

A Tragic Love Story

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(a) GETTING ACQUAINTED

“Are you that Maiju Lassila.... the daughter of that Tohmajärvi sheriff?” a dumpy, rather stupid-looking old gentleman I didn’t know from Adam said to me. He had just stepped out onto the street from the Sortavala Clubhouse as I went tripping by. I pretended not to hear. The question was so intrusive.

“Or am I mistaken?” the man said, looking stupid, as I started off again. “So you’re really not Sheriff Lassila’s daughter?”

Now I gave him a look, turned my back on him indignantly and proudly, but gracefully and winsomely, of course, sniffed scornfully, and said contemptuously as I walked away:

“Pooh!”

But that old wretch did not let up. He didn’t get what I meant, but stuck to me like a burr and tried to humor me.

“Now I know I was right.... I know you, you look like your parents.”

He annoyed me, especially since a group of Sortavala’s elite was watching us: the mayor, students from the seminary, and Nissinen’s son, a university student. I tried to act as if the intruder were not talking to me and had nothing to do with me. I clasped my skirt in my right hand so that my small, high-heeled shoes would show to advantage as I minced along coquettishly with very short steps, my nose a bit in the air, trying to smile in as carefree a way as possible. And so I went swishing away.

But the man stuck with me as if he hadn’t even noticed. What a burr! Now he began to explain:

“I’m that Ikonen, from Kitee. I used to own Haarajärvi, but now I bought the Peijonniemi Mäkitalo for 80,000 markkas.”

I looked back and could have burst with chagrin when I noticed that the Nissinens’ son was watching me walk with that stupid-looking lunk of a man. But the latter went calmly:

“I’m sure you’ve heard people talk of that sale.”

I’d never been in such a situation before! I looked the other way and tried to hurry my steps toward Vakkosalmi to get out of sight and get rid of this Ikonen. But he merely went on:

“It was a low price for such a good farm. The timber woods alone bring in 60,000, and the firewood forest will in time bring in as much money as you have the guts to bargain for.”

At last we got to Vakkosalmi. Ikonen had dug out his pipe from his pocket and was cleaning out the stem, blowing into it so hard that his cheeks puffed out red and seemed about to burst. He went on explaining:

“I was planning to buy a new pipe stem, but that so-and-so Kotilainen would have robbed me of three markkas for a six-inch tube, so I decided to mess with this old one yet.”

I had had enough. I glanced to see if anyone was in sight, and when there was no one, I turned toward Ikonen and said, bluntly and directly:

“If you don’t leave me alone right now, I’ll call the police.”

Ikonen looked stunned. He scratched behind his ears and tried to speak:

“Uh....”

“Well, what business do you have traipsing along after me like that,” I stormed angrily, interrupting him. Now he explained stupidly:

“Well, not me.... But since my son has gone to divinity school all these years, and is a university student now, well, the old lady, the boy’s mother, has started hoping that he would marry you.... so that he wouldn’t be left with just some farmer’s daughter....”

I couldn’t be angry with him, he looked so stupid. Pursing my lips to keep from smiling, I tilted my head. Meanwhile Ikonen had managed to clear his pipe stem and now he went on:

“And our Petteri is a decent boy. He doesn’t smoke or drink yet, like the other gentlemen of his age in Sortavala.”

I swung my hips proudly again and started walking slowly forward. Actually I wanted to hear more, not because I was interested in the matter because of the boy, but because this stupid old man amused me. His idiotic speech and his gestures put me in a good mood. I didn’t care one whit about his son, and it wasn’t because of him that I listened.

Well actually.... I just did lie to the reader.... But who would have the nerve to speak right out on such a matter.... One is shy about matters of love. To be honest, the fact is that I’d already heard people speak of Petteri and this old man. The had recently moved to Tohmajärvi, and all the wives in Tohmajärvi — and even some of the gentlemen — spoke of Petteri as a potential sweetheart for this girl or that. Even my father had once said:

“He is a rich boy after all.... If only his father weren’t such a heap of crap.”

All this had made me curious, and perhaps a slight interest had begun to stir in my heart. That was the case now; I would even swear an oath on it.

That’s why I was now hoping to see what Petteri looked like. Of course I pretended to be indifferent. I swayed along, happy and carefree. Ikonen tagged along beside me and explained:

“And the boy himself has nothing against it. But he takes after his mother. He’s so shy that he doesn’t dare speak for himself, so the old woman said that I should maybe start to.... that I might go and meet with the sheriff himself.”

As he spoke, he filled his pipe from a large leather pouch, still sticking close by my side. I already wanted to see what his son looked like. The old man puffed on his pipe, and went on, as if to himself:

“This boy’s education is going to cost money too; it isn’t something that a man with little money should try.... “

At intervals he wiped his nose with his thumb, coughed, spit on the roadside, and continued:

“But why save this money when we have no other heirs but this one boy, and the old woman and I don’t need much any more. All the rest of it will be left to the boy.... If only he’s able to manage it and can get the right kind of wife...”

My good mood was enhanced. I was barely able to suppress a laugh and to hide my excessive smiling. The old man went on again:

“If you could only see the boy and get to know him.... Of course the boy will wind up the matter himself!”

And lo, the opportunity presented itself. At a bend in the road, a university student with a Finnish face, turned-up nose and all, advanced toward us, and Ikonen said:

“Well, there comes our Petteri!”

The oncomer was already before us. His father introduced me:

“Well, here’s that Sheriff Lassila’s daughter.... I ran into her on the street and came along with her....”

Petteri greeted me with a clumsy bow, and when he shook hands he twisted his arm so clumsily that his elbow stuck way out to the side. At the same time he smiled broadly, which exaggerated his turned-up nose.

“You can recognize her from her resemblance to the sheriff himself,” added his father, puffing on his pipe, and adding:

“Uh, I’m going over to feed the horses now. Take a walk with this missy yourself now!”

Imagine that old man! I was starting to be ashamed of his talk. He was already leaving when he thought to ask Petteri:

“Well how are things.... do you have money if you happen to need it?”

Petteri did not know how to answer such a question. The old man did in fact save him from the quandary by adding, as he left:

“Well, you just go and get that pants fabric from Siitonen’s store and tell him that your old man is sure to pay for it.”

The two of us were alone now. As if by agreement, we set off walking side by side.... What made me go off in an unknown man's company, I still cannot understand. But one thing is certain — the reader may believe it or not — that there was not a bit of what we may call ulterior motive in it, no desire at all to marry him. I was then a totally inexperienced girl in matters of love, And I could have had others, for all the gentlemen in Joki, Sortavala, and Tohmajärvi were crazy about me.

I still cannot understand it. The only thing certain is — let the reader believe it or not — there was no so-called intention, no desire to get married to him. In matters of love I was still completely inexperienced. I could have gotten others as well, for all the gentlemen in Joki, Sortavala, and Tohmajärvi were crazy about me.

So we walked on toward Kuhavuori. I walked swaying my fanny gracefully, for that was then the style. Oddly enough, neither of us could find anything to talk about at first. Finally Petteri came up with something, and he asked:

“Has Miss Lassila been at Vakkosalmi before?”

“I have,” I replied, trying to concentrate on walking gracefully. Then I asked in turn:

“Is this the first time Mr. Ikonen has been here?”

“No, I got into the university from the Sortavala Lyceum so that these parts are well-known to me,” Petteri explained, and again he asked:

“Well, what does the lady think of Vakkosalmi?”

“How so?” I smiled, already becoming more animated, in order to add life to the conversation, and while Petteri tried to think of what to say, I spoke up:

“I like everything about Sortavala... And what about you, Mr. Ikonen?”

“I like it a lot. When we were taking the university entrance exams, all of my friends were of the opinion that the only park in Helsinki that might match Vakkosalmi is the Kaivopuisto.”

We had again run out of things to talk about. I liked him. His conversation was the plain, simple, open talk of an inexperienced young man. I tried to walk even more prettily and put on airs. Petteri was thinking up a new subject to talk about. Now he found one, and said:

“Has Miss Lassila read Jussi Erheyinen's last book?”

“I have... have you?” I said coquettishly.

“I have...I read it last spring already.” Petteri smiled, trying to walk in step with me, but not succeeding. Now more animated, I asked:

“Well, how did you like him?”

Well, he does write, but he’s so heavy, so hard to digest, and so long-winded that a man couldn’t get through his work in a lifetime,” Petteri explained in his own folksy way. Then we were shy again. I couldn’t think of anything to say either, and so, even if I didn’t feel like sneezing, took a handkerchief out of my handbag as gracefully as possible. Having done that, I tilted my head and spoke as if I were peeved:

“Well, I think the same thing... Lassi Maijula writes much more simply and clearly. Or what do you think, Mr. Ikonen?”

Petteri was in a bit of a bind since he had not read Lassi Maijula’s book. There was a moment of embarrassment. But fortunately someone whizzed by on a bicycle, and that gave Petteri cause to ask:

“Does the young lady ride a bicycle?”

“I... do you ride?” I pretended to brighten up.

“I do... Last week we rode to Kirjavalahhti, and next week we plan to go to Impilahti,” Petteri explained, and then he asked:

“Well, what bicycle does the young lady like best?”

I didn’t know the names of bicycles. I was about to be confused, but I came through all right, and answered in a quite happy tone of voice:

“I like the bicycles they sell in Kotinen’s store. And what about you?”

“I like them too. They’re the Tarmo bicycles. They have good tires, and the bearings don’t heat up from a little riding.”

We were climbing the Kuhavuori slope. It was a calm, lovely, summer day.

The flowers seemed to be dozing in the noonday light. The deep water of the lakes, their shores, and the slope of the hill seemed poetically deserted. The poetry of the solitude and stillness began to weigh on our souls, shaping our moods, which had been made more sensitive by the timidity brought on by our sudden meeting. Petteri’s mind especially began to glory in it. And I too tried to make myself open to the beauty and poetry of nature. All of this in turn increased Petteri’s shyness. Another period of silence commenced. Finally Petteri noticed a familiar flower on the roadside, and pronounced its Latin name:

“Chrysanthemum segetum.”

I smiled a little, even at that.

“Sometimes even rare plants grow here on Kuhavuori.”

And again we were silent. We both were trying to walk in an appropriate way, I gracefully, and Petteri in his own fashion. For lack of anything else to say, Petteri asked:

“Do you like botany?”

But at last we reached the crest of Kuhavuori. Before us lay the pearl of the North, Finland praised in song. We could see the blue bays and sounds of Lake Ladoga. We could see Lake Liikola and Lake Vakko and Hympölä. We could see ponds. They lurked in the recesses of the landscape like shy and lovely maidens hiding themselves. There were also beautiful islands, lovely shores and gorgeous valleys and hills, peaks and summits, Paussuvuori and Riuttaluoto. We could see Liikola Manor, some aristocrat’s home, and decent farmers’ houses. There were a couple of rather poor cottages and the decrepit shacks of some men who worked on tramp steamers. Wooden hinges gleamed on their doors, and sticks hung there and on the gates in place of bolts. Hungry nags scratched their ribs by rolling on the rough surface of a shore meadow. The lovely, idyllic landscape of Finland shone at its height like a shy flower in the solitude of a summer evening. It is no wonder that I pretended to be charmed, and shouted as though I were ecstatic.

“Oh, beautiful! What an enchanting view.”

Petteri smiled at that show of delight, half-laughing, so that his mouth was open and his nose stuck up. That amused me. I smiled in such a way that my eyes opened wider and my brow wrinkled. Since I had also cried out, Petteri was moved to say:

“One can never tire of this view!”

And now the initial shyness between us disappeared, and we were able to point out more and more points of beauty and shout to one another to our heart’s content. Petteri was now enthusiastic:

“One just has to say this: Finland is a beautiful country... Poets have good reason to praise it.”

I tried to appear ecstatic, and shouted: “If only one could always enjoy a sight like this!”

At that moment a group of drunken men from Sortavala came driving down the road. They were cursing and whipping their skinny nag, and darned if they didn’t burst out into a dirty song. I pretended to be deaf and blind, and to cover up I began to hum:

“When you gave us a beautiful land
and the lovely blue of the sky...”

Thus we escaped that embarrassment and again began praising the beauty of the landscape. I shouted out, enchanted, and now we began to talk about our country, praising its beauty and its people. Even on that subject, Petteri spoke in an unadorned and folksy language. We began to descend from the hill, and little by little I began to know him more inwardly.

And now we continued on our way. We went first to the city and then without any verbal agreement, we walked through the famous village of Lahti. We passed a decayed cottage. On one fence there hung an old, patched and tattered pair of pants, and outside one door someone had just emptied the remains of a dish made with salt fish, which exuded such a stench that Petteri had to admit:

“That does smell bad! Let’s take this other road.”

We turned in another direction. A woman carried a slop pail out of another cottage, dumped it onto the manure pile, and then bent over to spit, letting the saliva ooze slowly from her mouth. To save us from this strange situation, I began to shout:

“Oh, look at the beautiful view over there... Look, Mr. Ikonen... there, in the distance... what a beautiful rural idyll!”

“It really is!” Petteri exclaimed, not knowing what view I meant, and so we continued on our way until we were well acquainted. By now I was flirting and putting on airs quite freely, and I kept glancing at Petteri to see what effect I was having on him. So we arrived at the Vorssi Sound, where we stopped and looked at the open waters. I let my charming, enchanting gaze glide far out over the waters, yearning and dreamy. Petteri looked into my lovely eyes, smiled broadly, and then, as if he had swallowed the spell of my loving gaze whole, he became shy and said, for lack of other words:

“This isn’t a bad view either.”

So we grew closer to one another. And when we parted about noontime, Petteri was already able to ask:

“Perhaps I can send Miss Lassila photographs of views from our bicycle tours?”

I thanked him. I don’t know why, but without being aware of it, I had begun to like him. I had never been in love before, and so I was totally inexperienced in such matters and unable to be on guard. I didn’t know how love began, and so I, a novice, fell, totally unaware, into the agonies of a first love, which I am now about to relate. And now, having begun, I will tell all, and cover the whole subject of love just as it is — no matter how others may paint and prettify it with lovely, sickening colors. If only the reader is able to see and find among these apparently trifling matters that great and deep unseen which is so hidden in them that at times it is difficult to find,

especially for a novice, just as it is impossible to find the smell in an onion although it is certainly there, as everyone who has held an onion is forced to admit with tears in his eyes. Well, it is just that unseen, that which makes us weep although we can't see it, which in this account is that renowned thing called love.

Well then! Our story has actually begun already. It was heading toward evening. When I rode home with my father, Sheriff A. U. Lassila, I was in an unusually poetic frame of mind without myself knowing why. I was already... let the reader conjecture... well... leaning that way. Evening arrived. We were home already. Restful night blanketed the manor and garden and the waters of the lake with its dusky mantle. The people were asleep. I was sitting alone then, looking out at the deserted lake and dreaming of something vague and beautiful without wondering what it might be. An hour passed, and then another. Midnight arrived. I began to yawn and feel sleepy. I yawned a long yawn, stretched, undressed, ducked into my bed and fell into a wonderful sleep.

Petteri had experienced something similar. Having bought the fabric for pants and bicycle rockets, he drove home with his father in a sober state of mind. Little by little, my beloved image began to impress itself upon his simple soul. Having arrived at home he began to think about me, and he sat up until fifteen past one in the morning. But then fatigue overcame him too. He took off his shoes, considered them thoughtfully, lined them up alongside his bed, undressed, went into the pantry to drink a glass of milk, and covered himself up head and all so that the mosquitoes would not bother him.

b) THE FIRST STAGE

From what a small matter the plot of a huge affair has begun to develop! I could hardly believe it myself if I hadn't lived and experienced it. I'll tell you about it here:

Some kind of new phase had begun in my life. There was something light and bright in my psyche. The blue of the sky looked more limpid. The song of birds sounded different from before, and a totally new poetic mood was manifest in the calm open waters of lakes, in the forests, and just everywhere.

So one day passed, then another. I was joyful, happy, sweet, and good to everyone. But the calm image of my new acquaintance Petteri had begun to appear in my soul. At first I laughed and scoffed at it, as girls are in the habit of doing when all alone they practice their mischief, and I said to myself:

“Oho! He’s not the first one I’ve seen!”

But I could not get rid of that feeling. That feeling of love appears in us the way a stubborn, annoying fly appears to disturb the peace of someone who yearns for rest. It buzzes around once, then again, sits on one’s forehead or one’s bare bald head. We’re not troubled by the first time it buzzes, but after that we try to shoo it away, but in vain, of course. It buzzes around more and more stubbornly, and always returns to torment us anew, and finally we are nervous and tormented, helpless before the fly, and then our peace is over and done with.

I experienced something like that.

Petteri had already sent me eight picture postcards, but my album was already filled up. I had to start taking the earlier ones out to make room for the ones he sent. I took out those sent by girls and my parents.

Now another postcard arrived. I had been thinking of him, and these cards were like breezes blowing from where he was. Now I reorganized my album. I moved Herman Ratinen’s cards from the beginning to the end of the album and put Mr. Ikonen’s in their place.

It was from such apparently trifling incidents that the matter began to build! Isn’t that just remarkable! Everything develops from small beginnings, like some huge disease from a little pimple. And I was already beginning to think of him, even to miss him. I don’t know what it was in him that attracted me. I think it was his honesty, the simple, unadorned picture of his face, the simplicity of his soul, and his broad, honest smile which penetrated my soul, my soul which no longer did anything but thirst for the truth about life, its depth and its gravity — where on earth had it developed such a thirst — my soul, to which everything superficial and ornamental was so foreign that it literally feared it as a child fears a spook in the dark.

Love had begun to fill my soul without any awareness on my part. It had succeeded in making a small change in my mind. I was already dreaming and fantasizing, sometimes singing mournful, poignant songs, and spending whole days in front of the mirror primping myself.

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Some time had passed. The warm summer days had ended. The sky turned gray with clouds. No longer did one hear the joyous songs of the

birds. The open waters of Tohmajärvi were shrouded in gray and a solitary seagull flew over it with powerful wing-strokes.

That day life seemed stranger and lonelier to me than usual. Perhaps my idle life had something to do with it, but I'm not really sure about that. Father and Mother, along with everyone in the house, seemed to be yawning, almost dozing. Even Musti the cat had hidden herself in the corner and slept curled up in the bed.

But at noon we did get a visitor, Mrs. Halinen, the lumber dealer's wife. Like my mother, she was fat, and she knew all the secrets of Tohmajärvi. We drank coffee. Mother and Mrs. Halinen talked about how the hens were laying. Mother was complaining:

"I wonder what has gotten into our chickens. They're not even laying enough for us to see what an egg look like."

"Go and buy from this new... from old Ikonen those new kinds of thoroughbred chickens, and they will lay," Mrs. Halinen recommended. And so the talk turned to the Ikonen gentry and in the end specifically to Petteri.

"He'll be a rich lad... that Mr. Ikonen's son, when the old man himself dies," Mrs. Halinen conjectured. Mother was checking Father's old socks and she asked:

"What kind of man do you think he might be?"

I was sitting in the rocker, rocking as if I were deep in thought and pretending not to hear the entire conversation.

"I haven't heard anything bad about him," Mrs. Halinen explained, "... at least not up to now."

She also checked Father's sock in the interim, and then explained more about Petteri:

"They say he doesn't even drink yet."

"How can anyone that old not have learned to drink yet?" Mother thought it odd. Mrs. Halinen took her up on it, assuring her:

"Well, they say he doesn't drink yet... Unless that Ratinen's boy has taught him by now."

I was overjoyed to hear what they were saying. I was no longer able to fully control my state of mind. And when the conversation had continued in that vein for awhile, and Mrs. Halinen had kept on praising Petteri, I could no longer hide my joy, but rose from my rocker and hugged and caressed her.

"Auntie Halinen, You're always so good and sweet!"

"Well... what's on your mind now, Maiju, to make you act like that?" said Mrs., Halinen in surprise. I hurried to confuse the issue by patting her hands and cheeks and repeating:

“I like you so much, Mrs. Halinen, “so much, so much that I really...”

And so the talk about Petteri went on. I was all happiness and joy. But suddenly Mrs. Halinen changed the subject and announced:

“They say that Elli, the daughter of the cantor Iittinen is head over heels in love with the Ikonen boy...I hear them repeating that over and over.”

It was like being stabbed in the chest. Even in this instance I won't conceal my obvious weaknesses. Jealousy began to rise in my soul, wordless and gloomy as a thundercloud, and I could not suppress it. The talk went on. Now my mother observed:

“Well, it's time for that Elli to get a man... She just sits there and eats up the Cantor's small earnings.”

I leaned against the back of the rocker and shielded my eyes with my left hand. I felt the blood rush to my head. Jealousy made my feelings for Petteri more heated. Mrs. Halinen went on:

“Well, getting a husband is costing the Cantor money too. Now they say Elli is putting on such painful pressure for a new dress that neither the director and his wife can get any rest.”

I had a moment of malicious pleasure, but it soon passed. Having first put Elli down, Mrs. Halinen now began to rate her strong points by saying:

“But she does know how to draw a man into her net if she can once get into his company. She already had her strings around Oskari Pekkala, and he would most likely be her husband if he hadn't happened to move to Kuopio.”

She went on calmly shooting off her mouth. I was getting nervous. When a single fly buzzed in my ear, I got so angry at it that I tried nervously to slap at it on my forehead and snapped angrily:

“Damn!”

“Well, what are you snapping at!” my mother put in. That indifferent but meddling question annoyed me. I got up from the rocker and headed for my room, snorting as I went:

“Well, why is this house such a mess? It's so full of flies that one doesn't even dare open her mouth!”

That's what my inner life had suddenly become... so strange and touchy that I grouched and snapped at any little thing! It isn't for nothing that people have written about the great power that love stirs in us. My innate character traits were beginning to reveal themselves, for when we are in the grip of a great emotion, everything within us is true and really our own, not just fool's gold. I wanted to be alone. I opened a window, sat down at it, and gazed out at the gray waters of Tohmajärvi. The sky was blanketed with clouds. Water dripped from the leaves of trees, from hay, and from

everything. A misty rain began to fall. There was no living creature to be seen, not a sound to be heard. A few words had totally shaken my tender, hypersensitive soul. The darkening mood of the air added to the pressures on my state of mind. The image of Elli, the choir-leader's daughter, appeared before me, and everything seemed cloaked in life's universal gray.

I sat that way for a long time. Mrs. Halinen had found a sock of mine in the laundry and asked Mother:

“Did Maiju darn these socks herself?”

Mother was busy with something and answered in a way that was cross for her:

“Well, yes she did! Otherwise she's so lazy she won't do a thing but fool around and tear up her skirts riding that bike!”

She fingered the collar of her blouse for a while and then added:

“She tore up three skirts riding around on it already this summer, so I locked the whole bike up in the storehouse.”

The first heavy raindrops began to fall. From somewhere came the snarling of fighting dogs. Then all was silence again. The rain became slowly heavier. Soon everything seemed to be drowning in water. There was no sound but the patter of the rain. The calm surface of the lake seemed to be boiling as heavy raindrops fell upon it with a continuous patter. I gazed at it for a long time as if I were lifeless, and lo and behold, at last a feeble, sorrowful sigh escaped from my breast! Elli's image flashed before my eyes, and in my jealousy, I uttered these scornful words:

“That so-and-so! She thinks she's better than the rest of us!”

In those days, all the fine missies of Tohmajärvi and their mothers talked only of Petteri. He was praised. His wealth and his decent behavior were exaggerated. It is no wonder that his image grew ever brighter in my soul and impressed itself in its depths as more and more beautiful. Jealousy only increased the warmth of my feelings day by day. I even think that this jealousy played the leading role in the entire matter.

Sometimes I wondered whether I had any real reason to be jealous and whether I couldn't be sure that my love was requited, since his own father had spoken to me of the matter. But I could not calm down because I wasn't sure. It matters little what parents say on behalf of their children! My own father had once said that I was in love with Mr. Kuittinen, but there was no

basis at all for that statement: I just couldn't stand Mr. Kuittinen. Petteri's father too might talk the same kind of pure nonsense about his son.

A week went by in this manner, and then another. I avoided Elli, the cantor Iittinen's daughter, although we had been the best of friends until then. I wanted to see Petteri, I missed him and his company, but where could we have found a reason for getting together!

One day when I happened to be walking past Haaranen's store, I saw Ikonen's horse standing in its yard. Thinking that Petteri was in the store, I immediately headed for it on the pretence of going to buy something. I meant to ask about some very fine goods which I knew they didn't carry. Isn't it terrible that such thoughts should enter my mind? And I had guessed right. Petteri was in the store. I pretended not to notice him, but went ahead with my pretence of buying something. The clerk rushed over hat in hand to serve me, asking fawningly with his head cocked to one side:

"What will Miss Lassila have?"

I fanned my face as if it were hot, and explained soberly, as if I were warm and in a hurry:

"Do you have a sort of... sort of..." I gestured with my hands as if I were trying to remember and went on: "I don't know what it is in Finnish... that kind of 'petit corset'... in French. You know? Petit corset... petit corset."

Of course the clerk understood nothing of such talk and shook his head doubtfully, at a complete loss, for he knew not a word of French. I just kept right on:

"But the best... the very best in that line... that kind of 'petit corset.'"

"We don't have anything of the sort!" the clerk was totally confused.

Then I began to complain:

"Well, shame on you!"

"We did have them, but we're all out." The clerk began lying to get out of his predicament, and then he asked:

"But will there be anything else. We have good ladies' stockings and..."

"No!" I hastily interrupted him. The clerk went on stubbornly, tilting his head.

"And women's gloves... and..."

"No... no," I interrupted him again, hastily.

"And hairpins... and good brooches."

I was getting angry now, and fearing that something awkward might develop, I tried to cut things off. But the stubborn clerk bowed all the more stubbornly:

"And fine ladies' panties... just arrived."

I was on the verge of blushing. Ugh! To escape I pretended to notice Petteri and cried out:

“Oh... Mr. Ikonen is here! I didn't expect this!”

He bowed, tipped his hat, smiled calmly and explained:

“I came to buy a line and hooks... It's the best time for line fishing now!”

How our attitudes had changed since our first meeting at Vakkosalmi!

Now I was at a loss and he the more experienced and therefore more bold. A little discussion ensued. I tried to be friendly, but at the same time carefree and happy so that he would not get the impression that I was being forward. So naturally, down to the last detail, did I play the part of a woman in love.

But the encounter ended suddenly. Petteri's father had completed his transactions and shouted for his son to come out and hurry home with him. I was left alone, thinking of ways I might get to spend more time with Petteri undisturbed. An opportunity was coming up: our family had planned a family celebration for Mother's name day, to which we generally invited all the elite of Tohmajärvi, and at other times only a select few of the richer and more proper gentlemen. I decided to direct all my energies to seeing that Mr. Ikonen and all his family would be invited, although he was not yet a close acquaintance of my father. I waited impatiently for the celebration and vowed to show Elli that her intentions would come to nothing.

And now a period of waiting and uncertainty commenced. My inner life was as sensitive as mist is to a breeze. I was subject to dreams and fantasies. On going to bed in the evening, I hoped to see beautiful dreams of love. But the wonder of it is that I never did have one. That, in my opinion, was the first bad omen. That was the reason that often, when I woke up in the morning, I vented my grief to the whole world, beat on my pillow or tossed it away in a nervous fit:

“Damn!”

C) MY FIRST SNARE

A last the name-day I've mentioned arrived. Father was smoking his pipe and Mother was making up, as he listened, the list of those who should be invited. She began:

“Well, no need even to mention the minister and the other best people... we'll invite them... But what about this merchant Surakka?”

She waited for an answer. I was impatient, fearing that the Ikonens would not be invited. Apprehensively I put in, when Father delayed in answering:

“Didn’t you hear what Mother asked you, Father?”

“What?” said Father calmly.

“I said what do you think of the merchant Surakka?” Mother repeated.

“Surakka?” Father answered, digging at his teeth with a toothpick, then cleaning what was left with his tongue, and spitting. Then he announced:

“Well, he can come. He can talk to Ikonen later about the price of flour, so the man won’t cause the rest of us any problems.”

“Then we’ll invite Surakka,” Mother checked his name on the list, then she gathered it up and said:

“Well, that’s the last of them, thank God.”

“Mama...Ikonens!” I whispered into her ear. Mother gave me a look of inquiry and asked:

“Well... what do you say to them?”

“To whom?” Father said with difficulty, the toothpick still in his mouth.

“The Ikonens... the ones who moved here to Peijonniemi.”

Father had picked up a mirror and was checking his teeth with his mouth wide open. He cleared his throat three times, each time louder than the last, went and spat, and then said no:

“He’s such an improper man, that Ikonen.”

I was upset, and snapped at him:

“How can you say such things about people, Father!”

“This damned throat, I can’t clear it!” Father gurgled again. I was annoyed and growled as though to myself:

“As if people were different from one another... and as if Ikonen didn’t pay Father his money just like anyone else,” I added nastily.

Father didn’t deign to argue. Finally getting his throat cleared, he picked up his pipe and said to Mother:

“Well, invite them for all I care! But invite that timber baron Halinen too, so that the two of them can talk about forest deals and won’t bother the rest of us.”

Happy, with my nose in the air, I left the room. Father lighted his long-stemmed pipe and said lazily, referring to me:

“Where did she get so fascinated by that Ikonen boy that she’s trying to drag the whole bunch over here?”

Mother had picked up a mirror and was inspecting the single whisker growing on her chin trying to decide if she should cut it off again. Father leaned back in the rocker and added:

“That girl already costs so much that my pay won’t cover all her dress money.”

Mother and I were very busy on that day. In the morning I was pretty nearly wild with joy. I petted the cat as if it were a child. At times I went into my room, looked at my dress in the mirror, fluffed up my hair, practiced smiling, spinning, and even more often I checked to see that my bodily movements, when viewed from behind, were graceful and in good taste, and practiced to make them so. I had, you see, noticed Elli Iittinen making a display of just these movements, and it had annoyed me. Now I had to show her that others had mastered them too.

And now things began to occur which would have been impossible had the psyche been in a healthy state, and not shaken by love and the jealousy attached to it. As an example, I will relate the following case:

At noon that same Elli arrived at our house. I heard her talking to Mother:

“Good morning, auntie... Mother sends many, many greetings and says that your yeast caused the dough to rise so well that three kilos of flour made a huge twist and three braided loaves. Where’s Maiju now?”

“She’s probably in her room... Hey, Maiju! Are you there? Elli Iittinen is here,” my fat mother answered her and shouted to me as she rushed to brush dust from the furniture with her apron. Elli rushed into my room and shouted:

“Oh, my! You’ve go everything so well organized.”

And she dashed over to the mirror, made dreamy gestures with her hands, then turned sideways to it, tried a flip with her fanny, checking the results in the mirror, and brushing the front of her skirt as she did so. Her preening made me so angry that I tossed my glove from the table to the sofa, snorting indignantly:

“Ugh!”

But Elli did not notice a thing. She was now inspecting my hat with no regard for me, and then only did she blurt out her reason for coming:

“Listen, Maiju! Have you seen young Mr. Ikonen yet?”

In a flash I was jealous and I did not answer. Elli continued:

“He’s so-o-o nice--- so-o-o nice, Maiju, you won’t believe it. And then he rides a bicycle and is into nature and is such an idealist. I like him much better than I do Oskari,” she concluded, with a change in her tone of voice.

I didn’t know what to say, and to cover my pique, I shouted into the kitchen peevishly:

“For heaven’s sake, shut that kitchen door so the smell won’t come here... it’s enough to make one suffocate!”

Someone closed the door. Elli took my powder box, rubbed a heap of powder from it onto a puff, and, with her mouth open, patted so much of it onto her face that it looked as if it were coated with flour, started into to wipe off the excess in front of the mirror and asked as she did so:

“Maiju, is Mr. Ikonen coming here this evening?”

“Pooh... Let him come or stay away!” I tilted my nose up, pretending that I looked down on Ikonen, because jealousy was making me furious.

“I’ve seen better,” I added sourly, in order to hide my feelings. But she merely went on:

“I like him. He’s so nice and such a great idealist, such a great idealist that you just wouldn’t believe it, Maiju!”

I was about to burst with chagrin. She would have gone on talking, but I cut her off contemptuously:

“Hmhm! It’s so old-fashioned!” Elli again meant to speak, but was not in time, for I rushed on to say stiffly, nose in the air:

“Idealism is old hat now. All great and modern people are now realists.”

But Elli still did not understand that I could not stand her. She again started to speak about Petteri, to praise him:

“In the lyceum he was already so smart, so talented and resourceful that all the teachers liked him.”

That exhausted my patience. Nervously I shouted to Mother in order to get rid of her:

“Hey, Mother. Don’t you know we have a visitor? You haven’t offered her coffee yet.”

And that helped. Mother called Elli to have coffee, and so I got rid of her.

Perhaps now the reader will believe that Petteri had stolen my heart, that my love was genuine, and not just a momentary, illusory feeling. For if it

had not been real, I would not have been so jealous of Elli. I couldn't stand her now. When she left, I checked my powder box, threw the puff she had used into the stove, and muttered angrily:

“She comes barging in here and smears up someone else's powder puff and wastes her powder! The so-and-so!”

Recalling her coquettish movements, I became angry again, and said disdainfully:

“She plays the coquette and flirts like the best of them... humps out her fanny, and then when she wiggles it like this...like this...and like this!”

I imitated her movements, exaggerating them, and then I continued:

“And then she babbles about idealism like some magpie, as if she understood something about it.”

I imitated her babbling and the way she puckered up her face, and incredible though my behavior seems — who can believe that I had so completely forgotten myself and the demands of courtesy as to mock her in this ugly manner — but nevertheless it is true. I have related it so that you cannot accuse me of concealing my poorer side and the traits which demean me. I have wanted to be honest, for what good would it do me to hide all this.

Well then. So I mocked her and did who knows what. But that only increased my jealousy, which in turn intensified my love. I became nervous, began scheming, and did nothing but lounge around. My heart began more and more to thrust my brains aside, my emotional life took charge of my intellectual functions, and of course strange things began to happen, at least at first. In general, when our heart performs the work of our brains, we may be compared to a house whose master has gone on a trip, and a clumsy old man, unused to the work of the master, is left to restrain unruly children. Imagine what chaos arises, and what stupid things the old man finally resorts to in his distress!

Well then. Things began to take that course. Around noon I locked myself into my room and sobbed away, for the first time because of love, even though that does nothing to improve matters in such cases.

But at last evening arrived. The visitors had already gathered. I was gay, talkative, and vivacious. I tried to be lovable and happy, and sometimes my eyes were so wide open that my brow was furrowed. At the same time I tried to keep Elli away from Petteri.

And all the while my hidden jealousy gnawed at me. Because of it Petteri seemed even more pleasant. Others annoyed me, and when the Ratinen boy Oskari came to court me, I could no longer stand him, and treated him coldly. His intrusiveness made me nervous. I tried to take advantage of every opportunity to say a few casual words to Petteri.

Once I had just begun to talk to him about a bicycle trip when Oskari again butted in. He was trying to get his pince-nez to stay on, but was having trouble, for his nose was too small and low. "Excuse me, Miss Lassila, may I ask..." he began, but just then his pince-nez fell off and was left dangling by the cord. He began to set it in place and made a new attempt:

"I beg your pardon, Miss Lassila! How have you been spending the summer?"

"The pince-nez won't stay on your nose," Petteri smiled at that point, in a comradely way. Then he added in a candid and guileless way:

"Perhaps the spring is slack... they don't last."

Ratinen, now holding his pince-nez to his nose with his fingertips, went on:

"No... it is a new spring."

And changing the subject, he repeated:

"Well, how has your summer been, Miss Lassila?"

"Great!" I tried to be mischievous, although Ratinen annoyed me.

Petteri's father had been watching Oskari's efforts and now he approached and explained:

"If you had glasses with a thick frame like mine, and like my wife has at home, they would stay on your head."

Petteri was amused by his father's advice. He smiled candidly, with his mouth open. His father asked:

"How much do those gold glasses cost?"

"Um...how much was it?... Sixty markkas," replied Ratinen, searching for words with a gentlemanly mien.

"I paid one markka and fifty pennies for mine, and I can see damned well with them, even the fine print," Petteri's father responded.

I fanned myself with a handkerchief as I listened. Old man Ikonen cleared his throat and bent over to spit behind the sofa as he commented:

"Maybe I should buy that sort of glasses for my son here, but I don't know if they will do because the bridge of his nose is so low."

I don't know what turn the discussion might have taken if Mother had not interrupted it. She clinked her name-day toast at the other side of the room and suddenly announced:

"Where is young Mr. Ikonen?"

"Here, Mother," I managed to get in, and immediately a waiter brought a glass to Petteri. Mother came swiveling across the room with her glass raised on high, clinked it with Petteri's, wiped her sweaty brow with the back of her left hand, and said before drinking:

"Good luck to you too, Mr. Ikonen!"

Petteri bowed so clumsily that he seemed to have assumed the shape of a hook, and smiled even more broadly, his nose even more turned-up. I looked at him on the sly. Old man Ikonen began to explain to Mother:

"This boy of our plans to study and become a judge."

"Is that so?" Mother said coquettishly, and then she asked:

"Well how is the Ikonen family doing there at Peijonniemi?"

"Well, why shouldn't we do well? The fields are loaded with crops and the hay in the meadows is pretty good," the old man explained, puffing on his pipe, and then he asked in turn:

"And how old is the lady now?"

"Forty six years, four months, and thirteen days," Mother explained, trying to be nice. But the old man blurted out:

"Well, that's pretty old already. That old lady of mine is a year younger."

Mother was so stunned that she instinctively curtsied deeply to Ikonen by mistake, her head tilted to one side, her mouth sour, and her eyes round with amazement, clinking her glass to his in greeting.

The evening passed. We had already eaten and even danced. I tried to play the coquette. Sometimes I pretended to be a naïve little girl, and at other times a wild schoolgirl. In vain I sought an opportunity to be alone with Petteri.

But then I really did get the chance. The sun was setting and evening was upon us. He was alone in the garden. I went by him, hoping he would join me, and to make sure of it, I said to him in a happy, charming voice:

"Aren't you cold, Mr. Ikonen?"

"How so?" he smiled in his usual way and walked along with me. I was so happy that I played the innocent and as I minced along lightly.

And Petteri felt himself flushing shyly, and could not think of anything to say. I took him along the garden path to the shore. At last he said:

“This is a really nice, big garden.”

“Do you like it?” I seized upon his words.

“I do,” declared Petteri, and went on to explain:

“I don’t like those city parks where they shear the lawns as if they were sheep. That only corrupts nature.”

We had made a good beginning. But now I began to feel truly shy, and could not find a thing to say. But I did try to fawn upon him by shouting:

“Oh, you are such an admirer of nature, Mr. Ikonen. I don’t care for pruned nature either. There’s nothing soft in it, nothing sort of homey and folksy.”

“No there isn’t,” declared Petteri, and so we continued walking and talking. We were approaching the shore, and in order to stay in his company longer, I quickly made a sly suggestion:

“Have you seen my favorite spot yet?”

“No, where is it?” Petteri said, astonished.

“It’s a little way from here,” I explained. “Oh, there’s such a lovely view from there. It’s so lovely, so lovely that one could enjoy it forever.”

“Well let’s go and see it,” Petteri seized the advantage, for he too wanted to stay in my company. I gathered my skirts up high enough for him to see the lovely lace on my slip, and so we set off.

The lovely red sun was setting beyond the waters of Tohmajärvi when we reached our destination, the shore. The islands and the shore rippled as mirror images in the calm, blue waters of the lake, beyond the lake a thin mist arose, wrapping Janne Voutilainen’s house in its mysterious veil.

“Look! Isn’t it beautiful! I exclaimed when we reached the spot. Petteri gazed at it for a while, and then agreed:

“It is a beautiful place. That calm lake and the village in back of it and the cows on that shore. What is the village on the other shore?” he said, changing the subject.

“It’s Jouhkala,” I said.

The eyes of night were already opening in the thickets. The butterflies were asleep. In the shore waters a late duck finished his last swim and night’s mysterious spirit manifested itself on the lake. I tried to melt into nature’s frame of mind, trying to be dreamy and poetic as I said:

“How beautiful the northern summer is!”

Petteri waxed poetic too. Admiring the calmness of the lake, he said:

“It would be a good time to drop a line now... there would be no wind to trouble on now, and from here the boat would look as if it were free of the water.”

“Yes, how beautiful it would be,” I melted even further. Another silence ensued. Petteri became more and more shy. Being sensitive, since there was no other subject for conversation, he now asked:

“Do you like fishing, Miss Lassila?”

“I do!” I cried, quickly, unreservedly, lying just to please him, and Petteri announced:

“I do too. I like everything that involves nature.”

“Indeed, you’re a great nature lover!” I drew nearer to him again. Petteri was waxing enthusiastic and asked:

“What kind of fishing do you like most: net or line fishing?”

“Line fishing!” I snapped out blindly, but positively and without hesitation, my eyes wide.

“I do mostly fishing too,” Petteri was already beginning to boast.

And he told me about his fishing and we were happy. He ended his storied by saying:

“When I fish in that Nenonen pond and catch those humpbacked black perch, now they really go for the bait. All you have to do is toss your hook with bait on it into the water and they snatch it right away. You should come fishing there sometime.”

“Oh, what fun! If a person could just once sit and fish in peace...really fish in peace...and all... all that is good and beautiful!” I kept piling it on, already feeling envious.

Thus we continued our discussion, drawing nearer to one another. In order to soften him up, since I already knew that he was an idealist, I suddenly blurted out:

“But what do you think of the realistic point of view? Isn’t idealism the higher stance?”

An odd, victorious smile spread over Petteri’s face, and he declared slowly and oddly:

“Of course it is...idealism is! I can never enjoy realistic literature, but it’s exactly the opposite with idealism.”

I felt as if I had won, and I played my appealing role so well that I myself was beginning to believe that I was telling the truth when I asserted almost peevishly:

“It’s the same with me. I can’t stand the realistic bias.”

And I became downright enthusiastic and animated and kept yammering away:

“Just think, Mr. Ikonen, that it doesn’t elevate, it doesn’t enlighten, it doesn’t raise a person above the mundane, but always grinds away at the same old, common, everyday life!”

And so we penetrated deeper into new literary questions. But it was already time for supper. The tender, mild night wrapped us in its soft shadows as we rejoined the others. I was joyful and content. Now I hoped that I surely was the winner, at least over Elli. I was already a bit worried about what might lie ahead. Affectionately, pretending to be nice, I spoke to old man Ikonen:

Listen, Mr. Ikonen. Some day you should invite the people from Tohmajärvi to a fishing trip on Nenonen Pond.

The old man had his mouth full of food when he mumbled in response:

“Well there would” — he chewed for a while — “there would be” — perch in that pond if there only were fishermen to catch them.”

Like an affectionate, happy butterfly I attached myself to him, trying indirectly to make him understand that he should organize a fishing trip. Of course it was a difficult task for me. No matter what tack I took, the old man merely kept on praising his pond:

“Fish... That Nenonen pond is full of fish.”

d) FIRST DEVELOPMENT

The celebration was over. The days passed by, quiet and lonely. There had been a big change in my life. I had become lazier than before. Even the smallest task troubled me. I spent my days reading idealistic books, fussing at the servants, and at night I sang and dreamt. And always there gleamed in my soul the unadorned image of Petteri. It was imprinted there, as lovely and as calm as the images of the shore reflected in the depths of a lake, merging the beauties of earth and water into one restful splendor.

And how passionately I awaited another meeting! I hoped that old Ikonen would indeed invite people to a fishing trip, and toward that end I learned all I could about fishing in the meantime: Matti, the hired hand, taught me how to put a worm on a hook, and gave me some other tips. Impatiently I awaited the invitation to the fishing trip, and when it didn’t come, I became nervous,

impatient, and found fault with first one person and then another. One day I was even annoyed at Father for sleeping on his side on the couch and I snapped at him:

“What is it Father, with that everlasting lying around! No one in this whole house does anything any more but eat and sleep.”

Father opened his eyes lazily and looked at me.

“Well, Father!” I barked, and he turned over onto the other side with his back to me and began to snore. I tossed my head angrily and left the room grumbling to myself scornfully:

“Of all the sleepyheads in this world!”

Father did not seem to hear me, and soon was snoring peacefully.

But let us pause for a moment, and glance at Petteri’s life.

When he left us and drove home with his father around the end of Lahti, he was more susceptible than usual to the influence of nature. He too had been affected. The horse trotted along lazily. The wooded landscape was wrapped in the fine mystery of a summer night. The bunches of hay set to dry on fence posts, the willow bark, and the alder tufts seemed soft and unreal, the beard moss on the spruces so mysteriously dark. The birches seemed silent and the spirits of the night to be creeping around in the dark shadows of the trees, and Petteri, his nose tilted up and his mouth in a lifeless, unadorned smile sat lolling on the seat, the flower I had given him in his buttonhole. When they were passing the Marjamäki cottage, even his father noticed it, and asked:

“Where did that flower get caught in your jacket?”

“Miss Lassila gave it to me,” Petteri now came alive too. His father rapped the horse with the end of the reins and asked:

“Are you starting to chase after her now... that Lassila girl?” he asked after a pause, when Petteri did not answer. He still remained silent. His father thought for a moment and then spoke:

“She has got nice gams... when she lifts her skirts enough to show them.”

“Father, we should arrange a fishing trip.”

“Huh? We have enough salt fish to last for a month yet. And we can buy dried fish from the Sortavala market,” said his father doubtfully, not yet catching on. Petteri was forced to explain.

“Yes, but I mean the kind of fishing trip to which we invite all the elite of Tohmajärvi. We would make coffee on the shore and set our lines.”

Now his father began to get a vague grasp of the matter. When Petteri went on explaining, he was ready to agree:

“When we get some rainier weather so that we won’t lose any workdays during good weather, then we’ll set it up...Fish take the hook better in bad weather too.”

Petteri had to explain over again. His eyes on his university student’s cap, he spoke at length as if he were talking to himself:

“N-no. It won’t do if it’s raining. It has to be nice weather so the young ladies’ clothes won’t get wet.”

A new discussion ensued. Finally the old man got the idea that it was really about something other than fish, and he said:

“Well, how was I to guess that you were fishing for that Sheriff’s daughter!”

And he began to yield. First he suggested that they make it a haying bee so that they would gain by it at the same time. But Petteri opposed it, saying that he did not care for mowing and raking, and then his father gave in, jerked the horse into a trot, and announced:

“Well, you set up the outing yourself. I’m sure some perch will get caught on a hook.”

Some little things may be left out here and there, but since they are not so important, let them go. This tale is already stretching out into a book. So I’ll skip straight to the fishing trip.

Finally the longed-for day dawned. Ikonen’s hired hand came to invite people to it. Father was shaving, in his shirtsleeves, his jaw lathered. Mother dashed into the room and said:

“Ikonen’s hired hand is in the kitchen. He came to invite us to a fishing trip.”

I was overjoyed. Father opened his eyes a bit wider, looking at Mother, but did not interrupt his task. That annoyed me. Mother waited and inquired:

“What shall I tell him?”

Father scraped at his chin, his lower lip caught between his teeth.

“Father, didn’t you hear that now?” I snapped at him then.

“Are you going... on that trip?” Mother continued.

“Where will he be fishing?” Father finally grunted as he stopped shaving.

“In Nenonen Pond,” I put in angrily. Looking indifferent, Father inquired as he lathered his face anew with soap.

“What the devil kind of fishing is that now when we should be involved in working bees?”

“Rats!” I released my anger loudly. Mother tried to explain that it was a kind of pleasure trip. Now Father got it, and he said, as he prepared to go on shaving.

“Well, we can pop in there. Tell the hired hand we’ll come,” he concluded, sticking his lip between his teeth again so that it would be easier to shave. My joy, of course, was indescribable. Father finished his chore and sprawled out on the sofa to read the newspaper. In a short time, when Mother returned, he sat up again, and he spoke, yawning sleepily, as if to himself:

“Well see if that Elli Iittinen catches that Ikonen boy in her net. Old Iitinen was already asking how rich the old man was.”

So Father was already talking about it. There must be something in it then. He yawned slowly again, and went on talking with his mouth open, interspersing his words with yawns:

“And he really is”—he yawned again—“he really is a rich old man, that Ikonen.”

He had ceased yawning, rubbed the back of his left hand, and added, as though to himself:

“They say he has a couple of hundred thousand clear in current money.”

My thoughts and emotions were in total confusion. I was furious with Elli, my soul was now so sensitive and open to influences. Muttering something, I went into my room. In my rage, I found Elli’s photo in my album, tore it out, and threw it into the stove.

“That so-and-so...that flirt!”

And now bitter thoughts infected my happiness. Of course I wept and grieved again, but that did nothing to improve my state of mind.

But at last my hope had been fulfilled: the fishing trip had arrived. All the elite of Tohmajärvi were gathered in the Ikonen home. As a matter of fact, the entire fishing trip was something new. Many had understood it to be a fishing bee. Before departure, we all sat in the Ikonen salon and drank coffee. Timber baron K. P. Halinen began to discuss the matter by asking:

“Are there a lot of fish in Nenonen Pond?”

“There really are a lot of perch and roach. And there may be a few ruff among them,” the master of the house admitted, and to make sure he shouted to Petteri:

“Petteri, are there any ruff in Nenonen Pond?”

“No.” Petteri said. His father then defended himself.

“Well, that doesn’t matter... those bony fish. They’ll do for a fish pasty, but they’re not worth a damn for stew or for salting.”

The visitors were already expressing their acceptance by their silence, but now Petteri disagreed vigorously:

“Now you’re mistaken, Father. The ruff is most valued exactly for fish stew, even though it is so bony. It makes the very best stew.”

A discussion of the matter ensued. A number of the women naturally took Petteri’s side, considering him an expert on the matter. Petteri explained the species of fish from the point of view of natural science and then asked me:

“But what does Miss Lassila think: aren’t ruff the best fish for stew?”

“They really are. I really love ruff,” I lied quickly, as if turning up my nose at Elli, for I knew I was on the same side as Petteri. Even such insignificant matters had a huge effect on my soul. And it was no wonder. Every girl in love will understand it perfectly. Then Father took up the matter: stirring his drink with a spoon, he said:

“Salmon would be a good meaty and fatty fish, but the wretch doesn’t live in Tohmajärvi.”

The merchant, A. Kotinen, who was wearing his glasses, had also been taking part in the discussion. Now he stood up, went and spat, and argued:

“But the Onkama whitefish is a good eating fish too, when it’s fried fresh in butter, or cooked in a stew and has butter added. It won’t yield much to the salmon.”

“That is so... The Onkama whitefish is good fish to eat... But those Okama types really know how to jack up the price nearly as high as the price of pork, just for some fish!” old Ikonen now conceded, and so the discussion ran on through everything having to do with fishing.

Finally we wandered off toward Nenonen Pond. I was wearing my best dress and my hair was done most tastefully. We were traveling along a woods road, and I tried to walk beside Petteri so that Elli could not butt in. all my feminine defensive instincts were aroused. Petteri spoke of the flowers that happened to be growing on the roadside, announcing their names and asking if I liked this flower or that. In each case I always tried to find out his taste by asking:

“What about you?”

If he answered in the negative, I turned up my nose and agreed with him, like this, for example:

“I don’t either... Such a gross odor and commonplace colors.”

If he said he liked it, I would shout with delight and praise the flower. I really had the tricks! Petteri smiled, opened up more, became more familiar, and the two of us drew closer together. We were already friends. The others were paired off. Petteri had reserved a fishing rod for everyone, and now that all the elite of the parish walked with their rods erect on their shoulders, the sight was almost military. Thus had I put into a motion a troop such as this all for the sake of my love. The merchant Kotonen was already wondering:

“There’s a whole forest of rods on the march here! Where the devil can you find fish enough for all of them!”

If only they had known that all this was because of me, the result of a notion I’d had! But how could they know. We arrived at the shore. Petteri had already set nets and a line on the previous day, and filled the shore waters with fish traps and fykes. Now we needed only check them, draw in the nets, fish with the rods, cook, and eat out in the fresh air of nature. I went to work trying to get Elli to stay ashore so that I could be at peace with Petteri out on the water. With a pretense of joy, I shouted flatteringly:

“Elli! Listen Elli! You make the best coffee of anyone here...!”

Elli was pleased. I continued to arrange things:

“Then you can stay ashore. I’ll go out on the water to fish with Oskari and Helmi and Mr. Ikonen. Isn’t that so, Mr. Ikonen?” I hurried the decision along.

And thus I arranged the matter. The older ladies and gentlemen stayed on shore to fish. The ladies sat with their knees elevated or squatted with lines in the water, rods in their hands and chattered away about everything in the parish from the marriage of the Huhkonen girl to the widow Kaikkonen’s affairs, not caring a whit about the fishing. Father tossed his line into the water, and without giving it a second glance, lay down and asked the curate:

“Are those the big pine woods and the parsonage lands?”

The curate fumbled with his line and admitted that they were.

“A pine woods like that would really bring in the money if it was rented out to the foundry corporation,” Ikonen put in.

“How much would that foundry pay per stump?” Kotonen was already musing, he too lying down near his rod. Halinen went on explaining, his mind on his own advantages:

“It’s such a poor place to float logs from that it’s not worth paying a full price. Hauling them out with horses would cost so much that there would be little left to pay for the wood.”

And so the discussion continued. We were rowing far out in the pond. The water was calm. The rugged, wooded shore was reflected in the reedy shore waters of the pond. The smoke from the cooking fire rose straight up, thinning out and disappearing into the blue. The shoreline was full of squatting women and sprawling men. The peaceful, idyllic, unspoiled picture of life on this earth was complete. I too was moved.

And now the fishing began. Petteri tossed his hook in for the fish, I mine for Petteri. All feeling, I said to him:

“Isn’t this a lovely trip?”

“It is,” Petteri smiled awkwardly. I began to employ the usual tricks of someone in love: the melting eyes and dreamy voice:

“If only a person could die in this beautiful peace!”

The discussion continued in this vein. Petteri began to reel in his line from the water. Oskari was rowing. I was dreaming again. But suddenly Petteri interrupted it all by shouting:

“A perch!”

There was a splash. Petteri voiced his chagrin:

“Now the devil got away!”

“Did he get off the hook?” I said, sharing his misfortune. Checking his hook, he replied:

“The darned thing did get off! He was hooked only by the gill, and it tore. There’s only a piece of the gill on the hook.”

He showed it to me. For want of something else to say, I shouted out:

“Oh, what a red gill.”

“Father, that perch was at least a half-kilo, but I didn’t have the luck to catch it,” Petteri kept venting his annoyance. I tried to think of something to console him. So we continued our work for another hour. We caught eight perch and five roach altogether. Happy and lively we rowed to the shore. Old man Ikonen checked our catch there, and said:

“We won’t get a stew for this big a bunch from a catch of this size. Anni, you take that beef from the basket there in the thicket and make a really good beef stew.”

Father was also pleased, for he had often craved fresh meat.

While the stew was boiling, Petteri wanted to take me for a walk somewhere, in order to enjoy my company and win me. But he was shy with me and could not think of a proper suggestion. I withdrew a bit from the

group in the hope that he would catch on and join me. He did so and came over to ask:

“Has the young lady ever been to the top of Kytkytmäki?”

“No.”

“It’s a very beautiful view from there. You can see Petravaara, Kivenvaara, and everything in the direction of Lempaa,” Petteri said in an effort to persuade me. I would have been stupid not to take advantage of the offer. To help out Petteri, I said in a tone of complaint:

“How awful that I haven’t seen it!”

Thus we hemmed and hawed. Since Petteri was still too shy to invite me to go with him, I had to speak up, and I did so in a forthright manner:

“Shouldn’t we go and see it, Mr. Ikonen?”

“Yes, let’s go!” Petteri was delighted, and we left, climbing the steep, wooded slope in an effort to please one another.

And how peaceful it was in the darkness of the primeval forest! The soft moss felt like velvet underfoot. Age-old fir trees were like smiling oldsters. It was the start of the mushroom season. The first of the little milk caps blushed shy and lonesome among the moss. Here and there the chanterelle and other varieties raised their heads. The solemnity of the woods and the poetry of our being alone made Petteri even shyer. He sought in vain for something to talk about. Finally he found it in the mushrooms, for luckily three handsome death-cups appeared before us, and Petteri briefly pronounced their Latin name:

“Agaricus muscarius.”

I was pleased to have him come up with something to say, for one can always pick up on a remark. Now he noticed a little milk cap and wondered at it in order to have something to say to me:

“And how pretty that milk cap over there is!”

“Oh my! How clean and shy, like a lonesome child,” I was waxing poetic. Again Petteri was abashed. To recover his composure, he said:

“They say the people up north don’t know how to eat mushrooms yet.”

“Is that so!” Wide-eyed, I pretended to be amazed.

“They really don’t eat them there,” Petteri assured me, “although mushrooms really contain much nourishment, and science assures us that they are a very healthy food!

“We continued to discuss this strange phenomenon. I tried to appear more and more astonished, and marveled:

“But it’s strange that Northerners, who are otherwise such intelligent and manly people don’t know enough to value such an important source of nourishment.”

“It is strange,” Petteri agreed, and so we walked on. But now I too ran out of things to say. To save myself, I exclaimed:

“What kind of milk cups do you think are more nourishing?”

My happiness and my friendship had given Petteri courage. He now tried to be precise in his explanation:

“We don’t yet have the results of any scientific study. The yellow latex milky really are good for making soup and salting, but the orange latex milky are good when steeped in vinegar.”

But suddenly we heard someone yoo-hooing, and then the sound of Ikonen’s shout:

“Yoo-hoo, Petteri! Come and eat. The stew is done!”

They’re calling us to come and eat!” Petteri announced, and we started down to join the group.

e) THE FIRST THORNS

It was already midnight when we returned home. A calming and consoling feeling of happiness filled my entire soul. What cause for sadness could there be when everything was going so well? I was already sure of his love. I opened my window, put on my nightgown, and sat at the window for a long time, letting my eyes and my thoughts roam in the gentle, silent gloom of the night. Everything was still, but every now and then a corncrake called out in the grain field. It was as if I were living in a spirit world which opened on a secret sea of love and happiness.

And this comforting state of mind did not end with that night. It continued on the following day. I felt as if I were a new person. Before that, when I was younger, I could hardly bear to read anything, but now I really devoured *The Surgeon’s Stories* and anything which told about love and with its cares, its beauty, and its happiness.

A somewhat similar change had occurred in Petteri as well. He dreamt about me. He had already forgotten about nature, fishing, biking and the rest. He too became lazy: he forgot about work and lived in his dream world, practiced writing love letters and doing everything else involved in the subject of this book. His father noticed it. One day when haymaking was most pressing, and Petteri would not come to work, even though it was threatening to rain, the old man expressed a bit of dissatisfaction:

“You could lay off chasing that girl until the fall when there are more idle, rainy days and help the hard-pressed haying crew now.”

Without a word Petteri picked up his university student’s cap and rode off on his bicycle. There in the lap of nature he calmed his restless thoughts.

He rode out to Nenonen Pond and recalled the time he had been rowing on it with me. Now the pond seemed lonely when I was not there. Silently he fastened the bicycle clips on his trouser cuffs, mounted his bike, and sped away along the wilderness road which led to the Värtsilä highway.

But sorrowful days were in the offing for me. Cantor Iittinen's daughter Elli really was head over heels in love with Petteri. Her mother and father wanted to arrange a wealthy marriage with the Ikonen family, and naturally did their very best to help out their only daughter.

With that in mind they had invited the Ikonen's and all the gentry of Tohmajärvi to their house for Elli's birthday. That was a blow to me. Tormented by jealousy, I lived a nightmare, plotting and irritable. I myself did not understand what on earth prompted me to constant fits of temper? For a couple of days I plotted how I should act. At first I meant to pretend I was ill, to be absent from the party, in order to have an effect on Petteri. Shortly, however, I gave up that idea, which would have made no sense at all, for in my absence Elli would surely have won a victory, and so I berated myself:

"I'll go just to spite her. I'll go even if I'm so sick I can't stand up and they have to carry me."

And when the day for the party came, I was among the first to arrive. I had plotted a hundred schemes, a number of which I put into action during the course of the evening. Elli came to meet me in the hallway, feigning friendship, and cried out as if she were overcome with joy:

"Oh how nice that you came so early!"

I merely smirked and curtsied, pretending to be friendly and saying in an odd tone of voice:

"Yes... I did come... so what?"

Elli began to cry out:

"I was really, really waiting for you, really really waiting. Listen," she changed the subject suddenly. "Did you know that Mr. Ikonen is coming here?"

"Well, what of it! Let him come!" I made a wry face, indicating that I cared nothing about him and Elli. She clapped her hands in tempo as she spoke:

"And I have so much to tell you... Listen while I whisper it to you."

“Well, whisper away! I said drily, arranging my locks of hair and letting her whisper away:

“Listen, Oskari Ratinen is already courting Sylvia from the parsonage, and the doctor’s daughter Katri is in love with Herman Parviainen.”

Well, let them be.” I said impertinently, brushing off my skirt. But at that moment the voice of a new arrival could be heard from the steps.

“Oh, it’s Mr. Ikonen! Mo-ther! The Ikonens are coming!” shouted Elli, fluttering around the room like a magpie. Everyone in the house stood up. The Cantor and his wife went to receive the Ikonens, and meanwhile Elli rushed off to powder her face and primp up her dress and her hair. Old Ikonen stumped along into the hallway accompanied by Petteri, and said:

“Well, this looks like a good old homestead. Good clayey soil and sloping to the east...hello, hello and greetings from our place!” he completed his greetings to his hosts.

“Well, what’s new, what’s new, what’s new?” the Cantor babbled in haste, helping the Ikonens take off their overcoats.

“Nothing much... Petteri, say hello to the Cantor,” old Ikonen continued. Petteri bowed and greeted the family, smiling in his usual manner.

Pretending coolness, I was already leaving the hallway when Ikonen put in:

“Well, the Sheriff’s daughter is here too. What’s new with the old boy and are all the rest of the family in good health?”

I didn’t have time to answer, for Petteri came to greet me. That pleased me.

“We’re all well, thank God, although they say this Tohmajärvi is an unhealthy and disease-ridden place. None of us seem to have caught any of it yet,” the old man went on.

The Cantor bowed and made a request:

“Let us... let us... let us please step farther in. The women are already here. And young Mister Ikonen too. Come into this room.”

Now there was a long-drawn-out series of bows.

“Please, after you,” said the Cantor with a bow.

“No, please, after you,” said old Ikonen.

“No, no visitors first. Please... be so good. And young master Ikonen. Please!”

“Please,” Petteri bowed.

Please, please, be so good,” for his part the Cantor begged, and so in good order everyone was threaded through the door and into the room. Elli too soon flew in. She rushed headlong to greet Petteri, smiled and whirled and tried to act like a bird of some sort.

How burdensome my life seemed to be now. I was a rank amateur in these affairs of the heart, a mere beginner. I could not remain calm, as I now am, now that I have so much experience. I now hid myself in a corner, no longer noticing the merriment of others, but following, with an aching heart, the Elli's activities and Petteri's reactions to them. Elli buzzed about him perpetually, laughing and putting on airs. And when I saw how Petteri responded to her with the same broad, candid smile he had shown me, I felt as if my heart had shrunk with pain, and my mind been dealt a stinging blow.

But to return to the external action. The cheerful group in the room seemed to have forgotten me. I, of course, was suffering indescribable pain. I felt my heart bleeding. There is nothing playful in such matters. Everyone who has experienced an unhappy love knows that.

But fortunately something happened to separate Elli from Petteri. The cantor himself had gotten into a disagreement with the teacher A. B. Minkkinen about a song. At issue was the hymn "The whole world must be rejoicing" – or was it some other one, I don't remember. But that doesn't matter. One hymn is as good as another. The Cantor maintained that at one point, they should sing "ti."

"Ti—tiii-ii!" he sang. Minkkinen argued that it should be a "do."

"Do— do-do-do- do... !"

An argument developed. The Cantor fetched his kantele, put on his glasses, and sang the long-drawn-out sound to its accompaniment.

"Ti—tiii-ii!"

"Do— do-do-do- do... !" Minkkinen insisted, honking away. He banged his tuning fork on the table to get the pitch and sang a scale, and again, "Do—do—do-o-o-o!"

A hymn-singing competition ensued. At length Father asked:

"Well, what's the difference if it's a "do" or a "ti"?"

"Pshaw... There's a great difference in hymn singing. "Ti" is a head tone and "do" is a throat tone!" the Cantor explained. Now Halinen took up the matter, asking:

"Well, what's the difference between a head and throat tone?"

"Tch tch," clucked the Cantor — there's a big difference in hymn singing. The lower tone is easier to sing in the throat, but the higher... the higher... or upper tone is harder."

"Well then we should always sing only the lower tones!" the merchant Kotonen broke in. A discussion on the matter ensued. Ikonen then observed:

“Let’s ask our Petteri. He can explain. He always had good grades in music at the lyceum. Petteri, come here and explain this matter to these gentlemen!” Ikonen finally called out. Petteri broke away from Elli and asked:

“What matter?”

“Well, this Kotonen says we should always sing only low tones in church. Well, will that work? Ikonen explained.

“That wouldn’t work at all. The hymn would get all mixed up,” Petteri was dumfounded by such a thing. The Cantor chimed in by saying:

“Yes, yes, yes, the notes would get all mixed up, if only lower tones were sung, and the congregation would no longer recognize the melody.”

Kotonen was confused. The discussion continued. The Cantor went on explaining:

“There must always be order in the notes and the hymns. If the upper and lower tones are not in place, the hymn will be ruined.

Kotonen was dumfounded. He still did try to argue his point, saying defiantly:

“I don’t believe that things would get mixed up here in the Tohmajärvi church. If the Cantor would really sing out a darned hymn loud enough to deafen the women, then it would be clear enough whether it was an upper or lower tone. As long as the voice was loud enough...”

This discussion was some slight consolation for me because it separated Elli from Petteri. It gave me hope and courage. I now decided to use guile, for what else was there to do? I decided to ask Petteri in advance to dance every single woman’s dance first with me. I was merely waiting for an opportune moment to make that request.

The dance had already begun. Petteri bowed to me. I leapt to his side joyously, like a bird, and tried to be as light as a feather in the dance, or would it be more fitting to say as light as air? I was so happy again for a moment. Dreamily I hid my head on his shoulder and would have been content to sleep there for ages. I scarcely heard the music. My face was glowing and I had already closed my eyes.

And when the dance was over and he took me back to my place and bowed clumsily to me, I whispered to him shyly:

“Mr. Ikonen! Can I ask you to be my first partner in the women’s dances this evening?”



I expected a positive answer. At first Petteri was stunned, but that he smiled as if asking forgiveness, and answered in a regretful voice:

“Miss Iitinen had already asked me...and I promised.”

The blood rushed to my face and my ears rang. I feared that I would faint. Petteri apologized, adding:

“But then for the second dance... may I have it?”

Naturally I was so ravaged by grief, pain, and shame, so I was unable to do anything but nod. I went into the garden, cooled my burning temples, and wanted to hide somewhere away from the whole world, for all my feelings had been crushed. I could not weep no matter how hard I tried. Alone, abandoned, and miserable, I sat on a park bench in the shelter of the trees.

But Petteri had seen me leave, for he had been keeping an eye on me. Now he came up to me and said:

“Why is Miss Lassila out here?”

“No reason,” I said slowly, trying to arouse his sympathy for my feelings.

“Won’t you get cold?” Being out here between dances when you’ve been sweating, it may be dangerous to get chilled,” he said.

I did not answer. I fanned my face with my handkerchief and sighed, as if to myself. Petteri, who was sitting with his legs spread, turned his toes in and began tapping them softly together, studying the angle they made, and said, for lack of anything else to say:

“Mr. Ratinen can turn his toes together so that his toes form a straight line.”

I, of course, did not give a hoot about the matter, but was brooding over my own concerns. I again sighed heavily. Having gotten a start with talk of his toes, Petteri asked:

“Do you like sports in general?”

“I do,” I said in a sad, dreamy voice. Petteri went on:

“I do too. We had such a good gym teacher in the lyceum that he could interest the boys in almost any bodily exercise, so much so that they became almost professional athletes.”

I sat hunched over there like a little girl and listened solemnly, my mind black. He went on:

“Our class especially was unbeatable in the broad jump and the triple jump... a real Hercules class.”

His candid, friendly talk was already beginning to calm me down. He took the idea further, conjecturing in his own way:

“If they would establish an athletic society here in Tohmajärvi and organize an athletic festival, the people would wake up to the great importance of athletics in the life of nations!”

“Yes,” I whispered, as though to myself. Petteri went on to ask:
“Do you like amateur athletics?”
“I do,” I acknowledged sweetly, again having recourse to my feminine power to charm.

And we would soon have come to an understanding, these additional sorrows would not have ensued, and this tale would have been much shorter had Elli not come rushing over to intervene. But didn't that magpie come busting in like an evil spirit, shouting”

“Mr. Ikonen, so here you are! And Maiju! What are you doing here now, Maiju dear, when it's almost eleven o'clock! May I sit down?” she concluded suddenly.

“Please do!” Petteri moved a little farther off to make room for her, letting her come between us.

Who can imagine my chagrin? If I had at least wound up on the other side of Petteri! At first I meant to jab her in the ribs with my elbow, but I restrained myself, for that would only have made matters worse. I moved farther off ostentatiously, to the very end of the bench. Elli either did not notice, or pretended not to, and went on with her torrent of words:

“We had so much fun inside just now...so very, very much fun, when we danced a round dance and the old gentlemen...Mr. Ikonen and Father and everybody, absolutely everybody joined in. And we were laughing so hard, so very very hard, so awfully, awfully hard that they ladies said their tummies were starting to hurt. Do you like round dances, Mr. Ikonen?”

“I do,” said Petteri, “especially if the songs are good.”

Elli began to explain more and more enthusiastically, and to flirt and to show off. What my state of mind was at the moment, I can't really recall. I was so disheartened.

Naturally I was about to split with vexation. Elli would have gone on talking the entire night, but we were interrupted. Indoors, the teacher, Minkkinen and the cantor, both of them with their hands in their pockets, their bellies flat and taut, were singing “A rose Grew in the Vale.” Elli listened, pretending to be musically inclined, and joined in the song with great enthusiasm.

“A wandering boy has seen it there,

And he can ne'er forget.

Suddenly she stopped and asked:

“Do you like music, Mr. Ikonen?”

I could no longer restrain myself, and answered impertinently for Petteri:

“Well, his father has already said that he had good grades in music. He can hardly be unmusical then.”

“Oh yes, that's true! The senior Ikonen did say so!” yelled Elli, and began to praise herself:

“I like music and all musical people. Such people are so refined, so sensitive, and how shall I say it, so intelligent, and...what kind of music do you like best... singing or instrumental music?”

“I like both,” Petteri smile broadly. Elli picked up on that immediately.

“So do I. I like it as long as it's music, no matter what kind.”

She went on and on in that vein. I thought over the things I had plotted at home, lighted on a suitable one, and took my revenge: I handed Elli my handkerchief, and said nastily, but in a quite friendly and innocent tone of voice:

“Elli, here's my handkerchief. Some extra powder got left on this cheek of yours... or is it rouge?”

You can imagine the effect this unexpected blow had on Elli's ecstatic soul at this point.

With these last words of mine, I had poisoned the entire party. I knew very well that Elli was now my blood enemy, but what did I care? Other women in my place would have done the same thing. I relished my victory. Naturally I pretended complete innocence, pretending not to have any ill intentions and to be the sweetest of friends to Elli. As we entered the house, I called out to her:

“Listen, Elli! You won't believe how much I like your new dress! You won't believe how wonderful you look in it.”

Elli did not answer, but merely tossed her nose in the air and called out to Mrs. Kotonen in order to hide her displeasure:

“Mrs. Kotonen, do you know what?”

Pretending to be overjoyed, Elli cried out:



“When you go picking mushrooms, you have to invite all the gentry, the Ikonens, the Halinens, the clergymen, and the doctor... everybody, just everybody. You will, won't you, Mrs. Kotonen?”

“Well, my goodness, Elli, what nonsense,” said Mrs. Kotonen, but her smile was promising. I surmised Elli's plot, and again felt stricken, and so the time passed.

When the party was over and I was riding home with Father and Mother, I could no longer feel the gentle poetry of the night, see the smile of the fir trees, or hear the song of the nightbird. I sat on the back seat feeling as if I bore a heavy weight on my shoulders. Father sat up front with Mother. On one uphill the horse plodded along slowly. Father spoke then, with equal slackness:

“That old man Ikonen is such a bungler. Now even he dumped a whole glass of clabbered milk on the Cantor's wife's dress. Why on earth did they invite him to the party?”

“Ugh!” Mother intoned. I didn't care about anything. Father slapped the horse with the reins. The horse broke into a lumbering trot, and Father continued:

“Although even Ikonen might learn if he could be in the company of gentlemen.”

He thought over the matter lazily for a while and then he wondered:

“It's odd his son doesn't teach him to get rid of the worst of his bumpkin traits, such as spitting behind furniture or into flower pots and spreading butter on his bread with a finger.

But we were already home. Depressed, I hid myself in my room. I was unable to undress, nor did I want to. Fully clothed, I threw myself on the bed and wept.

But the reader can already deduce from my fate what pain an unfortunate love can bring to the bosom of a human being. The worst thing is to know nothing. If I had known Petteri's feelings, there would have been no problem, but was just the crux of the matter — I didn't know anything about them, not the least little bit.

f) A LATER STAGE

But let us linger a bit longer at the Iittinen's house.

The visitors had already left. The mild heart of night had already wrapped the hills in its mist. The house was steeped in the gloom that succeeds a party. Things had shifted from the world of joy to the monotonous, prosaic cares of everyday.

Standing by the table with his glasses on his forehead, the Cantor was still plucking away at his kantele. As if in defiance of the teacher A. b. Minkkinen, he trilled at full volume:

"Ti—tiii-ii!"

His voice became even shriller as he trilled with all his might:

"Ti—tiiii!"

"Are you still singing?" his wife put in as she rearranged the chairs. The Cantor explained:

"I was just testing whether it was "do" or "ti." And it really is "ti" although that teacher Minkkinen, that Minkkinen, that Minkkinen..."

He shook his head at Minkkinen's ignorance.

"What did that Minkkinen say?" his wife, now curious, asked.

"He just insists that it...that... that it is "do."

"Do-o-o! Do-do-o...Ti... do-o...ti!" his wife checked. Elli appeared in the doorway at that moment and asked in an almost quarrelsome voice as a result of her recent misfortune:

"Let it go already, Father! Who can stand to listen to that all night?"

The Cantor obeyed, put his kantele away, and wondered to his wife about Elli's irritation. His wife explained:

"Maybe that Sheriff's daughter Maiju came between them! She seems to be stalking that Ikonen boy."

The Cantor was annoyed, scratched behind his ear, and snapped:

"Oh rats!"

And a minute later, he asked me (????): "Wasn't she shining up to that Oskari Ratinen in the spring?"

"I don't think she's gotten anywhere yet...Mrs. Hälinen knew about it," his wife conjectured, a little disheartened. The voice teacher was so annoyed with me ???that he snapped:

"Damn that wretch...She causes trouble for everyone in Tohmajärvi."

His wife sighed. Something oppressive had entered the house. Life's big question, love, had spread its difficult controversies ever farther.

And at the same time, Elli was suffering in her room because of my successful malice. She recalled the insulting remark, raged at me, and hissed to herself;

"That so-and-so. She sticks that nose of hers up in the air like any clothes hook... just like this!"

She mocked the way I raise my nose, but that only made her feel worse and increased her rage. She went on depicting me.

“And then how she titters away, and goes tromping through a room with her back stretched out like a bird with a broken wing... like this... like this!”

And again she mocked me — this time it was my gait — waddling through the room like a fleeing goose, and fuming:

“Does she think that others can’t play the coquette and flirt like her?”

Her heart filled with excruciating pain and anger, she finally checked her face in the mirror and cried out:

“There isn’t one speck of powder on my entire face. I had wiped every single bit of it off with a handkerchief.”

Wetting her finger in her mouth, she brushed it across her cheek to make sure, and cried out triumphantly:

“You see! Not a single speck of powder!”

Now she must see perforce the full extent of my malice. In a fit of temper, she flung her sofa pillow away and snapped at it:

“And you there too!”

Time and again, bitterness flooded her mind. She hated me as one does her worst enemy. The great issue of love had cut the bonds of friendship, thus demonstrating its power over all things. Elli already understood what the issue was. The mighty fire of love was beginning to smolder. At first she tried to be scornful:

“Let her keep her Ikonen. That blabbermouth!”

And wonder of wonders, she believed she had control of herself, and added scornfully:

“That Ikonen is just the right type for her —for that magpie!”

That’s what we girls are like when we are in love. Our psychic life is so capricious and strange then that when one describes it in a book, it affects, nay it destroys, the unity of the work.

In vain did Elli now try to deal with the matter by pretending indifference to Petteri. Love had already obtained such power over her that she could not escape by the mere act of saying of me, “Let her keep her Ikonen!” She could not control herself, she could not conquer her feelings. She became more and more bitter, more and more heartbroken. At length she could do nothing. Crushed, she buried her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

But later, when she had calmed down and recovered some of her strength, she vowed to take revenge on me and to take Petteri away from me no matter what it took.

Thus open war had broken out between us. It was not until a quarter after four that Elli calmed down enough to fall asleep. She woke up at seven-

thirty, yawned, stretched, and then began to sew new dress shields on her blouse because the previous ones had been ruined by sweat during yesterday's dance.

But to return for a while to Petteri's life.

He too had returned home with his thoughts a muddle, for amazingly, he had not been aware of my feelings, and was therefore as uncertain about my love for him, as I was about his love for me. You see, he was a neophyte like me, and therefore he too shilly-shallied, and was partly to blame for the doubt-induced pain and suffering which we experienced and suffered so profusely.

Therefore he too could not sleep on his return home, for who could sleep under such circumstances unless he were an insensitive dolt. Although it was already after midnight, he went bike riding in order to cool his emotions in the great peace of solitary nature. He had to ride for a couple of hours along deserted wilderness roads before he settled down enough to get to sleep. Having once dozed off, his sleep was comparatively sound, and he did not awaken even though the flies tormented him so frightfully that he kicked the covers not just off himself, but also completely off the bed.

And so morning arrived. His feelings were now more certain. My image impressed itself more deeply into his soul. Work did not go well. Even biking was no fun. He greased the bicycle, pumped air into its tires, trying to pass the time. In a way, he did succeed, although that sort of forced way of killing time is not much fun. Anyone knows that.

And now he too wanted to be alone. Company troubled him. Sometimes he was angry with himself and, noting a few faults he possessed, he cringed with shame at them for my sake.

So it was now too. His father, speaking about the matter in his usual manner, now said:

"Isn't that Sheriff's daughter going to start warming up to the chase?"

Father, don't!" said Petteri impatiently, offended on my behalf by the vulgar language. His father, unaware, continued:

"She's quite a lively and peppy girl... But the mistress of a farm like this could stand to have a little more meat on her bones."

Standing near the window, he dug out the ashes from his pipe and dumped them out into the year, musing as he did so:

The Cantor's daughter seems to be a bit more strongly built, at least in the bust and hips."

He blew through his pipe stem to clear it, his cheeks puffed out. Petteri was already getting angry. His father went on about Elli:

“Although she doesn’t seem to have much of anything at all at the waist.”

“Father, don’t go on talking like that!” Petteri could not restrain himself. The old man did not seem to notice, and announced:

“Well, there’s nobody to hear us... No matter what we say to one another here!”

And calmly he began to fill his pipe in the same cool way. Then Petteri grew angry on my behalf, and scolded:

“And Father is not to spit behind the sofa in a neighbor’s house... or spread on butter with his finger!”

The old man was astonished. He asserted calmly:

“Well, I can wash off this finger with water... If it won’t come clean with cold water, then I can use hot water.”

Of course there was a bit of folk wit in the old man’s words. But Petteri became more heated and would have said something nasty. A break was about to occur in the relationship between father and son. The great issue of love was about to rejoice in a triumphal march in this case too. Fortunately the merchant Kotonen happened to come for a visit at that moment and interrupted the exchange before a break occurred. Having greeted the visitor, old Ikonen began to say:

“My son and I were just talking about these marriage bargains nowadays... about how complicated and messed up they are.”

Kotonen wiped off his glasses and was about to say something, but Ikonen cut in before he could speak:

In the old days, when I took this old lady, there wasn’t all this dilly-dallying about it: You just looked at which one brought in the most stuff to the house, and if she was otherwise a strong and well-built girl, the matter was clear!”

Kotonen scowled, became involved in the matter, and discussed earlier days nostalgically:

“These new ways are spreading to every parish. That sheriff’s daughter has even brought them to Tohmajärvi.”

In the interim, he lighted a cigar, raising it to his lips between his fingers, and added, speaking of me:

“They say it will take some doing to get that bird snared.”

Listening to the conversation, Petteri became depressed. He felt insulted on my behalf. Kotonen went on to say

.....

“They say the Ratinen boy had a go at her in the early fall, but he didn’t seem to get anywhere, even though he’s a university student himself, and his father is a big landowner and has a lot of money too.”

Silently Petteri left the room. Kotonen’s words about the difficulty of getting me to yield had naturally depressed him. A spark of jealousy also began to glow within him. Old man Ikonen spoke on behalf of his son, saying:

“Doesn’t that Ratinen boy drink a lot?”

“Well, who here in Tohmajärvi doesn’t drink?” Kotonen said, and then he added:

“I don’t think there’s a man here who doesn’t drink at all except for Hämäläinen’s boy who moved here from Kitee. . . and then your own son.”

From there the talk went on to drinking matters. Old man Ikonen offered his visitor a drink, and from then on the day progressed to evening in that activity. The sun sank sadly behind the pine-covered crest of Kytymäki. Petteri felt something very heavy and uncertain in his breast. Another sleepless and restless night lay before him.

g) GREAT SUFFERING

I no longer noticed any difference between day and night. I was suffering, I annoyed others all day long, and a gnawing uncertainty plagued my soul. I could not stand anyone. Everyone was a complete mediocrity to me, the entire content of their lives consisting of everyday affairs.

At last my freakishness began first to worry Mother and then to anger her. Once she asked me:

“Maiju, are you sick when you’re acting that way?”

Concealing my irritation, I did not answer. Mother became worried.

“I could ask Granny Laakonen to massage you. . . I you’re ill.”

“Oh Mother,” I burst out angrily. She went on.

“Or you might go and ask the doctor.”

That was the last straw.

“Well, stop it already,” I hissed.

“Well Maij. . .”

“Well, I won’t go, a interrupted her attempt angrily, shut myself up in my room, and complained”

“I can’t be at peace anywhere in the whole house!”

There had been several such encounters. I could not control my irritable nature. Finally Mother complained about it to Father. He was putting on his hunting trousers when she voiced her concerns to him. He listened

indifferently and having gotten his trousers on, he said calmly:
“Put the girl to work and she’ll cut out the shenanigans.”

Mother fell silent. Father finished putting on his high-top boots , and added, as if to himself:

“A full-grown slob of a girl... She’s big enough to go to work.” Calmly he finished dressing and went out duck hunting. Mother charged into the kitchen and began working there.

And now when I became more and more ill tempered, Mother decided that I was up to tricks and that she would follow Father’s advice. She was really forced to do so, for the servants had to do the outside work and she had to prepare food for all of them by herself. Servants’ and masters’ food were cooked in different pots. In addition she had to set the table for our meals, for Father was waiting to eat. In all that rush, sweaty and tired, Mother asked me:

“Maiju... come and stir this rice pudding while so that Father can eat.”

That annoyed me, and I pretended not to hear. After a moment she called out, more loudly this time:

“Maiju! Come and stir the rice pudding so it won’t stick to the pot!”

Now I began to read a novel, as innocently as if I were not aware of anything. Mother finally came to the door and said, this time sharply:

“Don’t you hear what you’re being told?”

“Well, what is it?” I raised my eyes from the book for a second, and then went on reading. Mother stamped her foot and said severely:

“Hey, Maiju!”

“Well what... what is it now?” I snapped.

“Put that book away this very minute and come in to stir,” Mother, now angry, said, and then she threatened me:

“Or else you’ll really be in trouble!”

I could no longer control my anger, and I snarled contemptuously:

“Well isn’t there anything in life of more worth than this everlasting cooking and eating!”

Mother was stunned. I used that to my advantage and pretended to be really horrified:

“Is there nothing in the whole house but material things and pudding and stews and roasts! No ideals, no literature, nothing spiritual?”

I thought I had won, but I was mistaken. Mother came and stood threateningly right in front of me and said bluntly:

“Right this minute, Maiju, you go and stir that pudding or I’ll give you idealism and something else spiritual too!”



“Aghh!” I growled, tossed my book onto the sofa, and went over to the stove, bowing my head contemptuously.

And so I had to busy myself with the most material of everyday duties. Alongside the rice pudding, the pot for the working crew was boiling. The roast smelled of burning grease. On the table were boxes of salt and flour, herring, butter, sour milk, and who knows what. A wet mopping cloth hung on the wall and an old broom jutted out of one corner. It was in these surroundings that I now found myself. My suffering had come full measure.

Mechanically I stirred the pudding. My thoughts were labored and confused now that they had focused on the pot of pudding. I compared the glow of the idealistic life to this misery. Soon my thoughts were a hodgepodge when they turned to Elli and Petteri. Of course I forgot about the work completely. Mother bustled about as plump as she was and really scolded me as she warned me:

“And watch out that it doesn’t burn on the bottom, or your idealism and your other dodges will come to no good end!”

I did not deign even to answer. I closed my eyes and tried to be deaf. My thoughts were scattered. My painful feelings got the upper hand — to be honest, anger was among them — and I forgot all about the pudding. Mother just kept on working and scolding, her forehead all sweaty. She began to smell the pudding burning to the bottom of the pot, and suddenly struck me on the head with a towel and shouted in dismay:

“You devilish girl! Did you burn that pudding on purpose?”

“Hit me, hit me! Go ahead and kill me!” I shouted scornfully, as if I would humbly submit even to being butchered. Mother snatched the pudding pot from the fire and rushed over to the water tub to prevent further burning, complaining bitterly in her anger:

“That’s what they’re like when you let them grow up without discipline. The whole pudding is ruined.”

Ordinarily, when there wasn’t a party, out food table was set in front of the sofa. Father, you see, liked to eat sitting on the sofa, so that when he had eaten he could immediately take his rest after a meal. It was that way now too.



I really didn't mean to go and eat. My stubbornness would not permit it, and besides, I wasn't really hungry. My soul's suffering had worn down my appetite, although generally I liked food too much.

But Mother feared there would be some consequences from the pudding's having burned, and she had therefore demanded that I come to eat so that if necessary she could put the blame on me. She really did not need to fear that Father would scold her, for nothing on earth could make him angry or quarrel, he was so calm and peaceful. To tell the truth, I must have inherited my hot temper from somewhere else, or perhaps it was self-created. Let scientists decide the matter.

Thus when Father was already at the table and there was no sign of me, Mother called out:

"Maiju! The food is on the table!"

I hissed angrily in my solitary room and concentrated on my reading.

"Maiju!" Mother repeated even more emphatically. I did not stir.

"She just isn't hungry," Father said calmly.

"It isn't that... she's just up to her tricks again," Mother responded. She came charging up to the door of my room, and, with a warning finger raised, she ordered sternly:

"Maiju! Behave yourself and come to eat right now!"

"Bah!" I tossed the book back onto the sofa, dashed past Mother, rushed over to the table and sat down, muttering:

"Well feed me now, feed me till I burst!"

"Keep your mouth shut, Maiju!" Mother said even more harshly, and so the compulsory meal began. Father stuck a spoonful of the pudding into his mouth, took another spoonful, sniffed at it and opined:

"Did this pudding burn to the bottom of the pot?"

Now Mother had good cause to begin scolding me. She tapped the table with her index finger and began to speak her piece:

"I did tell you, Maiju, to be sure not to let the pudding burn to the bottom! That's how you obey your parents' orders, and that's how you plan to get ahead in the world and take care of food."

Father went on eating peacefully and Mother went on scolding. At first I controlled myself, pretending not to care and to be above it all. But when she went on, I could no longer control my temper, but rose to defend my psychological rights with a force that had to be acknowledged, and declared bluntly:

"Well then, was I to bury my entire mental life and my education for the sake of one pot of pudding?"

I felt positively noble in sensing my rights, the wrong that had been done me, and I rose to continue my defense:

“Is there really nothing more exalted in this world than this materialism, this common life of eating and sleeping?”

“Mai-ju!” Mother was already threatening.

“Well, I will speak!” I was already speaking in a threateningly loud voice. The justice of my cause gave me strength.

“Maiju!” Mother was really shouting now. I became really angry now, and I really shouted:

“But I will speak. I have suffered, but that will end now, for I too am a human being.”

A bitter debate developed. Father did not even seem to hear what was said. He finished eating, took up the newspaper, lighted a cigar, flopped down on his back on the sofa, and asked:

“What are you fighting about?”

Mother was completely red as she argued:

“Well, I put her stirring the pot and warned her over and over again not to let it burn to the bottom, and she, just on purpose... you burned it just on purpose,” she wound up speaking to me. I defended my actions and my rights just as vigorously. Father lay there puffing away and blowing clouds of smoke up to the ceiling. I went on quarreling with Mother, growing more and more heated.

I tried to think up a most poisonous word and I succeeded. As the reader, having already visited, will have noted, both Father and Mother are quite well padded, as people say, and I would have been stupid not to have taken advantage of such a good subject. Using that as a weapon, I vowed:

“You don’t need to think that I will ever sink into such gross materialism as can already be seen in your outward appearance... you are so fat that you are as round and full as a sardine barrel... so fat you soon won’t be able to roll out of the door!”

Now Mother would have flown into a blind rage, but Father, who was sleepy, turned onto his side with his back toward us, and said lazily and casually”

“Chase that girl out of her with her blabbering and you get out of here too with your scolding so that I can get to sleep!”

Having said that, he commenced to snore softly. Mother was feverishly intense, but I shut myself up in my room and once more wept bitterly. Mother fell slightly ill, but fortunately Granny Laakkonen was at home. They warmed the sauna and Granny massaged Mother into good health

again. The sun set. The others were as before, but a dark night of uncertainty had invaded my soul.

And so the sad life went on. The relationships between the cantor's gentlemanly friends had worsened, had cooled. The cantor's wife became upset on her daughter's behalf. There could not, of course, be an open break, since the cantor owed my father the sum of five hundred and eighty-three markkas.

But secretly the relationships between us became more and more bitter. The cantor's wife made a trip to Joensuu and sent mother a postal package from there containing a whisk-beater of the type which in Tohmajärvi was always sent to one who was, as it were, who had been beating in another's pot, that is, interfering in another's affairs. In Tohmajarvi it was the symbol of the worst kind of nastiness.

And now Mother's griefs began. She was shamed by the gift before the eyes of the entire parish, and one time she wept and complained as she went to bed:

"I've never swung my whisk over anyone's kettle, and now to be humiliated like this!"

"Throw it into the fire and you'll be rid of it!" Father said to that, hiding beneath the covers and beginning to snore.

h) MIXED MATTERS

Now there will follow such a romantic and esthetically impossible episode that it will be a good thing if it doesn't ruin the entire book.

Surely the reader has come to understand, with the help of this tale, that love has to do with feelings and not with brains. My brains were now like a star covered by clouds, which therefore could not shine. Feelings alone now lived and reigned within me.

And now back to the plot:

These days I saw something incomprehensibly sad in everything. A gray veil of life covered everything. The waters of Tohmajärvi lay barren, a desert of death and non-existence. Sometimes a seagull flew high up in the sky ... or some bird or other. It seemed like a ghost from some lands of death, lying in wait for its prey. Somewhere farther off I imagined solitary terns and sea-mews living and abandoned life, the sole dwellers in a deserted area . Such were the gloomily poetic notions spawned in my brain.

And I had planned a thousand plots whereby I would defeat Elli and achieve happiness and the harmony of a life with the man I loved. To such sadly poetic thoughts was my brain giving birth.

And I was planning a thousand schemes whereby I could defeat Elli and achieve a life of harmony in the arms of my beloved. When Mother again tried to force me to work, I pretended illness in order to be at peace with my emotions. There was another reason for doing so: I wanted people to pity me... or rather—to throw off shyness and circumlocution and tell the plain truth—I knew of and had read in school Heine’s beautiful poem, “Journey of Hope” “Du Hochgebeinedeine!” [You Most Blessed of Maidens] and perhaps I took the unfortunate notion into my head of being that afflicted maiden whose heart ailment her mother sought to cure by sacrificing a waxen heart to the Virgin Mary. I also thought that my helpless plight would affect Petteri as well, would thaw him, shock him into feeling tenderness toward me — such were my calculations. So sickly were my plans. I put a cold wrap around my head, which I changed twice an hour. I tried to throw up. Sometimes I filled my mouth with water, then came running into the kitchen and vomited it all out into the slop bucket in sight of everyone, then kept on heaving, pressing my hands to my abdomen, and staggered out with the wrap on my head. Once my father, who was then lolling on the sofa, glared at me and asked Mother:

“Is that girl sick when she throws up like that?”

“Is she still at it... she’s just up to her old tricks,” Mother replied, and Father went back to reading the paper.

The coldness and indifference of people angered me. You see, I imagined myself the most unhappy, most isolated person on earth. That’s what an unfortunate love does to a person. I tried to pretend I was more and more pitiful, and probably I would have succeeded if hunger had not begun to nag at me, and when that happened, of course the game was up. I hoped that someone would come and beg me to eat. But no. Once, in order to arouse pity, I opened the door of my room, sat on the bed in my nightgown, my head wrapped, and pretended to be literally in the throes of death. Father, who was lounging on the sofa, glared at me and said in an indifferent tone of voice:

“Close that door so I won’t have to watch the girl’s tricks.”

Mother complied with his request. I was fit to burst with anger so I stood up and kicked at a stocking left lying on the floor and sent it flying to hang draped over a chair. Having done that, I buried my face in a pillow and let the tears flow freely. What else could I do?”

Poor me! Poor little Maiju!

But let us go on. This coldness and my hunger exhausted my strength. I could no longer hope for help from pretended illness. The only thing I could do was to effect an honorable recovery so as not to become a laughingstock.

In that I succeeded to some extent, although I felt stupid. I no longer feign illness. At least I learned that much from the experience.

One day when I had given that up, Oscari Ratinen came to court me. I could no longer stand him at all. He sat at ease in the rocker, one leg crossed over the other, blowing smoke from one corner of his mouth in a most effective and imposing manner. Holding his spectacles on his nose, he began to speak:

“Well then, did Miss Lassila have a good time at the cantor’s party? If I may ask.”

“And you?” I avoided answering.

“Yaaaa—ah. We---ell.” His reply was long-drawn-out. “I usually look upon life as... as...”

He made illustrative gestures with his hand and strove to continue:

“Well... how shall I put it... as an epicurean...”

Affectedly he resumed his relaxed rocking, and then puffing out a smoke cloud and dispelling it with elaborate and calculated hand motions, he went on to explain:

“Young Mister Ikonen and I have been planning to establish a bicycling club at Tohmajärvi, to which at least I and Mister Ikonen will belong at first, and perhaps someone else. A kind of forerunner, so to speak.”

A blessed thought struck my mind like lightning: Elli did not have the money to buy a bicycle and she did not even know how to ride one. I was overjoyed. I became friendly to Mr. Ratinen as he was now like a bringer of good news. I shouted in delight:

“Oh, what fun... it must have been you, Mr. Ratinen, who thought up such a great idea. Or wasn’t it you?”

“Yaah... well, you might call it a self-initiative, although getting it started was in a way my work... But one mustn’t deprive Mister Ikonen of his credit, for he is an ardent and skillful bicycle rider.”

“Oh, what a great thing!” I was really laying it on thick. Then I added, now lying:

“I’ve been aware that you sometimes initiate educational projects in this area. People in this area expect so much of you.”

He believed me, and blew out his smoke even more affectedly. By now I had learned all the information I needed from him, and to get rid of him and spin my plot further, I called out:

“What a shame that Mother hasn’t heard about it yet! You have to tell her about it. She just loved to ride a bicycle. Mother! Mother!” I shouted, and when she came rushing in, I left, explaining as I went:

“Mr. Ratinen has such an important thing to tell you about... such an important new thing that it will bring about a complete change in the social life of Tohmajärvi!”

I rushed out, leaving them at a loss for words. For Ratinen knew that my mother absolutely hated bicycles, since I had torn three brand-new skirts while riding them. But it was your fault, Ratinen. Why did he barge in when I was in love with someone else! Totally unsuspecting, Mother asked what the new thing was. Ratinen was in pins and needles, and tried for a long time to utter something:

“Ah... aah... aah... it’s a bicyc ... “

Mother’s lips were already pursed and there was a sour look on her face as she listened to the account the other was forced to tell. And when Mr. Ratinen had left, she began to scold the servants.

I had a practically new bicycle, although Mother had actually locked it into the storeroom, Now I brooded over ways to go along on the same bicycle tour as Petteri and to find out how he felt about me.

One day passed in these endeavors, then a second and a third, with no results. I meant to write to Petteri, but I did not dare. Girls, you see, are shy about such things. What would he have thought of such indiscretion!

And during that time, the hatred of the cantor’s family towards us was incubating. Elli was busy, suffering as I did, and our relationships grew tense. Only my father stayed out of it. The cantor elite avoided even the slightest bit of contact with us. But once it occurred unexpectedly. We were out for a stroll with visitors on a narrow forest trail where two people could not walk abreast, or pass one another without one of them stepping off the trail. Suddenly the cantor’s family and their guests came toward us. The cantor’s wife’s lips tightened. The whisk troubled her as well. Earlier we had always been friendly, but now a nasty, malevolent courtesy ruled. Both parties stepped off the trail, leaving it empty, and the cantor’s wife bowed ludicrously:

“Be so kind!”

“No... You be so kind!” Mother replied, bowing in turn. Now the cantor broke in:

“No... no... Be so... be so... please be so kind.”

“No... no... the cantor’s family is older,” Mother declared ceremoniously.

“But the sheriff’s family ranks higher!” the cantor’s wife put in with a sour face, and so the ceremony continued, and we could not get by one another. Fortunately Father caught up with us and said:

“Well, what kind of fair is this!”

“Ask the cantor’s family to be so good!” Mother requested, and Father, unaware of what was going on, said:

“Well... be so good, then!”

Her face sour, her eyes on the ground, the cantor’s wife strode sullenly by us, and the cantor too, hat in hand, rushed by. Father called out after them:

“Listen, cantor! Stop in to chat sometime, and we’ll empty the bottle we bought in Joki!”

“Could be... could be... could be!” babbled the cantor as he rushed off.

Under such quarrelsome and difficult circumstances, and among such embittered people was I forced to do battle and pursue my objective completely alone. It is no wonder that sometimes, when despair was at its height, I feared that my strength would give out and that the waves of Tohmajärvi must open their rescuing bosom to me. However, I do not now remember if I truly feared so, or was only pretending...

And since no other means seemed to be of help in finding out and in making soulful contact with Petteri even if it had to be by way of bicycles, I decided that I would write to him after all. I sprinkled perfume on the paper, kissed it twenty-three times — Petteri was twenty-three years old you see — and after a long struggle I wrote in this subtle manner:

Dear Mr. P. Ikonen!

I just remembered that I have forgotten to thank you for the scenic postcards. What great joy they have brought me! I beg your pardon that only now... imagine, only now, not until now, have I remembered to thank you for them! How negligent and bad I have been!

But you will pardon me for this delay. I have heard that you are establishing a bicycle club, and that you are the soul and originator of this

project. Oh, how I congratulate you! You won't believe how much bicycling enthalls me! But it is so difficult when I have no friends who understand how this is with me. You see, my one best friend, Miss Elli Iittinen, doesn't know how to ride a bicycle, and will have nothing to do with the matter, even mocks those who ride. Isn't that just awful?

Gratefully yours,
Maiju Lassila

I had taken a bold step. Restlessly, feverishly, I awaited a response.

Actually Mr. Ratinen had begun to ride bicycle with Petteri in order to have an opportunity to court me. The guileless Petteri was unaware of it, and embarked upon the project enthusiastically. He also did it for my sake, chiefly for my sake. How handsome he would appear to me in his attractive biking outfit on athletic and other trips.

And now he began to demand money from his father for expensive athletic sweat suits and other things. But the old man, who was as stingy as the devil, became thoughtful at once, and said as he greased his old work shoes:

“Won't you stay warm even in homespun pants on the back of a horse like that bicycle?”

“Warm-schmarm... it's not just a question of staying warm,” Petteri explained expansively. But when his father did not answer, merely rubbed grease on his shoes more thoughtfully, he added:

“You just can't take part in sports among gentlemen and in other places wearing only wadmol pants.”

A silence ensued. Finally the old man asked:

“Have you got that sheriff's daughter on your mind again?”

“Well, maybe so. “ Petteri was already annoyed, and now he said bitingly:

“It won't do to appear before fine ladies in any old rags.”

The old man became sober. Having finished greasing his shoes, he said as though to himself:

“All in all, that girl, that sheriff's daughter may cost more than she brings in.”

This did our affair begin tilting in a bad direction. After the discussion, Petteri went out grieving for my sake. For a long time he walked around in a

melancholy state of mind. Finally he came upon his gymnastic apparatus and began working on the so-called giant vault.

And at the same time another entirely unexpected cloud arose — of course I don't mean the kind of cloud that rains — everyone knows what kind of clouds we are referring to in these cases. That cloud threatened to make our happiness as dark as night. In Haarajärvi's Kitee from which the Ikonens had moved to Tohmajärvi, there was the Ruuska farm. In it there were two women of marriageable age, Hilda and Hulda. When the Ikonens moved, the farm was still in ruins, and sunk in poverty. But now the family had unexpectedly inherited one hundred and twenty-four thousand markkas, had managed to sell some of its woods at a high price, and most important of all, Hilda had died. Hulda was now the only heir to the house, and old man Ikonen had heard the news of the matter. He began immediately to ponder the matter. Petteri's expenses in courting me added impetus to the matter, and one day when Petteri again mentioned athletic shirts, well, didn't the nasty old man, with a certain end in mind, announce:

“That old Ruuska woman's daughter is now the only heir to that house.”

Now Petteri sensed what was going on. He merely growled:

“Well, so what?”

But his stubborn father would not let the matter rest. Again and again, he spoke of Hulda. Finally he said outright:

“What's the difference between one woman and another? A woman is a woman. As long as you have someone to patch your pants.”

Petteri was downright offended. And with good reason! What kind of talk was that! Now he explained to his father in a firm and decisive voice:

“Well now, there is a difference between an educated miss and an ignorant girl.”

“What the devil difference is that!” the old man was astounded. Petteri had to get angry at that. He explained more sagely:

“Well you can't compare that girl to an educated miss. There is such a great difference between them.”

“Well is that so!”

“Well yes there is! You know nothing at all about such things.” Petteri was getting angry, but the old man argued all the more stubbornly:

“Buy Hulda a fancy dress and high-heeled shoes and she's just as good as that sheriff's daughter.”

“Wh-a-at!” Petteri intoned in amazement.

“And she’s even better,” the old man went on to explain, “she’ll be able to take care of the house when her mother is gone. She’s got a half again bigger build.”

Thus the black clouds rose into view in the sky of Petteri’s life. He still would indeed have borne them in a calm and manly way if he had known my feelings. But he too was still uncertain about everything. His became depressed and no longer even cared to go bicycling.

But just then when a dark cloud rose from Haarajärvi, a bright light appeared elsewhere: he received my letter, was overjoyed and regained hope, like the inexperienced young man that he was. But he still was not really sure. In form my letter was merely a polite formality, its subject practical, although it was actually something quite different. He started in to write an answer it at once. After writing three drafts, he wrote out a clean copy. It was poetic, candid, and direct, like any pure young man’s letter. He wrote of athletics, of nature, of literature, and thanked me for my letter. The letter was a rising flight, and I rose with it as I read. At the end he had interpreted the following poetic, simple thoughts.

“But now autumn is approaching. The baby doves have flown from their nests. How happily they dart through the blue sky. Industriously they pursue insects, thus benefiting all creation. It has been scientifically calculated that one single dove destroys a thousand harmful insects in a single day. Without their help our country would be a bare desert.”

“And so we people are like young doves. The seasons change and we change and grow older as they do, and we leave our homes and scatter around the world like the doves. Winter will soon come. Then the earth will be covered with white snow and the winter athletic season will begin. Does Miss Lassila like winter sports?”

It was as if a beautiful happy thought had flown into my heart as I read this letter. Every line in it was redolent of his pure, youthful frankness. Its simplicity stunned my soul. I showered endless kisses on the letter. I got from it a desire for life, and hope, and the courage to live. The horizon seemed to glow with an eternal brightness. Somewhere joyous wedding violins were playing. Everything grew light and clarified for me into an enormous peace.

.....

And so everything became bright. But I still did not have an inkling of that dark cloud which rose from the village of Haarajärvi in the parish of Kitee.

i) NEW OBSTACLES AND CORRESPONDENCE

But from another source too a cloud rose into the sky of my life.

One day Mrs. Kotonen was visiting us. We were drinking coffee. I was again happy, affectionate, and loving. Suddenly Mrs. Kotonen broke out in speech:

“Now where on earth did that cantor get the money for all that schooling for Elli?”

I did not understand, nor did my mother. Mrs. Kotonen had to explain:

“They’re going to send her to school all the way to Helsinki.”

“Elli?” I said, appalled, for Petteri too had to go to the University of Helsinki in the fall.

“Elli,” Mrs. Kotonen agreed, wiping her mouth with the corner of her headscarf and continuing:

“What further school is there in Helsinki that people say they will try to get her into?”

I sighed in secret. Mother poured another cup of coffee and began to backbite:

“That Elli really could go. She’s been the laughingstock of all Tohmajärvi. She’ll find peace if she leaves. Please have another cup of coffee.”

“Yes, thank you,” Mrs. Kotonen accepted the offer, and began to drink again, speaking as she did:

“She’s in love with that Ikonen boy. Maybe that’s why she’s going.”

“Well, she doesn’t really need any more study,” I put in nastily, pretending to be on Elli’s side. However, Mrs. Karvonen divined my intention, and joined in putting Elli down.

“Well, if there’s anything she needs, it’s more education! She’s not as smart as many a girl with no schooling, even though she’s gone to the Joki girls’ school for many years.”

“And then she parades around like any beauty... that ugly hen.” I chimed in with Mrs. Kotonen’s badmouthing more boldly now as we continued to paint a picture of Elli.

But just as our backbiting was at its height, Elli, whom we had not seen since the cantor's party, came flying into the room. We were astounded. Actually Elli was coming to take revenge on me by telling me with the joy of triumph of her going to Helsinki. Innocently, pretending friendship, she shouted out her greeting;

“Oh, Maiju dear!”

She spun me around by the waist and continued:

“I've missed you... missed you so terribly and every day I asked my mother what on earth had happened to Maiju because she never came to visit us! But we just never were able to get here... Oh, Mrs. Kotonen and the sheriff's wife! Mother told me to send many, many greetings, so awfully many greetings...”

“Thanks,” Mother said, and then requested:

“Please sit down now, Elli, and have a cup of coffee with us. Is your mother well?”

“Oh, she is so well, so very, very well that...” trilled Elli. Mrs. Kotonen joined in fawningly:

“We were just saying that we missed you, and that a gathering was nothing unless Elli was there.”

And so it went on. Finally Elli came to the point. She boasted to me in a very friendly tone of voice:

“Do you know what, Maiju?”

I was silent. She concluded simperingly:

“I'm going to continue school in Helsinki.”

“Oh my!” I pretended astonishment and delight. Mother followed my example and declared:

“Well, Elli isn't just going off and leaving us alone in Tohmajärvi?”

Elli made a sour, yet triumphant face. Mrs. Kotonen came to my mother's aid:

“There's no sense in having a sewing circle here if Elli is to leave suddenly.

Well, Maiju will be left here,” Elli put in impudently. I controlled myself and declared with a pretense of envy:

“What am I compared to you! All Tohmajärvi adores you.”

Elli drank her coffee, holding the cup between her thumb and forefinger and trying to hold the others gracefully spread out. The same sad cloud that covered everything began to rise in my soul again, and I could not prevent its rising. Elli played the coquette, rattled away, and pretended to be as innocent as an angel. Now she said something really nasty. Crying out in a voice of sweet innocence, she promised:

“And Maiju, I’ll send you picture postcards from Helsinki.. and I’ll write and send you packages, so many, many packages that...”

She kept on gesturing with her hands and recited a list as she did:

Before Christmas I’ll send you this... and this... and this... and I’ll write and for Christmas Mr. Ikonen and I will send you the kinds of things that you really, really like. I already asked Mr. Ikonen if he will bring the package, and he promised that he would, and then you, Maiju, will get such good, an awfully good face powder, a kind that you can’t get in Joki no matter how much you pay for it.”

Quickly, with careless ease, she swiped at her face with her handkerchief, still continuing to talk:

“Whew, it’s hot. How have your flowers been doing, Maiju? Have they bloomed well? she said, suddenly changing the subject, and enjoying her nastiness. My entire life went black.

“Have all your flowers blossomed already” she repeated.

“Yaah,” I blurted out. She went on for a while, then hugged me, shouting a goodbye as she left aglow with victory.

The present state of my soul was so dark that I will no longer attempt to depict it fully, nor would its depiction make it any worse. But anyone who thinks that I, to whom happiness had appeared to be within my grasp, would now be downcast, does not know the nature of a woman. He does not know that for the sake of her beloved, a woman is ready for anything, for battle and even for death.

Therefore I set in to carry the matter on to victory. Petteri’s letter had contained the question: “Do you like winter sports?” I had recourse to that now, and thus had a subject for continuing our correspondence, for courtesy alone demanded that I answer the question.

I wrote to Petteri with this comment:

“In your letter you asked if I liked winter sports. I must answer your friendly question and thus I am forced to trouble you with this letter. I do like them. I like all sports” etc.

And he answered with this among other matters:

“It is good that you like all sports, for sports are absolutely necessary physically. They keep us well and energetic. And since a healthy spirit can

live only in a healthy body, so then sports are indispensable in a spiritual sense.”

And so our correspondence continued. We wrote about everything else, but we dared not touch upon love; rather, we circled around it like a cat around hot pudding. But letter-by-letter, we did indeed draw closer to the subject, and finally our correspondence began cautiously to strike the proper note. I again felt renewed hope of a victory and the goal of my life once again showed some slight sign of a dawn.

After a long exchange of letters, you see, I had written boldly and winsomely:

“You ask how I am doing. The days pass slowly. I miss something, I am longing for something. I would like to go bicycling often, but I don’t have my kind of intelligent companionship. Etc.

To this Petteri responded joyfully, with this *inter alia*:

“Well then, come and bicycle with me and Mr. Ratinen. We go every day, and I’ll come and ask you to join us. It’s a lot more fun when there is a large group.”

Now things were all set. Actually it was bad that this bicycle matter came up. It has a bit of a bothersome effect on this narration, and for a person who cannot understand the strange state of my soul, it reveals some apparently petty traits in me. I have, nevertheless, included it in this book since it had in actuality become necessary and revealing it shows me in a better light than concealing it would.

Well then. I’ll tell it straight. Now I needed only my parents’ permission, for in those days unwed girls of my age could not go out with young men without their parents’ permission.

Asking such permission, however, was an offense to my intelligence. In addition, I knew that Mother was adamantly opposed to my going. It’s no wonder that I became nervous, began to plot, and picked a little quarrel with my mother. Finally she became upset and began to arrange things:

“You’ve started acting up and getting lazy again. You can cut out your tricks tomorrow and start ironing your father’s collars tomorrow.”

Now was the time to make my demand. I began by snapping:

“I don’t have time!”

“Is that so... What work is taking up all your time? Loafing?” Mother said sarcastically. Then I made my self-assertive request. Tossing my nose in the air, I announced:

“I’m going bicycling with Mr. Ikonen!”

Mother lost her last shred of calmness. She made another attempt:

“So you’re going to go crouching on the back of that devil’s wheel’s and tearing your skirts again.”

“I am going,” I repeated my demand more self-confidently this time.

“We’ll see!” Mother threatened, and then called out to the hired hand Matti in the kitchen:

“Hey, Matti! Go and take those wheels of Maiju’s into the storehouse and bring me the storehouse keys.”

I shut myself into my room and thought over the matter for a long time in a stubborn mood. Finally I tossed my head contemptuously and declared:

“You tyrants! Do you think you can keep my happiness under lock and key!”

My spirits rose as I declared obstinately:

“Do you think you can control a woman’s feelings forever and force her to submit to your guardianship forever!”

That was the sort of nonsense I spoke at the time!

It is thus that small matters loom large — like this seemingly insignificant matter of the bicycle — when we adults fall prey to a state of mind that seems petty to spectators.

j) BICYCLING

Who can say whether it has been wisely arranged that we should all obtain the best of things through combat. Perhaps those battles and tribulations are mental exercises which harden and develop us. Perhaps it is just out of those terrible psychological struggles and torments that the author of this esteemed work, to the chagrin of Ellie and other such friends — I always speak right out — has developed into such a great and gifted writer. I was no longer empty-souled, no longer sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal, for there was love within me, that huge emotion, which set me to working diligently in this matter of love, as an ant labors to drag his little particle to the pile. In other words, there was now some content in my life.

But let’s stop for a moment at Petteri’s home.

Miss Hulda Ruuska was visiting there with her parents. She had actually come at the instigation of old Ikonen to look at the house. Formerly she had dressed like all others of her class, in an ordinary loose shirtwaist, but now she was wearing a form-fitting muslin blouse. But she had no waist, so that between her blouse and her skirt there was a gap through which one could see her shirt.

But Petteri had avoided her, so in her boredom she had now come into the servants’ quarters to enjoy herself. A game had begun. The maid Mari

had thrown her mittens at the hired hand Matti. Of course Matti, for that reason, set out to catch Mari, for he divined her intentions. Then Hulda tossed her hat at him, with the obvious intention of turning Matti's playfulness in her direction. Matti did dash after Hulda to catch her. So they ran and tossed and the joy was great. Now Matti was chasing Hulda, who snatched some water from the bucket with a dipper as she passed and threw it at Matti's eyes.

"Damn it!" Matti swore at the game, and dried his eyes. The girls laughed and mocked him. Hulda laughed and giggled in the doorway, dipper in hand.

Then old Ikonen stepped into the room, accompanied by Hulda's father, cigars in their teeth. The playing stopped. The young people went out into the yard to play tug of war, with all the girls against Matti.

And now old Ikonen set about arranging his son's marriage. He began by saying:

"This is a big house. And the cultivated fields and the hayfields on this farm are big too. With a fit and hard-working woman here, nearly a hundred milking cows could sail right through the winter on our own fodder without a hitch."

Ruuska twirled the cigar between his lips, pasted its scattering leaves together with spit, and surmised:

"This is a real mother-homestead here!"

Ikonen strolled along hands in his pants pockets and affirmed:

"That it is. And there would be women in our own parish willing to take it over."

He sat down, straightened up his boot-tops and went on:

"This sheriff's daughter here has been after this place... And she's one of those turned-up nose and skinny-legged girls."

Ruuska not in turn tried to advance Hulda's cause by suggesting:

"These gentleman's daughters can't compare to your real farm girls. They can't even handle the barn work the way your farm girls who have learned to do it can."

Thus continued the bargaining with people's fates. Petteri happened to enter the room and after him came Hulda. Now old Ikonen decided to bind his son in the matter so that he could not withdraw. He observed:

"Petteri and Hulda are of the same age, and there's not much difference in their size. They really would make a good pair."

Into such a difficult position did the father put his son. To the reader such ruthlessness must seem downright incredible, but nevertheless it is the truth. Petteri did not know what to do or what to say. Hulda too was timid, peeling the bark from a birch twig with her teeth and glancing surreptitiously at Petteri. Ruuska went to spit in the hearth and declared:

“Well, it’s no problem for Hulda to live at home either. We’re starting to clear new fields and there are over a hundred thousand in the bank.”

Thus the tortuous situation for the young lasted for a long time. At last old Ikonen said:

“Go and take Hulda for a walk, Petteri, and show her our homestead’s fields. And you might even try the springboard,” he concluded his advice. Petteri could not of course be so discourteous as to refuse, and so he had to spend the entire day in Hulda’s company.

In the meantime, the relations between Mother and me grew more and more strained. The instincts of a mature woman and the desire for freedom grew more and more strong within me. Consciousness of my rights gave me strength, and more and more sharply I demanded the right to be my own mistress and decide my own fate. I announced sternly:

“I’m going bicycling no matter what.”

“We’ll see,” Mother jeered.

“Yes, we will see!”

Mother fussed with her work, and boasted:

“Try to see if the bicycle will come out of the storehouse for you to sit on.”

“Don’t you think there are other bicycles in the world? Pooh!” I snorted contemptuously and threatened: “Even if I were to ask Kaisu, the provost’s daughter, to borrow her bicycle, you would find out that you have nothing to say in the matter.

The dispute continued. We became heated. Mother, her face red, preached angrily:

“Maiju, you are forgetting that you are our child, and it is not proper for a girl to go pedaling after a man like that. What will the people at the parsonage and the cantor’s wife and all Tohmajärvi say?”

She went on preaching for a long time, but I refused to let it affect me. I said disdainfully:



“What do I care about your old-fashioned coffee-cup morality. It no longer prevails. I’m no medieval mammoth, and I won’t be led by your priests and your coffee-klatch morality!”

We continued to argue as we entered the dining room, I fleeing from Mother and she in pursuit of me. Father, who had just risen from his daily nap, pulled on his other shoe and asked Mother lazily:

“What are you yapping about with that girl again?”

Mother, her face red with anger, began to complain:

“Well, she’s again taken it into her head to get on those damned wheels and go spinning down the roads and tearing her skirts and chasing after men, and she’s become such a burr that she won’t let me rest day or night, but keeps on squawking about the same thing like a goose crying for her young and it’s driving me crazy.”

Father listened calmly. Now he inspected the seam on his other shoe to see whether it was about to come loose, and spoke as he did so:

“Well let her ride until her legs swell up... Then she won’t be pestering and babbling at you all day!”

I had won. I didn’t mind the hurtful content of the words. Father pulled on his shoes, rose, stretched lazily, yawned, and spoke as if to himself:

“I didn’t get enough sleep when they came cackling in here.”

Having said that, he put on his coat, raised its collar, took one of the keys from a nail on the doorpost, fumbled in the pocket of his coat, and went out.

Thus had I triumphed. I even believed that in Tohmajärvi the entire women’s issue had in a way been solved by my victory. But no more of that. A win is a win!

Now we bicycled, happy and energetic. First we pedaled by Cantor Iittinen’s dwelling, then past Päivinen’s manor, then turned at the manor’s so-called cottages and toward Lahdenperä. I tried to stay at Petteri’s side, away from Mr. Ratinen. Petteri began to speak:

“Isn’t the lady tired yet?”

“No,” I said gaily. He went on:

“This biking exercise is good in that you keep seeing new scenery all the time as you are getting stronger, especially in the toe and knee muscles.”

I too believed that, or pretended to. He went on:

“Although in a way the triple jump, the long jump, and the high jump do also strengthen them. Do you like the triple jump?”

“I do,” I said, rushing my false answer, as one generally does in such a situation, having resort to a quick and innocent lie.

“And the long jump? Do you like that too?” Petteri continued his inquiry, and again I replied without even giving it a thought. Now he began to talk about running, explaining:

“I don’t care for the marathon, but three-miles is a reasonable distance... with regard to health.”

“I think so too!”

And so we continued. Mr. Ratinen was merely an obstacle, and I could not think of a way to get rid of him.

This bicycle trips were repeated every day. Once I devised a trick to get rid of Mr. Ratinen for a while: I lagged behind and slyly dropped my handkerchief on the road. After we had gone three kilometers, I complained of the heat, searched for my handkerchief, and feigned horror and sadness:

“Oh, what a terrible accident. I dropped the handkerchief which Aunt Amalia gave me as a keepsake.” But I quickly changed my tone to a fawning one, and suggested flatteringly:

“But you, Mr. Ratinen, are always such a polite and refined gentleman. Perhaps you’ll be so good as to ride back and look for it.”

Of course Ratinen had to go, although he was quite annoyed. Petteri and I rode on side by side and I began:

“It will be so lonesome here in Tohmajärvi when you leave for Helsinki, Mr. Ikonen.”

“How so?” Petteri smiled. I feigned sadness, cast my eyes down, and drawled mournfully:

“We—ell... just because.”

Now we were silent. Petteri softened, grew warmer.

“If only you could come to Helsinki. It would be such fun there.”

I sighed so loudly that he could hear me.

“Or what do you think?” he asked after a moment. Sadly and slowly I replied:

“What does my life matter... we women were created to suffer.”

My feigned sadness was about to become real. The discussion was now tending toward life’s grand question, that of love. Actually was approached it in a roundabout way: we spoke of the women’s question. I lamented the burden which had fallen upon us women to bear in this world. I said we were in a position — I was referring specifically to myself — where no one mourned our fate, no one pitied us. It was my intention to arouse pity for me in Petteri. So the discussion went on. Petteri now courteously defended women:

“But if there were no women there would be no men. And then there would be no life.”

“Just so-o-o,” I said dreamily, and so we went on talking.

But then Ratinen came racing up to us and cut off everything. I got my handkerchief back. I thanked him for fetching it and we stopped to rest at the roadside, where Petteri greased the bearings of his bicycle and pumped air into its tires.

k) CONFESSION

Now we are approaching a very tender point, the most lovely, poetic passage in this entire narrative.

At last, you see, Mr. Ratinen had to go off to Joki on his own affairs, and the two of us were bicycling by ourselves. We went whizzing through the village of Kemii, turned onto the road that led to Kitee, and went on to the spot where the road comes upon a beautiful bay on Tohmajärvi.

At first I was cheerful: I became a totally mischievous girl and talked all kinds of nonsense to Petteri. Once I asked him:

“Who are you in love with, Mr. Ikonen?”

“I won’t tell you,” said Petteri, with a broad grin on his face. I glanced at him and declared jokingly:

“I know who.”

“Is that so!” he replied.

“I do know,” I insisted, nodding my head roguishly.

“Well who?”

“Miss Ellie Iittinen,” I said, and lookd at him again. His smile became even wider and less affected, and he replied with a long and wondering:

“Oh!”

“What? Didn’t I guess right? Didn’t I?” I went on gaily. Now he looked into my eyes and said sincerely and convincingly:

“Not at all! You’re not even close!”

A silence was about to ensue. I felt good. I kept up the game by pretending to scold him:

“Shame on you, Mr. Ikonen, for not loving Elli! She’s such a sweet and pretty girl. Isn’t that true, Mr. Ikonen?”

My image was implanted in Petteri’s soul. Thoughtfully, gently pedaling his bicycle, he said:

“Well, whoever cares for whomever, I don’t care for Ellie.”

“Shame on you,” I repeated, and glanced at him, smiling. Our glances met and we fell silent.

It was a lovely, calm day. The lovely landscape of Tohmajärvi lay sleeping in the silence of the countryside, as innocent as maidens beneath the covers. Their rich colors varied as quickly as a capricious maiden's mind; image succeeded image as our silent journey continued and the road rose up hill after hill and declined into valley after valley.

Petteri's mind was so susceptible, impressionable, and ready. His eyes on the road, he pedaled along, his thoughts shy, some incomprehensibly good, pure, and beautiful in his mind as in my own. No one was there to annoy us. Our pace slowed down. As if by agreement we rode side by side, so that occasionally our elbows touched. Then we always became shy, lowered our eyes, and lived as it were in a fairyland of the life and soul.

And now I became very sentimental, dreamy, and even sad. At that point we reached the bay where the waves of Tohmajärvi kiss the shore near the highway. I stopped my bicycle, got off, and admired the scene:

"Oh, what a beautiful place this is."

"It certainly is!" Petteri agreed, and went on to explain:

"Here we can get such a vivid picture of the beauty of the land with a thousand lakes!"

"Yes!" I whispered, and then I suggested.

"Shouldn't we rest here, Mr. Ikonen."

And now we sat on the moss beneath a lovely weeping birch and so it began... it. I closed my eyes and dreamed:

"If a person die in such bliss... in such a beautiful lap of nature!"

"That would be beautiful," Petteri agreed. And again we were silent, presumably enjoying nature, melting like wax in the sunlight, but still he could not say that last word.

But little by little he began to develop the matter: first he removed the clamps from his trouser cuffs and said:

"If I didn't have those clamps on my cuffs I could hardly ride my bicycle."

I did not answer. What he said didn't matter to me. Finally I asked in a half whisper, as if I were tired:

"What flower is that... the one that's alone?"

He plucked the flower, studied it, said its name, and asked:

"Do you know what species it belongs to?"

"No," I said sweetly. He began to explain:

“This belongs to... Let’s first see how many stamens it has,” he said, changing the subject, and beginning to open the corollas on the flower. I was lounging very close to him at the time, checking the flower with him. Our sides were touching, and I stretched over ostensibly to see better so that I was leaning right against him. He counted the stamens:

“One... two... three... four...

“Oh, how many!” I whispered as if I were dreaming, without thinking of what I was saying.

“And one pistil,” he announced. I sighed, now leaning almost into his lap. He was warm and his mind was aglow. I was dreaming:

“One single pistil...”

Again we were silent. I closed my eyes and whispered:

“Don’t you think loneliness is terrible?”

“It is.”

I sighed again and dreamed:

“With no friend... no one for whose good one lives... who would understand... who would...”

“Maiju!” he interrupted my whispers. I felt him wrap his sturdy arm around my slender waist. I pressed ever more tightly against him.

“Dear Maiju,” he whispered again, and his burning kiss seared my lips. A stream of bliss and happiness flowed into my soul.

“Petteri!” was all I could whisper. He went on kissing until we were almost faint with bliss and uttered a long, prayerful whisper:

“So-o... You can’t.”

Now this part of the story has been told. I will write no more about this bliss. It is so sacred to me. We sat there for a long time sunk in bliss, melted into one another. Finally it was time to leave. We kissed two or three times more — I don’t remember the exact number — and rose. Petteri brushed the moss from his trousers and we went pedaling toward home, our bosoms filled with the new happiness and the brightest of bliss.

1) THE FINALE

The time of great harmony had begun. The night of soulful suffering had brightened into a day, and the flowers seemed to bloom constantly, the birds

to chirp forever, and the smiling sun to look down on the great happiness of a now harmonious life.

And I... I was now like an entirely new person. My entire being was filled with a sense of happiness and peace. I was sweet, cheerful, I wished everyone well, and I loved everybody. Our coming together had effected so great a change: that is what love does.

Even at home I was a different person: I was diligent, I worked to help my mother, took care of Father's needs and sang and chattered gaily like a happy little bird in the sky. My parents hardly knew me as the same girl.

One day Mother was darning Father's socks. Without even being told to, I heated the pressing iron, made the table ready, and began to iron Father's collars. My white apron looked good on me. I hummed away happily and swept the iron over the collars with the speed of light. Father had already glared at my activity a couple of times. Now he sprawled out, mused for a while, and then pondered on me aloud:

"What on earth had happened to this girl? She's as sweet as wheat bread and butter."

"Mother sniffed and wondered:

"If only she would stay like that bread and butter."

I was not even offended by her doubts. I swung the pressing iron briskly and vowed:

"Well, she'll be that way until she dies."

"Oh?" Mother was still doubtful. Then I vowed more firmly:

"Well, you'll see."

Mother did not deign to argue, but muttered to herself with a darning needle between her lips:

"Well, if only she doesn't change her mind."

I did have one worry, for Petteri had to go to Helsinki. But I bowed to fate in that instance for I knew that our separation was only temporary. I enjoyed his letters all the more rapturously. We were corresponding secretly. I got a letter from him every day, and now and then we would ride our bicycles to our place of happiness to refresh our memories and impart happiness to one another with kiss after kiss.

.....

The moment of parting arrived. On some excuse I had gone in advance to Sortavala in order to say goodbye to him there in peace and bliss is trip. No one knew as yet that we were secretly engaged.

But how bitter the moment of parting was. Oh Lord! We had walked out to Vakkosalmi, where we had first met one another. We has sat there in the late summer evening moonlight, cried out of happiness, although the weeping didn't exactly go well on Petteri's part, and we had renewed our vow, encouraged and consoled one another, and gotten strength and belief to begin life ostensibly apart from one another.

The moment of parting arrived. I escorted him to the steamship Valamo, which was already set to leave. Petteri looked at it and said to me:

"This is really a big ship. It won't rock even in a storm."

"Yes!" I said sweetly. Petteri noticed the ship's paddle wheel and explained:

"When she puts those wings spinning at full speed she'll soon zip over Lake Ladoga to St Petersburg!"

But the ship's whistle was already blowing. The captain, picking food from the cavities in his teeth, rocked his belly ceremoniously, shouted a command, and the ship began to glide toward the open water, and we were forced to part. I returned to my room, closed the door, and wept bitterly. For a long time Petteri stood on the deck, his eyes on the shore he was leaving, thinking of me. Finally he went down to his cabin, changed into his everyday clothes so as not to tear his new suit on the trip, and then stretched out on the divan in the ship's salon to lie there and rest awhile. He lay there with his mind almost a blank until a ship's maid came to make up the divans in the salon as beds for the passengers and drove him away, muttering something about the gravel that had fallen from his shoes onto the velvet of the divan. Looking sleepy, Petteri scratched his armpits and went off to sleep.

Days came and went. Tohmajärvi was bleak and deserted. I lived in memories of the summer, oblivious of the present. I wrote to Petteri conscientiously, and got a message from him every day. He wrote so frankly about his strivings, his feelings, and about everything. There was no embellishment in the letters, and he concealed nothing.

And with what amazing speed he progressed in everything. I was utterly astonished and delighted by him more and more. Once he wrote thus, among other things:

“Dear Maiju... Now I have seven hundred forty-five and twenty-three hundredths (745.23) points in the long jump and seven hundred ninety-five and three tenths (795.3) in the triple jump. These are good results so early on. Only Mr. Simonen’s results were three (3) points better.”

Petteri, you see, took part in athletics in between studies. I was delighted by his success and congratulated him. Soon he wrote again:

“I’ve begun to train for running, and now I have the record for the three-mile-run in Finland. Your letters encourage me, and I hope that with diligent training I can yet get the world record and become the king of athletes. It is for your sake, dear Maiju, only for you that I strive forward until I win the final victory, no matter how difficult it is to achieve.”

Isn’t this moving, unadorned, and frank! For my sake — only for my sake — that he strove to advance in this way! Grateful, softened, I kissed his letter. I encouraged him. Day by day his points increased, and his wins increased my love and admiration. I imagined how all the fine missies in Helsinki admired him at the athletes’ victory dances, or how when victorious he responded to the ovations of the crowd. Every day I wrote to him. I wrote to him nicely, begging him to avoid Ellie, and he replied that he didn’t even want to see her. He loved only me.

And replying to these letters opened up a poetic vein in me. Of course I vowed eternal faith to him in my replies. Once I even wrote poetically:

“For you alone I live. I no longer see the lovely villages of Tohmajärvi, but live only in the memories of those sacred places where I have lived my life’s only moments of bliss and happiness.”

So a part of the autumn had passed. The breath of winter could already be felt in the air, and the leaves turned yellow. The happy flocks of birds were gone and gone were the swarming mosquitoes. Waterfowl no longer floated on the surface of Tohmajärvi and there was nothing to remind one of summer. Crows and magpies did still fly around, especially near the shocks of grain.

But there was summer in my breast even then. My happiness grew brighter and brighter, for every day brought me closer to the happy moment

I could again see Petteri and drink my soul full of bliss from his lips and his wide, ingenuous smile.

During such a moment of happiness and bliss, when I was biking, I happened upon the place sacred to our memories. It was a beautiful autumn day. The leaves were at their most brilliant yellow and bunches of red berries decked the rowan trees. Not a breath of wind was stirring, nor did any sound disturb the silence. The parish of Tohmajärvi was like a lovely autumn bride.

Then I sat down beneath the birch tree beloved in our memories and alone relived those moments of happiness, a joyful blush coloring my beloved face. I sat there a long time, perhaps until evening, like a lovely, solitary angel, or like some solitary one brooding amid the nostalgic, peaceful poetry of autumn. Before I left the place, I renewed my oath of eternal loyalty and affection to my beloved. Then I plucked a yellowed leaf and sent it that evening in a letter to Petteri in which I told him of my oath. That yellow leaf Petteri now preserves until his dying day as a sacred memento of his greatest happiness. Both of us were enjoying our happiness. Everything was ending well. And now the only thing left of this story was the ending: the wedding and a happy marriage.

Ah, the happiness I knew then!

That was the state of affairs when one day the son of one of my father's erstwhile schoolmates, Master of Arts Artturi Turunen, came to visit us. He was a handsome man of the world, so to say. He knew the wide world and he knew life: in spite of his youth, he had already been granted a so-called retirement without pension, but with the aid of friends he had again found a position as head of a certain moral society. He took care of this post in the name of a certain functionary's name. Father had once cursed Artturi as not even fit to be arrested. Naturally I began to feel pity for poor Artturi, and so we drew nearer to each other.

And now comes the tragic part of his tale, an event which caused all my struggles to have been in vain, and so everything ended in disaster. This Artturi, you see was wise: he was a genius, wise and noble, but he was unable to resist my charms, and fell in love with me. He clung to me like tar to tow, and wrote charming short stories and tales about me, with which he

always earned a few markkas. And I, having been left alone, naturally could not resist him, and so poor Petteri got the gate, for -- think, reader, how terrible it was -- Artturi won my second love.

