion, some friend... Yes, there it is again, that boundless and heart-breaking desire for love, the longing for tenderness that afflicts every nerve in my body. No such love exists, there is no suggestion that I will experience it. I am completely alone. And is it for this I may now be rushing toward total destruction? The speed keeps increasing, the whistle blows once for each kilometer, and the interval between blasts is brief. Into a tunnel and out. Bridges, dips, small stations, which don't matter. It seems as if the train can no longer be stopped. As if there were a magnetic mountain ahead, sucking toward it an iron craft which no longer obeys the rudder. The closer we come to it, the more eagerly it draws it to its breast. Finally that mysterious magnetic force will draw it right into itself, all the nails will pop out, the hull will tear loose at its junctures, and the ship will break to bits against the rocky sides of the black monster. But suddenly we are underneath a glassy arch, the speed slackens, and the train stops deftly alongside the station. I find myself one of the links in a chain of people, one end of which is on the station platform and the other end of which Paris has already swallowed up through a large door into its gaping jaws, as the throat of a rapids swallows a large boom.

IV

“C’est fini, monsieurs?”

“Oui, madame.”

“Pas de café. Pas de cognac?”

“S’il vous plait, madame.”

“Vous avez l’air bien triste, monsieur. Vous avez de chagrines?”

“Non, madame, au contraire.”

[--Are you finished sir?--I am.--Don’t you want coffee and cognac?--
Please. --You look so sad. Are you unhappy?--No, on the contrary.]

I am sitting in a small restaurant on the Boulevard Clichy in Paris and have finished my dinner.

The room is an oval and the front door opens directly onto the boulevard. In the doorway there is a zinc bar in back of which the shirt-sleeved proprietor constantly deals out drinks to workmen and drivers coming and going. Along the other walls are leathern sofas, with marble-topped, iron legged tables before them, at which sit mostly red-vested drivers, strong, weather-beaten men, eating and carrying on loud and never-ending discussions over their glasses of black coffee. Their shiny leather hats hang each in its place on a nail, along with a cluster of overcoats and rain capes. In the corner grow a bunch of their long, flexible whipping rods.

Every time the door opens and another driver, who fills the entire doorway barges in, he brings with him the noise of the boulevard, that unceasing hum of the big city: the shrill cries of the street vendors, the clatter of hoofs on the wooden street, the cracking of whips and the tooting of a passing streetcar horn.

It is odd to think that I sit here now, listening to and watching all that exists and happens near and around me. I. Yes I, presumably, having apparently flown through the air, have hurtled into this corner of Paris, and remained here.

Nevertheless, at this moment I am content to a degree. I can sit in complete peace with no one to annoy or talk to me. Nevertheless the strange faces, the novelty of the environment, and the constant chatter in a foreign tongue stir my blood to the extent that I don’t become totally numb and petrified. I spend two or three hours here sipping coffee and cognac, smoking slowly, and reading some newspaper or other to pass the time.

But as soon as I step out onto the boulevard, along which a never-ending stream of people passes, where one hears the gay and melodious chatter of women, where a tireless stream of barouches flows by, gleaming under the street lamps, and the carriage lights in turn gleam on bright, attractive skirts

which nearly trail along the ground, it all revives the sting of my formerly perpetual loneliness, which returns every day at the same time and in this same place. I have not a single acquaintance I would wish to be with. I don't even want to go to my lodging, where life is even more monotonous, and so walking slackly I wind up in my usual coffeehouse.

There I spend a few hours leafing through the newspaper, watching the billiard players, and writing letters.

This time I am working on a long letter to Anna's brother, and have already finished several pages.

The two of us have lived through many moods and many emotions together. We know even the slightest quirks in each other's nature. Together we have experienced each other's love affairs and helped one another out in our adventures. When one has been lived through to the end, we have both balanced the books and shared the proceeds, that is to say, our psychological discoveries and experiences. We have studied our souls' phenomena down to the slightest nuance and tried with their help to construct a psychic pattern of love and of life in general.

I wrote to him about myself now, trying to give him a brief research experiment into my situation after we separated. Perhaps there was a different reason for doing so. Reading over what I had written the previous evening, it seemed to me that it was intended for others to read as well as him.

"I would never have thought that this foreign country would have the kind of effect on me that it has had. I had pictured my trip here, this city, and life here in general as entirely different. Or perhaps it would be better to say I had viewed myself as different. For everything is what your state of mind is when you view it.

"Our relationship to the other sex determines how we view our surroundings. When there is a kind of armistice, a truce in love, when we are not directly under its influence, then it governs us either with memories of the past or hopes for the future. You recall how often in the past when we were carefree, calm, and happy, we yet found ourselves staring into the distance, and one of us might suddenly express his hope: 'Now the only thing lacking is a girl to admire this lovely landscape with!' And for that reason both of us might sink into thought and sit silent for a long time, in the grip of vague, half-melancholy fantasies. When a woman can have such an effect even in her absence, then what is it like when one is devoted to her? She projects her own coloration onto everything we see wherever we live. For me there is no place, no person to whom I would not have attributed something of that woman who was the contents of my life at the time. When

I see them again, they are either pleasing or repugnant to me, they evoke joy or sadness always according to my heart's liaison at the time I met them. Within me and for my sake, external objects have no effect on me except as witnesses to my heart's joys or ills. It has been so with me earlier, and it is so to the same or perhaps a greater degree now. It is not this foreign country that affects me now, it is my present state of mind. I think it will amuse you if I explain a few of the details.

“Although we didn't talk about it, you must know my state of mind when I left our country. Anna has probably told you about it. There is surely nothing new in a man of my age being in love with a girl of her age. But the character of those feelings took was new to me. It seems as if for me, having reached a specified age and gone through all the stages of development, my emotional life had begun anew a circular course, like the sap in some trees, which blossom anew during long autumns. Through the course of last summer, those childish yearnings, which I thought to have escaped the first time I fell in love, budded anew. In the presence of that little girl I had almost held in my lap and carried in my arms, whom I had treated as a child until then, I was as shy as a young schoolboy who first encounters his ideal. I fell in love with her as if she were my first love.

“I thought I could escape my hopeless emotion and leave it at home like everything else. But it came with me, it followed me on the trip, and during my first weeks here I was completely in its power, as you will soon see. I tried to battle against it because it troubled me unbelievably, and the external world too tried its best to banish the past with new influences. But my feelings resisted, and the past refused to fade. Therefore almost every place I have visited, every new street I have walked, every café I have sat in is a reminder of this struggle.

“The fact that I see all these places and areas so clearly and in such detail is undoubtedly the result of that double struggle. They have impressed themselves on my mind like a new cliché on clean white paper. There are moments when I think I have escaped the past, when a fresh image has penetrated my brain and its newness controls all my attention. But then my mind shifts abruptly, when the light, so to speak, falls from a different direction and the inner picture turns toward the light, there is somewhere down inside it a watermark, which shines through all else. It will not wear, it will not fade, and it cannot be falsified. On it there is her image with her clear skin, fine profile, and curl at the base of her ear.

“When I step out of my lodgings in the morning and walk down the street leading to the boulevard, I cannot escape being energized for a time by the life around me. Small sellers have spread their wares out on the sidewalk,

and between those high stone walls there are fruits and freshly picked green vegetables as abundant as the flow of water in a foaming rapids. The sellers shout at the top of their lungs, and past them go a continual flood of buyers, usually women in morning dress, with only a veil wrapped around their shoulders. There on his threshold stands a meat dealer in his white apron, and in the baker's window is a stack of slender white loaves, as long and thick as birch blocks. Close by, the zinc bar of a small restaurant shines through the window; at it stands a group of apron-clad workmen with a row of glasses before them from which they drink their yellowish-green absinthe standing up. A group of schoolboys in uniform with books under their arms hoot and holler along with the driver of a large freight wagon at the horses, whose hoofs strike sparks from the cobblestones in a futile effort to move their load. Almost every morning I meet a blind man with his cup waiting for alms and staring at oncomers with his dark eyes. In front of the newspaper-store window there are always people standing and checking the comics. The street ends in a small market with a statue in the center, along the side of which stands an ever-present line of barouches with their gleaming black hoods. A horn blows, and a streetcar drawn by two white horses thrusts into sight at the end of the street. It is on the way to the exposition, and I break into a panting run to catch it and get a seat in it.

“Through its moving windows, I catch sight of a piece of Paris. Cafés, whose windows and large mirrors reflect the street and the people on it, this streetcar, and the trees along the boulevard. Walls with large advertisements inscribed on them. Multicolored newspaper kiosks. A streetcar stop where a group in black waits to get on with us. The sober face of a policeman on duty. A new open area in the middle of which a fountain spurts up. Suddenly a new boulevard black with people and vehicles, diminishing and fading into the distance. And everywhere those tall stone houses, rising like temples hacked out of a mountain, simple and impressive, decked with iron balconies, like the gossamer veil of a lady dressed in gray.

“Opposite me sits a Parisian woman, her movements light and fluid. She looks as if her creator had delighted in making her, carving with his finest knife blade from the soundest side of the most succulent tree. Sitting next to her is an oldish gentleman with the rosette of the Legion of Honor in his vest and a high, gleaming silk hat on his head. They rise to get off. How deftly she maneuvers herself down the narrow aisle of the car between the knees of the other passengers. She is to me like a bird that darts through the boughs without ruffling a single one of her feathers. I draw back a little, pull in my feet, and her lips breathe a “pardon” as thanks. She slips to the street, steps

up onto the sidewalk, and as she starts briskly off she opens her parasol and thrusts a gloved hand under her gentleman's arm.

"And that is all I need. I remember everything, and my mind becomes sad and gloomy. And that happens to me almost every day for any reason at all.

"The exposition really makes a huge impression on me every time I gaze at it from underneath the Trocadero Palace arch toward the vale of the Field of Mars. In the center rises the Eiffel Tower, like a blossoming wilderness spruce, the gilded cupolas of the exhibition buildings burn in the sunlight, and the statues atop them make joyous gestures up toward the heavens. The blood in one's veins absolutely runs faster on the Jena Bridge beneath which the Seine River speeds, and small, sight-seeing steamboats full of people dart like swallows under the arches. And when I am under the Eiffel Tower itself, between the legs of this iron giant, all memories fade and one merely looks and wonders. Setting about to walk the streets and lanes of this wonder city, in and out of its palaces, whose facades are works of art, its doors, sculptures, its walls, paintings, and its interiors so filled with the entire world's treasures, my self evaporates and I cannot believe that I am here, and that with a single step I go from one part of the world to another. Or when I am in the machine room, which is like a shop with a glass roof which reaches to the sky, where all the arms of our time are at work, all its hammers hammering, steam, gas, and electricity being produced, I am entranced, intoxicated by the throbbing which seems to be born beneath the earth, to pass through it and electrify my every limb. There is a strange excitability in my body, as if an electric spark were crackling at every nerve ending. When evening comes and the 'shining fountains' begin to play their symphony of color, and the entire Eiffel tower explodes into a crimson statue of fire, the universal joy sweeps me along with it, and I too cheer before that sacrificial altar which seems to light up in defiance of God to praise human genius.

"But then again one only needs find himself in an out-of-the-way corner, one of those many cafés, alone at a small table. The noise from the center of the exposition grounds reaches here faintly, and the light can be seen only as a dim glow above the treetops. There are fireworks here too, round red lanterns resembling cherries grow on the branches of trees, and now and then colored lamps light up, making the foliage, the walls of the nearest pavilions, and the strolling people now red and now green. It is already something rustic, something like a folk festival at home. And a sense of weariness and melancholy begin to develop in me, and now my mood change is complete. I am tired of everything I have seen, which now seems

completely worthless. That tower is a worthless caricature of human striving, and all that apparatus is the work of big children. Those tens of thousands who battle for a seat at the “shining fountains” are poor souls, clowns. I view their enthusiasm from almost the same perspective as a pietist does in condemning earthly joys. Everything passes, in a few months there will be nothing left but mocking ruins. And is it for that reason that the whole world had been set in motion? The present age is humbug, and this is the biggest one of all. But I know that my judgment would be the exact opposite if she were here, if I could take her everywhere, if we could watch everything together, then I would enjoy, admire, and respond with enthusiasm.

“Once I wind up in a Hungarian restaurant at the exposition, where a violin orchestra is playing and where the original plains wine is served. There is the glow of a more southern sun in the music and the genuine taste of unadulterated grapes in the wine. The players are wearing folk costumes, they are black-eyed men, and their mustaches are daring handlebar ones. The director himself plays and does so while standing up. His instrument rises and falls passionately, his body flexes from the waist, and the jewels on his costume sparkle. His eyes gleam in the electric lighting, and he casts mockingly provocative glances first at one and then at another of the women sitting around, who now and then toss a bouquet onto the stage. The audience is involved the whole time, surrendering to the emotions that the strings interpret. Here and there a hand moves rhythmically from the wrist, feet and heads move in time to the music. I too am moved, my mood becomes lighter, and my mind gay. But suddenly the violins fall silent and the playing ceases. Only the clink of money that a waiter is counting out into someone’s hand can be heard from the rear of the room. The director’s bow has stopped at top speed, its end on high, and with the director’s hand at ear level. And when he draws it down so slowly as to be barely visible, the violin’s mood has altered. It has become sad, first complaining and then crying, like a yearning, recently forgotten but suddenly in one’s mind. The player’s face has become serious, his gaze now passes over the heads of people along a line which perhaps leads to the lantern at the door, but to me seems to wander all the way to the open plains, to a distant horizon, where his own country’s evening sun is setting.”

The music sends its sad echoes
 no farther than the wide waters,
 having once so sweetly sounded,
 as sweetly as a lovely dream.

“That’s where it is for me as well now, Finland’s sad horizon, the north wind just going to rest, the waves lapping against the side of the boat, the sails scarcely propelling, and Anna sitting in the bow with her back to me humming something.

* * * * *

“I stopped at this point yesterday. I don’t want to say any more about these mood swings, which are always the same. When you’ve seen one wave, you know what the rest are like. First there is the blue of the sky in them, then the white splashing of the foam. They surge like that for a time, diminish slowly as the wind dies down, and then subside completely.

“I think, I am almost sure of it, that my mood swings too are nearing an end. I’ve begun to work in the library, and I don’t have as much time to be aware of myself as I did earlier. Furthermore the environment, the Parisian sky so to speak, is becoming more deeply rooted in my mind, bringing with it new desires and new fancies. When, for example, I walk those broad, shining boulevards of an evening, where the whole world revels and courts, carefree, happy, and frivolous, I too feel the urge to join them. Really, what should stop me from joining hands with a light and sparkling street butterfly who swishes in silks and satins, and, looking almost innocent, flouts the whole world’s prohibitions. Wouldn’t such a creature make one forget the past, bind up all wounds? Wouldn’t she manage to dim the watermark by stepping into its place herself? Why don’t I join the hubbub, enter the cafés where black top hats and women’s white dresses mingle?

“So I ponder, but in this case too I still am what I am. I don’t stop off anywhere, but follow the same streets back to my lodging, content with having done so.”

When I fitted the letter into the envelope, I had the feeling that my comment about love’s approaching demise was not quite as I had described it. While writing, it had seemed right to me, but another idea ran counter to it. I did not believe it to be anything but a temporary state of mind that could change at any moment. And it changed so suddenly that I was immediately hoping the letter would make clear what I thought to have hidden in it. Having read the letter, Anna’s brother would surely say to his mother: “It is clear that he isn’t yet free, that he is still in love.” What will Anna think? Her brother will surely give her the letter to read. And if she does read my letter, what effect will it have on her?

Pondering this, hope dawned anew in my breast. Strand by strand, one possibility wove itself around another, and I began to imagine that my letter could perhaps change everything. When I thought about the matter clearly, I

realized that Anna still didn't know anything about the depth of my feelings. Everything had come upon her so suddenly and unexpectedly. I had been unable to speak to her soberly and seriously. After my departure she perhaps had begun to think of me more lovingly. With the low self-esteem of one in love, I also took into account the awakening of pity in her, and – I could not conceal it from myself -- the influence of her mother and brother. But above all, I trusted my own letter. She would see from it the depth of my love, how unhappy I was, how I suffered.

It was so odd to look at it as it lay on the table before me. The envelope was of fine French paper. It looked so alive there, it was like a pale, velvet-winged summer butterfly, glued to one spot on a bough. It did not so much as quiver, but if approached it would take flight.

I don't have the heart to crumple it by putting it in my pocket. I will let it sit there until I drink one more beer and smoke one more cigarette. Billiard balls clatter in the next room. The woman cashier clinks her coins in back of her desk. Mirror-covered walls reflect long vistas lighted by gas street lamps. Through the glass door one glimpses couples continually walking along the boulevard and coaches and horses gliding by.

I leave, holding the letter carefully with my fingertips, and when I hear it fall to the bottom of the mailbox, I give a start. Then I start walking slowly along the sidewalk toward my lodging. All the cafés are brightly lighted, from the concert halls comes the sound of music and song. Through open doors and a blue haze of smoke I see women clothed only in thin veils dancing. I hurry my steps and look straight ahead to avoid the women pursuing me: --“Monsieur! Dites donc, monsieur! Voulez-vous, monsieur?”

I shrug them off coldly and turn into my own street. It is calm and quiet there now. The stores are closed, and only the man who sells roasted chestnut is still on his corner next to his crackling pan. And before me there walks, sweeping his lantern along the ground, the chiffonier, the rag picker, the collector of all junk, that Parisian nocturnal scavenger who tosses whatever others have tossed into the gutters into the basket strapped to his back.

I ring, shout my name to the concierge, and climb up to my small room on the sixth floor. I open the window and try to peer through the darkness. All Paris lies before me in the obscurity of night. I can't see it now, but from the glow of electrically lighted boulevards and from fires twinkling in different directions, I can sense its magnitude. Not a peep can be heard from the nearby surroundings. But there in the distance is a continual threatening voice sounding as if it arose from a distant rapids, the roar of which can be

heard in the evening in a hill village in the woods. It babbles on there, sometimes booming, grating and howling, as if it were in constant pain. I hear the same sounds every night, but I cannot explain their origin. However, I think I do recognize the other sounds. That is a train, which whistles as it approaches the nearest station. Those are the shouts of people. Someone is singing.

Long, very long past midnight I am still awake. I forget where I am and imagine myself at home, in my father's house, in my old garret bedroom on a high hill, where I sat long ago with my books and prepared for my tests in a leisurely way. My mind was filled with dreams and hopes for the future. I loved and felt that I was beloved. From my window there was a spacious view, as there is here, over a wooded landscape, and I had my own fire comrade atop another hill. Everyone in the house had gone to sleep. But the wilderness did not cease to move. It stayed awake through the night, with the same soft sighing and the same nocturnal voices.

I undressed and lay down. As I dozed off it began to seem as if the blackness beneath my window were the woods and the sound was only the home wilderness sighing there.

The entire time between these two periods seems to have been lost. I am the same now as I was then. I still have the same hopes regarding the goal of my endeavors and I dream of a future, of a home and happiness as sure possibilities. And I no longer believe there to be a basis for the fear that I am doomed to live alone, and that all my days are to be unhappy.

V.

I live for several weeks in the same peaceful state of mind. A new mainstay has entered my life, a somehow plausible hope. I believe more and more in the possible effect of my letter. Those days during which I still cannot expect a reply are well nigh happy. I know that it is on its way, that this is a final turning point, the final trial, and that after it, there is nothing I can do. As a consequence I sink into a calm, fatalistic peace.

My work, which I have truly gotten under way, is going smoothly, and I spend almost all my time in the national library. There the prevailing silence of a church, the light which comes from the edge of the roof, the constant sweet warmth, the sober-faced scholars, the thoughtful faces, the foreheads lined with thought and the gray hair – they all instill peace and calm of mind in me, and despair cannot escape from its lair. No matter how things go, I think, I have to be content with it. My life will likely run an even course, without any great joy, in fact, but at the same time without any grating

sorrow. And it seems to me I have descended from the hilly lands of life to its lowlands.

Nevertheless there is still that not yet totally extinguished hope and expectation that actually has created this peace in me. For the more time passes from my sending of the letter, the more restless and nervous I become. When two weeks have passed and I still have received no answer, my days are ruined. I often neglect to go to the library and I cannot leave my room until the mailman has made his rounds at about three o'clock. And if I do sometimes leave, I might suddenly drop everything and return, through wind, rain, or mud to my lodging.

As I approach, the concierge is usually in front of her room looking out at the traffic on the street to pass the time. From a distance I try to ascertain from her face if she has anything for me. If she has, she will go back into her room when she sees me. But perhaps she doesn't remember, perhaps she does have something. I greet her in my most friendly tone of voice. She replies in an equally friendly way, steps aside courteously, and I slide by her. But she does not follow me. I wipe my feet longer than necessary and climb up two or three steps. I cannot go on. I have to be sure. If I am not, I can do nothing in my room. The whole day will be wasted. I have to ask her.

“Rien, monsieur, rien!” (Nothing, my good sir, nothing!)

The same answer every day, and the same heartbreaking burr in her r's. She has no idea how it hurts. She is a kindly old woman, always friendly and always courteous, but nevertheless I occasionally suspect her of being engaged in some secret plotting. Who knows? She may have hidden my letters on purpose. Perhaps she considers the tips I give her too small and won't give me the letters. And on appropriate occasions I put five francs into her hand.

But no letter arrives. Always the same answer:

“Rien, monsieur, rien!”

One day I come from eating breakfast. I have ceased to wait and don't bother to ask her any longer. I am going up the steps when the concierge suddenly calls out after me:

“Voilà! Une lettre pour monsieur!” (Here is a letter for the gentleman!)

It's from Anna! I give a start as I see the address. Can it be possible? What does it mean? And the thought of it has me up the winding staircase to the sixth floor in a few bounds. I am gasping for breath and so faint that I can hardly get the key into the keyhole. When I finally get the envelope open, tearing a part of the letter in the process, I see that it is from her brother. And when I check the envelope more carefully, I see that the address is actually in her mother's handwriting.

I have no desire to begin reading the letter. I half wish it hadn't come at all. For I fear that it will totally destroy my peace of mind. Uncertain waiting is better than a total loss of hope. Now that I have a letter I can put off reading it temporarily, until tomorrow.

How is it that her mother's handwriting is on the envelope? The probable explanation is that her brother, as is his wont, has neglected to send the letter in the evening. He wakes up in the morning, but can't stand to get out of bed, and his mother gets the letter into the mail. That's probably how her writing, which is somewhat similar to her daughter's, got on the envelope.

But finally I have to read the letter. Perhaps there is nothing about the whole matter in it,

Her brother writes that he hoped I won't take offense at his having shown my letter to his mother and Anna. His mother had pitied me very much. Having read the letter, Anna had handed it back to him without saying a word, and she had not discussed it with him at all. "Certainly you will want to know what effect it had on her, and I would gladly tell you, if I myself knew anything. I do think, however, that you have not lost anything, even if you have not gained anything. In addition, those women are generally the sort whose minds one can never really know. And to let you know everything that is happening here, Anna has an admirer. A university student, of course, a youngster. They met at the Finnish club, they have practiced and performed costume dances together, he has taken her to the theater and serenaded her on frosty, moonlit nights. Of course she is pleased with it. I really don't know about her "feelings", or how deep they might possibly be. This may result in an engagement but it is just as likely that it will come to nothing.

"Perhaps I can't really side with you in this matter, but between us, it astonishes me a bit that you take your love for her so seriously and heavy-heartedly, so to speak. I do understand in general what your feeling is. It is that common yearning and sense of loneliness which at our age is so difficult, almost impossible, to bear. It drives us to seek for tenderness and attachment as the only possibility in life. And the more swiftly we feel life gliding by, the more intense becomes the urge to leap off onto some solid rock. And although Anna really is a good girl, perhaps one of the best I know at present, nevertheless she is not the only girl in the world. I don't at all believe that you are lost if you don't get her. You say that this kind of bachelor's love is like a first love. But their similarity is also manifest in the fact that both imagine themselves to be the last love. But neither one is. Some day you will meet someone equally nice, if not nicer. Men at our stage

of development need to compromise in our demands, and when we do, there are still plenty of women in the world for us.

“As for me, I am sailing into the winter harbor of family happiness. Think, man, I’ve been engaged for a few days. Her name is Helmi, a merchant’s daughter from Oulu, not liberated, not particularly learned, ash blond, strongly built, sound-bodied, a practical northerner. She is not taking classes in continuing education, nor does she plan to go to the university, but she is good at handwork and has come here to study home economics. My sharp eye spotted her long braid at the Finnish club, I introduced myself and we danced a quadrille. As you know, I am quite intéressant with my fine mustache and my slightly blasé appearance. I outshine all the adolescent clods. She fell for me at once, and I soon learned about it through Anna, with whom she suddenly became a close friend. She sings a little; we invite her over and I accompany her. I see her home etc. In a word, those details are always the same, relived many times, and I’ll say no more of them now. I don’t, of course, say a word to her about what I used to think love was. It existed and now with her it is gone. But where, my friend, are we going to find those great and profound women whom we dreamt could fully understand and satisfy us. When I sometimes feel the need for more spiritual companionship, the so-called communion of souls, I seek out my comrades, discuss opinions with them (over a drink) and then return home peacefully, where everything is in good order and where I am surrounded by tenderness and conveniences.

“Furthermore I am sure that she will have no cause for complaint. I will be a good father to her children, whom I long for, and a faithful husband to her. That’s not at all difficult. You and I have both played through all the many complicated melodies of the emotions, and I think I can now be content with that one simple tune, the droning of which will be the rest of my life—‘at the home hearth.’ I crave peace, undisturbed and good for the nerves. Oblomov! you will say. Exactly, Oblomov, in a way. That is the way I have developed.

“And you should develop in the same way. Toss your cares to the devil. It doesn’t pay to spend your whole life mooning away. Especially not in Paris, over some little Finnish beauty. In your place I would go with the current, since I am on shore. Launch your boat and ride the rapids, since they exist. And if you don’t steer too badly, and at our age there isn’t too much danger of that, you will glide easily into your life’s quiet waters. I will be there already, waiting for you, and I will steer your boat into the quiet berth of a sensible marriage. If Anna doesn’t care for you, and that isn’t yet decided, so much the worse for her. I at least will do my best, and Mother

too seems to be of the same mind. Perhaps in that respect, everything will turn out well, but if not, you can be assured that with my wife-to-be – who also sends you greetings -- we will search for and find you a good and faithful parsonage mamselle who is not overly wise or gifted, but is possessed of a natural understanding.”

The letter has a good effect on me. Not that I approve of my friend’s theories and his view of marriage. But the letter leaves me clinging to one thread of hope, although a thin one. I am satisfied that at least not everything is decided. I involve myself in my work with a new zeal. I live a hermit’s life, and turn a deaf ear to my friend’s urging to throw myself into life. Now, if ever, I want to be faithful to my ideal, to carry out my principles.

VI

It is Christmas Eve, about five o’clock. A thick, gray cloud mass has left the west and north ends of the city, leaving a bright and continually expanding strip of clear sky in my field of vision. The weather appears to be clearing up completely. The evening sun comes shining into sight over all of Paris and straight into my room. Its light is yellow and cold, and the sight of the windowpanes on the wall above my bed is deceptively homey. It reminds me of Finland, of those winter Christmas nights far away when I gazed at the snowy landscape from the window of my garret, where, behind the bleak spruce woods, a chilly looking rim of the sun was setting.

In my thoughts I hear the light padding of footsteps, in back of the door a mysterious whispering, a hand fumbling with the key, and a line of brothers and sisters bursts into the room, the tallest of whom can barely reach to close the lock on the door. They have come to spend the afternoon with me, which is so devastatingly long when waiting for the coming of twilight and the lighting of the Christmas tree. All the games have been played to the verge of exhaustion, hide-and-seek and blindman’s buff, they have crawled under the beds and tables, and still they have to wait many hours before the door into the living room opens. They don’t know what to do, they are worn out, they drop all their games, hands dangling at their sides, they nurse a common despair, not even wiping a single drop of sweat from their foreheads or the tips of their noses.

But then they remember that their oldest brother is in the garret, the only refuge in this great sorrow. He can amuse them, he can make the time pass if only he wants to. He lies on the bed on his back, lights a manly pipe, and they crawl all around him. Blue clouds of smoke drift through the room, and he tells “stories” which they listen to with bated breath. They don’t notice

that the view from the window disappears, that dusk settles over the furniture, that they can no longer distinguish what is on the table, in the corner, where the others' eyes, noses, and mouths are. Only now and then in a gap between words the pipe bowl crackles, and burning tobacco glows in it. "Tell us more! Tell us more! And then what? What happened then?"

They no longer remember Christmas or the tree. No, not until they suddenly hear the door open downstairs and my sister shout to the noisy attic: "Hey-ey, children! You ca-a-a-n co-o-o-me down now!" The bed begins to boil with heads and feet, a glowing tobacco coal flies to the floor from the bowl of the pipe, the chair topples over, the door is left wide open, and before I manage to close it, they are at the foot of the stairs and the lower door is slammed shut. Then I change into a clean collar in honor of Christmas and I too go downstairs shortly.

Those were the days, now long since passed. My parents are dead, my brothers and sisters long since scattered about the world, and anyone might be living in my old garret now.

Yet the attraction of that bleak wasteland there is strange, now that it is Christmas again, but there is no one with whom I might celebrate it, nothing but this endless world city with its millions of inhabitants, not one of whom knows me and none whom I know. Nevertheless I get ready, with some sort of pleasure to wander alone tonight. Looking out the window and recalling some or other occurrence from my past life, I get dressed slowly. I put on a clean shirt, a just-scoured collar and cuffs, I set my tie carefully in place and take my silk top hat from its case, brushing its nap with a velvet brush. Now for gloves on my hands and a cane in my fist.

The weather is bright and brisk. I go straight to the boulevard. A brisker than usual crowd of people floods the streets. The women's strides and movements seem nimbler than usual, and the men's gait is strong and vigorous. The sounds ring out as clearly as the rush of a rapids on a clear day, and the drivers' whips lash as joyfully as though in fun. The small, light coaches and the nimble clop of their horses' hooves strike the cobblestones like the tapping of a hammer on nails, while the huge freight wagons, which are as high as houses, and the horses drawing them, as big as elephants, create a noise that resembles the thumping of a forge hammer. And all that gives rise to one large voice, which begins with the rattle of the wheels, receives impetus from the clapping of the hooves, bounds to the bright sky with the whistle of the locomotives, is sparked by the lashing of whips, and rises between two walls as a dense and powerful roar. Sometimes the flow encounters obstacles, the road is blocked, and then this sighing and shouting high tide overflows its banks, retreats. Even the nearby streets teem with

stopped vehicles, horses' heads, and the black caps of men. Finally the jam is straightened out and they charge forward again with increased speed, strength, and racket.

But on the large boulevards, which I gradually traverse, the uproar is absent. The vehicles have slipped onto the wooden surfaces and are moving along in silence, no wheel squeaks as it turns, and there is only the dull thud of hoofs, which sounds as if the horses were wearing woolen stockings. In this silence there is, nevertheless, a taut passion. Every nerve cell is tense, and every limb on a strained alert, as in a factory where the balance wheel whines treacherously and a conveyor belt turns whirring from axle to axle. There are no longer individual horses or individual vehicles. On either side of the street, one person blends into another; there is only one single line, the end of which cannot be seen.

Although there is still some daylight, the lamps in the stores, warehouses, and cafés have already been lighted. The doors open and close ceaselessly and it is as if human voices, a hubbub, and hurried actions burst from them out into the cool air. The goldsmith's windows gleam with expensive items: rings, bracelets, watches, brooches, candlesticks, and lamps multiply in reflections from mirror to mirror. Silkenware glows under electric lamps intensified by glass prisms. Large bazaars are stuffed from side to side with toys alone. Books and papers spill out from bookstores onto sidewalks like streams of lava. Haberdasheries are like snow forts, with drifts of white collars, garments, and linens.

The stores are now filled with shoppers. There goes a mother with her two little girls. I follow them from window to window, from door to door and stand looking with them. The mother is constantly forced to buy something by the pointing finger of a little one. Burdened with packages, all three finally step in through a door, which is presumably that of their home, and climb up the stairs, from which I can hear, where I stand outside, the sound of happy laughter.

Now the electric globes in the center of the boulevard are lighted, and the dimmer gas lamps near the sidewalks on either side burn with a lower glow. But the last gleam of daylight still outshines them, and they look like eyes that have been dazzled and are still not adjusted to seeing.

I wind up in a café, with windows decorated with colorful pictures like a medieval church. A nearly homey atmosphere meets me at the door. A steel stove in the middle of the floor spreads a pleasant warmth around. A servant hastens to take charge of my hat and cane. He shows me to a pleasant seat on a sofa near the window, and brings me the latest paper to read.

I order absinthe, that drink of dreams and forgetfulness, which is so strong that it draws a veil over the eyes. The electric globes outside have won out over the daylight and have a warmer glow now, as if they were spreading blue velvet around. Omnibus cars, large white horses, fire-red advertisement boards swarm by the window. Blue, red, and white mix with one another, and the mix is in perpetual motion. But the newspaper kiosk does not move, nor does the tree on the boulevard or the gaslight post.

I would have a newspaper too, but I don't feel like reading it. Why haven't I come here before to dream of happiness on the brink of this rushing stream...yes really, on the brink...at this fabled knight's castle...

But higher up there, curving over the black row of houses, is the bright, translucent sky. The red glow of evening has not died out completely. It is pale and cold, as it sinks out of one's field of vision, becoming clearer as it sinks. But it does not stop there for me, it continues as a large, curving plane of the sky toward the north, always farther and farther. And the farther north it gets, across the seas and over the mountains, the colder it gets, and the stars light up to twinkle in it. There in Finland now, right now, it is creating a snapping cold. It makes the snow creaky and dry, and creaks in the corners. The trees on Helsinki's Esplanade are white with hoarfrost, the telephone lines hang thick and frosty, white curls of smoke rise from chimneys, and drivers' sleigh bells jingle...

Who is it that walks swaying by there, her thick fur piece swaying down to below her knees. Her cheeks redden as she stands before a lighted window for a moment, and there is frost on her eyelashes. That fine, cold skin...if I could touch it with my lips...

And perhaps I still may do it once. I'm sure of one thing: I won't be flustered or concerned. I'll bide my time. I too will find happiness some day.

It is probably the fine-scented absinthe that does it...but my impulses have changed. My life and this Paris no longer seem the same. I feel a surge of joy and my mind purrs happily. I haven't been able to assess them properly until now. I have feared this city as a hundred-headed beast and it is really a sweet beauty, with soft eyes and a delicate skin, who offers to throw her arms around me, is ready to caress and lull and stroke me with silk.

Out on the street again. Now it seems to me that every place here is brimming with passion, with fiery emotion and the joy of life, like underground hot springs. Everywhere centuries of development erupt into the air and fall like a light rain on the surroundings, refreshing and invigorating every place. And to crown all this constantly varying accumulation of effervescence is the Parisian belle one meets everywhere, that agile ermine, that nimble squirrel. She is as sweet as a child and as

revered as a queen. What honey sweetness in her movements and speech! What stirring suppleness in her walk! How she loves and cuddles and becomes only his who has won her!

I begin to understand the Frenchman's attachment to his capital city. I can grasp his loneliness for his country when he no longer sees these large boulevards thronged with people, the lighted windows of these cafés, the omnibuses passing by, as soon as he no longer feels the easily trod asphalt underfoot, or hears the cries of the newspaper vendors. I understand very well how he can wander back and forth like this for hours on end and feel himself to be at the center of the universe.

Couldn't I too melt into this and stay here for the rest of my life? Finland too is beautiful, and its horizon arouses such sweet and pure thoughts. But they are so tame, so weak. It has the bright summer nights, but those chilling, freezing streaks are always in the air, which breathe of swamps never free of frost.

The shadows are so cold there
beneath the birch and alder,
in groves of shining gold.
The waves too breathe a chill.

How blessed 'tis to court
one's own beloved there,
there where faith was born
And longs still to return.

But here there is radiance and animated movement and a full life. Here one can pass as young even when up in years, recapture his youth and enjoy life longer than he could elsewhere.

Anna and her brother's advice again come to mind, and I ponder, half asking myself, what effect it would have on me if I were to see her out on that street now, along with the others. Is it possible that she would not seem to me as I had long imagined her to be, but perhaps duller, more trivial? And had her brother perhaps been right?

I stop thinking about it and wander over to the grand opera, then along Opera Avenue past the Theatre Francais, and from there beneath the arches of Louvre into the yard of the ancient castle of the kings. There in its center is an iron column, as high as a festival pole, and from two of its crossbars hang large electric globes which cast a dreamy light. I cross the bridge over

the Seine and stand for a minute looking at the small steamships, the red bow lights of which are reflected in the water like fish-spearing fires.

I am entirely free of my own cares. It is one of those rare days when the mind is completely calm, when one thinks of nothing but his existence at that moment. It has often happened that when I arrive home on the evening of such a day there is a letter or telegram waiting for me on the table. A bad premonition jars my mind immediately, and when I open the seal with a trembling hand, I get to read something that I had forgotten about for a long time, which perhaps I feared would come, but which I had already completely forgotten. Yet such moments may be the greatest turning points in my life.

Having eaten in the Duval Restaurant on the left bank of the Seine, I go back by the same route and stop at the Regency café to take a casual glance at the Finnish newspapers.

I find the café nearly empty. The waiter stand idle, and the billiard tables are silent under their covers. The people usually sitting there are at home with their families, of course. For everyone who has a friend or acquaintance has joined him this evening. Only a few old men sit reading newspapers and smoking their pipes. Perhaps they are foreigners, people for whom the café is the only home, like me.

A short distance from me, at the opposite end of the table, there is a younger man. He was there when I came in, has drunk his coffee, and seems to be waiting. He is restless and glances at his watch from time to time. Apparently the appointed meeting time has already passed. He controls his impatience, and lights a cigarette. After a short time I see a woman through the glass of the door. She dashes across the street in front of a passing omnibus driving by and runs in this direction. Now the gentleman sees her too. His face lights up and he rings for the waiter to pay his bill. The woman bursts through the door and goes directly to him. They argue for a while, make explanations, and go out hand in hand.

You imagine that you too would have someone you were waiting for in that way. You imagine it would be she...just she you were waiting for! Without looking aside, she would hurry along the boulevard and turn this way at the opera house. Now she would be past that open little marketplace, at the Theatre Francais. She waits for some coaches to go by in order to cross. I can't see her, she is behind that fountain.

“Good evening, are you sitting here alone?”

The man who has put his hand on my shoulder is a Finn I have met here a few times.

“Well, what's new?”

I don't much care for his company, and he has no special news to offer. He knows nothing that isn't in the newspapers, that there are difficult times at home, and that they plan to take away our own postage stamps and our own money. That is bad news, of course, and we both shake our heads and sigh. His remarks remind me that there are Finnish-minded and Swedish-minded people who are now struggling for official positions. He is Finnish-minded, and the Swedish-minded are plotting against him.

We really have nothing else in common, and we break off and sit leaning back with our newspapers.

"Oh my, look at this!" he says suddenly. "They're all getting engaged at home."

"Who's getting engaged?" I ask, continuing to read.

He hands the newspaper to me, and I read the announcement in large letters on the first page.

Engaged:

ANNA HJELM

TOIVO RAUTIO

"Oh, is that so?" I hear my voice say.

"You know the Hjelm family, but who is that Toivo Rautio? Is he one of the Rautios from the North?"

"I don't know him."

"The girl got hooked early. I didn't know her at all except by sight. She was a darned good-looking girl. I saw her at the theater, and sometimes she caused a stir while walking on the Esplanade with her brother."

"Garcon!"

"Are you leaving?"

"I have to go and meet a friend."

I see a long row of lights at some distant street juncture. I hear the clatter of wheels and the clapping of horses' hoofs. An iron curtain comes down with a crash in front of a store. Over the entire face of one wall are words in large brass letters: "Hotel du Louvre." A huge building on the left, a pitch-dark, gloomy black hulk. An illuminated clock face atop some column. Its hands point to one.

Now they are sitting in Anna's parlor on her little sofa. There is no candle in the room. There is no light except for that from an open door to the living room. If she should come out, her hair would be disheveled and she would be blushing.

I walk and walk without thinking where I'm going...

In the center of an open spot at the rim of some reservoir, there is a group of slimy, greenish water nymphs. Their heads are human but their lower

limbs are fishes' fins. Their damp figures shine and they seem to mock and grimace in the firelight. Where on earth am I? There is the bridge over the Seine and one side of the House of Representatives. This is the Place de la Concorde... And I live in Montmartre!

"Honk!"

The wheel of a coach coming up from behind me grazes my sleeve. I have barely managed to avoid being run over by it. The driver growls something angry.

Well if you don't care, then I don't either!

And my early evening defiance begins to rise up in me, increasing more and more as I approach Montmartre. I walk briskly through the marketplace and along the dark, shadowy walls. Thank God the whole thing is settled now. It's good that the last tie is cut. Well, now there's no opposition from my old roots. I'll thrust my stump into a new mother earth. I'll drive it in so hard that the surroundings will shake and the old bark drop off its sides.

They really are clowns. Announcing their engagement in a newspaper! And how often we had as a group mocked such engagement announcements. The only thing lacking was the announcement of her brother's engagement beside hers in equally large letters. Perhaps it was. How moving it was, when a brother and sister...! And of course it would be a double wedding.

It hadn't been considered necessary to let me know anything. Why bother? He can read it in the paper. Of course they were enchanted with the sweetheart, the family's new son-in-law.

I have been walking down Rue Blanche, which runs between cold-looking buildings. Suddenly Moulin Rouge appears before me at the upper end of the street on the slope of Montmartre. It glows a brighter red than ever before. Its blades, inset with red lights, squawk in slow tempo, beckoning from afar for us to come. Red lights shine through the windows, and the door down below between the legs of the mill is red also. People hurry toward it from every direction. Single walkers and entire groups rush along the boulevard and from the mouths of nearby streets toward the mill. One after another, coaches halt before its façade, driving quickly off to make way for others. An everlasting abyss, the base of the mill draws people into it. They enter, confident, experienced, and content, laughing men and women, like those in paintings on a church wall, where a happy humanity dances on the broad path from the large gate which leads straight to hell.

I too go there, exactly there—on Christmas night! What a fool, since I hadn't gone there before. I, a clown, have passed by this house of joy earlier, almost scowling. And climbed like a humpbacked pietist up the narrow

winding stairs to my room on the sixth floor, my kingdom of heaven. Why? And to what end?

I stand before it, watching the passers-by. A woman's head and knee thrust out from a coach, and soon the sole of her foot touches the sidewalk. Silken cloaks rustle and a small velvet hat tilts on the part in her hair.

"Oh! Comme c'est chic! (Oh, how pretty!) A group standing some distance away shouts.

I wonder whether I should go in with them. Really, what would I do there? But a policeman urges me either to leave or to go in. When the door is open one hears snatches of the dance music, and that pulls me along with the rest almost in spite of my intentions.

I am at the top of broad stairs that lead down into the dance hall. I recall long-forgotten tales from *A Thousand and One Nights*, of underground feasts, golden castles in crystal palaces inside mountains, to which there is no known road, but to which "Sesame" will open the door.

A roof adorned with daring pictures rises over my head. A mass of flags and banners hangs there, waving slightly. In the distance they look smaller and smaller, swaying a little. I see mountain caves, green hills, and do not notice at first glance that some of the walls are painted and some of them are mirrors. I don't know what is real and what is reflected. I see long rows of pillars and innumerable electric lights.

The mass of people crowding the dance floor seems to be filling a vast open field. With distance they look smaller and smaller. They move and surge with the music, swaying here and there with the flow of a waltz. The crowns of silk hats sparkle and gleam, and here and there the eye picks up white collars, neckties, the bare shoulders or the enticing neck of a woman which stops for a moment, spins around, and soon disappears in the crowd. Now the music is sad, and a sudden melancholy grips my heart. I feel as if I were weaker, tired, my legs tremble. I could almost cry. From the common hubbub, there arise shrill shouts of joy and sometimes a laugh rings out. Pairs of dancers pressed against each other whirl around, men and women breast to breast, almost a single being. Hats are down on necks, heels kick into the air, white skirts gleam from under black ones, a small silken shoe kicks as high as the head, and a red stocking is revealed above the knee.

The air is warm and passionate. It breaks out from there in thick waves... there is perspiration seasoned with perfume in it...as if smoke were rising from burning human stoves of lust.

I descend the stairs and join the crowd. I see sparkling eyes and feel the touch of rustling silk, soft arms, and shapely shoulders as they crowd past me.

I wander from one side of the hall to the other, stand among a group of dancers, and try to distinguish one here and another there of those limber movements of hands, feet, waists, and necks.

And for the first time I have a desire to embrace life fully, to enjoy whatever the world has to offer. I want to go gliding across that lovely polished floor, to be enchanted and intoxicated. I am no longer afraid of waking up, as I had been before. Let the world take me, let this Paris squeeze the life out of me, if only it first caresses me and carries me in its arms. I have the money, I can manage my own wedding, pay the expenses of a honeymoon! Let the stream carry me away, let the neck of the rapids rock me, I'll wave my hat goodbye to my non-existent friends, to my country, to its peaceful shores, its alder groves, its birches, its aspens and its dark thickets. And I don't want to listen to the roar of its rapids down below, or hear of the death that threatens.

I can't grieve forever! I must have a right to a life of my own. I want to enjoy it, before my blood congeals completely and I freeze in the chill of my approaching old age. I too want to kiss and embrace tonight and make up for the years of temptation.

It is as if the air goes to my head tonight. I breathe in its lust greedily. My eyes frown bold and certain, I begin to identify and check bodies from the mass, seek faces that please me. I get my expertise in the matter from earlier days, and long unused inclinations awaken anew. I don't intend to take the first goods. I reject one, doubt another, like the third for a little while, but drop her too. That one has too much make-up, that one is suspiciously pale, that one has a gross mouth, and that one's eyes are too dull. I have to find the finest fragrance, the best that may be found here.

A serious looking woman has slipped by me once or twice. Her body is full and faultless, and her features are clean and fine, almost noble. She is sympathetic and friendly looking. There is no powder on her face, and her lips are red by nature. Her dress is simple and dark, and to her velvet muff a simple blue violet is attached.

She takes no part in the dancing, and she doesn't seem to have any friends here. Once she walks by me, and touches me with her elbow as though inadvertently. She disappears into the crowd, and I turn to watch the dancers. But when the music stops and the crowd disperses, she is again behind me, and as she passes, she looks me straight in the eye, and I see that her eyes are large, and, I think, lovelier than any I have ever seen.

She goes off, but this time I follow her. Maybe she isn't one of the regulars, maybe she just happens to be here. And I picture a romance with an

exceptionally elegant Parisienne of the sort I had read about so often in novels.

I keep my eyes on her, and when she stops I stand behind her.

Quite naturally, without any preliminaries, she turns to me and says:

“You don’t dance?”

“Sad to say, no.”

“I don’t either. Would you like to offer me something to drink?”

She takes my arm and we sit at a small round table near the wall. I ask her what she would like to drink.

She is thirsty and says she only wants a beer.

When the waiter goes to get it, a long silence ensues. I take a pack of cigarettes from my breast pocket and offer one to her as well. She takes it, but doesn’t want a light. Rather, she puts it in her bosom and says she prefers to smoke at home.

“Of course you’ll come to visit me tonight?”

When I promise to, she presses her knee against mine under the table and toasts my good fortune.

“Oh, how thirsty I am!” And she finishes the drink in one go.

“You’re so good to me. I like you,” she says. “You’ll stay with me all night? Or what?”

“All night.”

She drains her glass and we leave. The sad, moaning waltz sounds again, and as we ascend the steps, the black crowd begins its wavy motion. On the other side of the hall I can see the orchestra platform, the motions of the violinist, and the conductor’s hand movements.

Why do I suddenly feel like weeping? Why are all my feelings of such heart-rending sadness? And why do I wish I were far away from here?

But it is as if she were attached to me. She does not let go of my arm even when she takes her umbrella from the attendant.

Meanwhile it has begun to rain outside. At the door she flips open her umbrella and hands it to me to hold, and gathering up her skirts in her right hand, she takes hold of me with her left.

The rain is light and drizzly. It has not created any real mud puddles, but a film of dirt covers everything and one tends to slip with every step. The streetlights and the moving lamps of the coaches are reflected in the wet street as though in a calm channel. The horses’ hoofs clop as if on treacherous wet ice.

We go threading our way under the same umbrella. She pulls me along with her the entire time. I ask if she lives far away, but she assures me:

“Very near, very near!”

On one street corner, she wants me to kiss her.

“Kiss me, dear!”

The kiss turns out to be rather clumsy, but the unusually delicate skin on her cheek feels soft to the lips, and I kiss her again without her asking.

And how does the gas lamp cast its light under her hat brim and how do the shadows fall so that when she looks up at me, I seem to catch a glimpse of Anna’s features. The same cheek, the same curl under the ear.

She talks to me the entire time we walk, she sings, always pulling me along with her. But I am no longer walking with her, I am with another. With her I stand before a door and her gloved hand presses a brass doorbell button. There up on the sixth floor we have a small household, two rooms and a kitchen, heavy curtains on the doors and windows, an alcove with my desk, with her rocking chair alongside it. And waiting for the door to open, I go through, as if in the chance light of a lightning flash, all my loveliest hopes, all my dreams and imaginings, as the dying are said to do before they draw their last breath.

The opening of the door awakens me. She darts into the corridor and fetches a candle from the janitor’s closet, climbs the stairs ahead of me, dragging her skirts, and I shake the water from the wet umbrella.

Her lodgings seem to be elegantly furnished. A broad, comfortable sofa, large, soft easy chairs, heavy, sturdy shades on the windows and in front of the alcove. A somewhat homey light through the lampshades.

I have taken off my overcoat and sunk into an easy chair.

She busies herself like a lady of the house, fusses on her knees to light a fire in the stove, straightens out the table, makes the bed, and always caresses me in passing. She has changed from her tightly laced corset and gown into a loose robe, and shaken her hair loose at the mirror, and bound it together with a red ribbon. Now I seem to see some likeness, something familiar in her posture and the way she holds her head.

I call her to my side. She throws her arms around my neck, holds my head between her hands, and kisses me as if she knows what I long for and what I am thinking. I am astonished that she has the insight to behave exactly as I wish.

“But why are you so sad?” she asks.

She is not stupid. What kind of experiences might she have had? For she knows life and people. How had she, living somewhere with someone or other, learned to despise them? She too must have loved someone wildly and unluckily, she has perhaps been betrayed and in turn has crawled at the feet of others. And where will she end her life?

“Why are you looking at me so strangely? Tell me why?”

“Because you’re so beautiful...”

She pretends to be cold, wants us to go to bed. Her robe falls to the floor, she slips into bed and tells me to come soon.

“Soon, soon, hurry up now!”

And she twitches her shoulder restlessly under the covers.

There is no coarseness or lewdness in her. She is loving and friendly and good, and wants me to be with her always. There can be no thought of my going and leaving her soon. She wants to sleep by my side the entire night, and she wraps the cover around us and seeks refuge with her head on my breast. I have to come here often; she is at home every day. I can come every day, at any time. “For breakfast tomorrow, no?” Remarkably, she doesn’t despise me. I look at her where she rests with her head on my left arm. And again she looks like Anna. Perhaps because I look for that similarity, deceive myself on purpose and make myself believe. And in so doing I have a kind of revengeful satisfaction, and with a merciless hand I try to force her into another’s place. It smarts, but I enjoy it.

Thus had I pictured her beside me, thus had I wanted to run my fingers through her hair, to rise up on my elbow and look at her face closely, her slightest feature, the forehead, her eyebrows, the bridge of her nose, her mouth and her neck. And thus would the lamp have gleamed in the dark, moist iris of her eyes.

She asks me again why I am looking at her so oddly, and I say that she resembles a woman I loved long ago.

“Was she beautiful?”

“Not as beautiful as you.”

“Did you love her?”

“A little bit, but that was long ago.”

And for no reason, I made up a story about her being unfaithful to me and that I had found her in the arms of another.

“Did you fight a duel?”

“We did. I wounded him in the hand.”

“You got your revenge. – People have dueled over me too,” she says casually, and then asks, “Do you still love her, that other?”

“No, I love you now.”

“Yes, just for the moment.”

“I think I could love you for a long time if you were in Finland.”

She begins to beg that I take her to Finland. She is tired of this life, she doesn’t like cafés and dances. She wants to go away, far away from Paris.

“But why do you live like this?”

“I have to.”

And we both surrender to the dream of that moment we will travel together to my country. We both know that nothing will come of it, but we both pretend to believe it and we wax enthusiastic imagining that it is possible. Nothing binds her here, she has no real friend. And we will sail across the sea, stroll the deck all day, sit in the warm sunshine, sleep nights in the same cabin, the very finest one on the ship. We are like newlyweds.

“Yes, yes, we’ll play newlyweds.”

And when we get to Helsinki, I’ll say she is my wife, and when we walk along the boulevard...”

“Are there boulevards there too?”

“There are...”

And everyone will turn to look at her and ask who that woman is, the one who is so beautiful, so elegantly dressed, so “chic.”

“Do you think I would attract attention there?”

“Yes, lots of it.”

“Take me there, my love, my own sweetheart...Let’s go at one...tomorrow already.”

“In the summer we’ll go to the country. We have a place there.”

“And we’ll fish and row and sail. She has rowed on the Seine, she has a rowing suit, she will take it with her.

And thus I put her everywhere in the same places I have previously put Anna in my thoughts on solitary trips and during those silent moments of the night up in my room, where she has become attached and from which I now tear her loose, trying to rip apart the sensitive weave of my finest moods. And I am content, I enjoy being able to do it. And thinking of my love for Anna and the way I now treat my own emotions, I begin to scorn their weakness and say half aloud to myself: “Pooh, was that you? It really wasn’t worth it.” But then I become exhausted and want to sleep all this away. I blow the candle out, but feel as if I cannot get to sleep yet. I become nervous, her head weighs on my hand like a log, and her breath burns my side through my clothing. I wish she would move to the other side of the bed and breathe toward the wall.

While I am thinking about how to propose it without hurting her, she suggests the same thing herself. When I suspect that she does it because she is as tired of me as I am of her, this all begins to trouble me, and when I recall what I have just said, I shudder with a irresistible feeling of loathing and draw as far away from her as the side of the bed permits.

She soon begins to breathe like a sleeper, and I too try to sleep. But the strange surroundings, the nighttime traffic on the street, and the rattle of wheels prevents me. I hear voices, steps on the stairs, the conversation of

men and women in the next room, and suppressed laughter. But her presence disturbs me most of all. I fear her waking up to caress me and I feign sleep when I hear her moving.

Finally I doze off, but immediately a weird nightmare begins to trouble me. I dream that I am watching her as she sleeps behind me. I believe she is awake and is waiting for me to fall asleep. She is waiting for an opportunity to creep over to the chair where my clothes and all my money are. But the one I am watching is not her, but it is Anna, some kind of mixture of the two of them. She is waiting for an opportunity to steal my money.

I try to force myself to stay awake, but I cannot, and I fall asleep. I start with fright at the thought that perhaps she has awakened while I slept. I wake up, having sat bolt upright and shouted.

“What’s the matter with you? I want to sleep.”

I no longer dare to sleep. I absolutely do not want to see that dream again. I stay awake for long time, listening to the clock on the marble mantel striking the hours and half-hours. The total wretchedness of this life, the misery of my fate besets and oppresses me. And in my opinion, it is not merely my own unhappiness but that of all mankind, which wishes through me to burst into a wail of complaint for that same shattering and warping which I now suffer. How dirty, polluted, and false it all is! And I had hoped, if only for a moment, for oblivion and consolation!

And constantly I see the image of Anna before me. I see her now, tonight, sleeping in her bed at home a peaceful, innocent sleep, in a virginally appointed room into which a clean, pale moon shines, windows that reflect frosty images, and with a moonlit snowy landscape outside. Never, never, it is gone, it is lost forever!

But it is not long before my companion begins to moan in her sleep. She weeps, sobs, and sighs, she too tosses like someone in the grip of a nightmare. Who knows what she is seeing, what she is suffering, or whether her dreams are more terrible than mine. I feel a boundless pity for her, and imagining that we share a common distress, I hold her in my arms with the tenderness and passion of despair. Half-dazed, she hugs me to her.

“I love you...I love you...I had a nightmare...kiss me...kiss me!”

Having slept, she is warm and ardent. Half mad with affection she clings to me. And I forget my past again, I don’t want to remember it, I have to escape from it.

The candle burns silently, casting an even light. I have drunk a glass of beer and lighted a cigar. Lying there and daydreaming, I am in a translucent frame of mind, body and soul in a temporary harmony wrought by numbness and weariness. I wonder at my attachment to Anna and all those states of

mind I have recently experienced on her account, and which I now consider childish. Suddenly she seems to me no more than that little girl from my days as a university student, whom I would meet on her way to school, and who meant no more to me than a familiar bird that I could single out from the rest because it so often flew across the road in front of me. I ask myself what all this laying myself open to torment on her account really is. Could I really have been so immature, so backward? Suddenly to imagine the possibility of a fine, idealistic love, a family, a home, and wedded bliss, which I have not believed in for years. Where on earth has this throwback to old susceptibilities come from? The world is raw and realistic, one must treat it as roughly as one does a nettle which blisters the hand that touches it gently and flexibly.

Morning begins to dawn. She has fallen asleep a long time ago, and sleeps peacefully this time. The candlelight turns pale and yellow and daylight penetrates the curtains. Yesterday evening they looked like strong silk and velvet, now they are a cotton fabric torn in many places, and the weave lets the light through. I get up and draw them aside. The sofa covering pales, the rugs and tablecloths become old and worn. In fact, the sun shines directly onto her bed with a pitiless strength. She lies sleeping there on her back now, her body limp, her head sagging down off the pillow. She cannot bear the merciless light any better than her room can. Her artificial curls lie straight on her forehead, and thrust out like thorns. Her forehead is grooved into little ditches, she has dark circles under her eyes, and the corners of her mouth are slack.

I myself look no better in the mirror there. My cheeks are sunken, my eyes are dull, my beard is sprouting, and my shirtfront is wrinkled.

I begin to dress without washing up. I don't want to use her bowls or her towels. My cuffs are still wet from yesterday, and my shoes are full of clay. The nap of my silk hat is fuzzy in many places and the collar is dirty.

When she hears me walking, she wakes up suddenly.

"Are you going already?"

She seems to be upset about something, she follows with her head on her elbow my every movement in dressing. When I already have my topcoat on and am brushing my hat, she cannot refrain from saying:

"You're not going without giving me a little gift?"

When she hears a gold coin clink on the mantle, she rises, gets her slippers, wraps a robe around her and comes to let me out. She offers to kiss me at the door but I avoid it, nor does that bother her at all. We have both had enough of each other.

Descending the steps, where rugs are being shaken, I see two pairs of shoes before every door, the larger ones men's, the smaller ones women's, both of them clayey and set out to be polished.

It is a bright, cold Christmas morning outside. From the nearest church I hear the ringing of bells.

"Merry Christmas!" my doorkeeper wishes me as I meet him on the stairs.

From my chamber window I can see all of Paris in the morning, its streets and church cupolas all aglow.

Mechanically I hurry to wash up, put on clean clothing, and lie down again.

And as I lie there gazing at the ceiling, the former icily clear state of mind I'd had when with the woman continues in me. There is a pleasant weariness in my body, and I straighten my limbs contentedly. They feel supple and pleasantly slack. Blood circulates so calmly and peacefully through my veins, which feel cleansed and freed of some bottom mud. "Pooh!" I say again, thinking of Anna. "So that's it! So its roots were no deeper than that!" I say it aloud, I want to hear what it sounds like. And truly there is no contradiction in the tone of my voice.

Be contented then. Life is like that. Accept it as it is given to you.

And lying there on my back between newly laundered sheets, calmly and with a mixture of disdain and mockery, I draw an orderly sketch of my future. It is a colorless and insipid design of dry lines looking as if they had been drawn with a ruler, exactly like my present state of mind.

It is a bachelor's quarters, with a large desk and its papers, all in good order, and a bookshelf with its books. A leather sofa with a worn pillow at one end for the bachelor's noon nap. An iron bed. Tobacco smoke in the room. Well-brushed clothing in school during the day. A robe that drags the floor and bedroom slippers at home. An old madam taking care of the house. Evenings often at a restaurant, where he discusses current issues seriously and declines into old age. Anyway, that is most likely. Home at a set hour. Reads some book before going to bed. On the wall near the bed a faded laurel wreath, a memento of his receiving his Master's degree. But without a picture of the woman who bound it. In the summer he lives on a solitary island and fishes.

There it is, there is no more. And it awakens no dreams, nor any hopes based on them. The sky of my life seems to have grown clearer and colder. I myself am freezing and shrinking. Total vacuity surrounds me, the soul bells of a solitary wasteland sound in my ears. And I think myself ready to accept the vacuity that life offers me. And I turn to the wall to sleep. But then I

seem to feel a waft of fragrance from this morning's bed, from her hair, from her room. She wants to draw me close to her, she strives to caress me, to kiss and hug me. And with one stroke my recent state of mind is wiped out along with the point of view it engenders. A loathing that sickens the heart turns my mind topsy-turvy, and shakes me from head to foot.

I love her again, I love Anna as insanely as ever, more hopelessly than ever before. From the depths of my being, I cry out to her now, call her to me, shout to her to come through that door, throw herself on my breast, to cleanse me with her kisses, to renew me with her caresses. I will tell her of all this as of an evil, ugly dream. She will forgive me, and I will begin life anew.

But she does not come. Those footsteps on the stairs are not hers. It is someone like me there, he stands before his door and his key sounds in the lock.

Why won't she leave me in peace even in the grave? Why can't I escape her, forget her, put her aside like so many other disappointed hopes? Why can't I escape her in enjoyment and solitary selfishness? Why can't I freeze into indifference?

But it is futile to ask. I know that I won't and I can't. Perhaps she fades from my mind for a brief time, perhaps for an evening or a night. These hopelessly real, these unimpeachable morning moments, they will always be the same. The same feelings will return, this same wretched longing, this wearing, gnawing loneliness. Wherever I may live, wherever I may seek consolation and forgetfulness, I am always groping for her around me, where she is not. I have tried to delete her picture, to cover her face, but the watermark always shows through, the clean profile and the curl at the base of her ear.