

HEIMITO VON DODERER

Divertimento No. 1

Dedicated to Countess Lotte Paumgarten-Hohenschwangau

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1.

People in Vienna remember the first of December 1921 as a day on which morning broke for the wearied masses of humanity as it always did and on which the afternoon likewise ran its usual course; on which, though, toward evening, rage and hopelessness burst through the customary social constraints, through protective barriers worn thin and no longer able to bear the pressure. The streets grew swollen, like torrential rivers, and the most vulnerable parts of expressionless building façades were shattered and destroyed. Mobs went pouring in among the heavy shards of broken glass that cascaded from the large, warmly lighted display windows of elegant shops, cafés, and restaurants; once inside, they turned their hands to destroying and their feet, with all the rapture of being let loose, to kicking in display cases and shelves that held cups and glasses.

Adrian, a young man of twenty-two, didn't begin to have an inkling of events which quite a few others at that time, after all, had long been considering a serious possibility. The whole time, he was paying little attention to movements in the ground water of the city; he always said he wasn't interested in "politics." Adrian used this term disdainfully, as a means of trying to elevate his indifference to the status of a superior position. He was mainly concerned with himself and was forever juggling his personal affairs, which occupied him completely. His parents had sent him from Bohemia to study at the university in Vienna, because the currency exchange rates in those days allowed him to satisfy his daily needs better here than he could have in Prague, say, on the same amount of money.

On that first of December we referred to a moment ago, Adrian was up early; his head had been uneasy on the pillow for two hours before dawn anyway. Feeling forlorn and bad-tempered, he'd turned in by eight o'clock the evening before and had struggled to force down a whole bottle of thick dark beer so he could fall asleep. Since he wasn't used to drinking like this, the beer had produced the desired effect, plunging him into a deep sleep after a brief, dull interim filled with jumbled bits and pieces of leftover thoughts.

He dragged out all the business of washing and getting dressed, thereby extending his sleep, as it were, which had released him so early, little though it had revitalized or calmed him. For many months now, his life had struck him as tangled up, so to speak, as falling more and more into disarray right under his eyes. True, his academic work was coming along steadily as he put in his daily stint. But then that was exactly what would turn around and stab at him, because he had no sense at all that he was preparing himself—for anything—or was on the path to some exceptional achievement; and, given his youth, it was this kind of thinking that naturally made up the core of his future. He would have found it so much more the right thing to just let go for once and spend days doing nothing but loafing around, the better to end up seizing on one of the major questions in his academic discipline with real energy and zest. But he lacked the nerve for that; he was too lethargic for any such productive idling, the kind that's

followed by a forward leap. All he did was keep on puttering around with his work, not once ever gaining a warmer or keener feeling for it.

Now if he'd been a real profligate, say, a wild man given to exceeding normal bounds! But wine, women, gambling—none of these had ever seriously disrupted his daily routine, tearing it apart and thus forcing him to change his ways. Today he would have welcomed some "turmoil" of this kind in the design of his life. All this while, though, he managed to involve himself in nothing more than little enmeshments that just dragged on and on—girls whose friendliness masked their desire for a home of their own; women who carried around in their handbags books unmitigated in their idiocy and who went to the theater when the most essentially inane and threadbare silliness was on the playbill; friends whose boring little pleasures he shared in a half-surlly, half-exhausted way. This was how the whole succession of his many free evenings just slipped away. And besides all that, he had money troubles, too; out went the cash for expenses that never brought any back in. Movement—none; new experiences—none; not even the most ordinary desires.

He stared into the lamplight and then pushed aside the curtain. A gray plane of early morning light was rising over the mass of roofs. This picture of high-lying windows brought to mind an earlier one—some days before, as he was listening to an extended prelude in the opera house (how seldom he put his evenings to some sensible use like this!), his glance had gone ranging from the gallery, all around the boxes, and down into the depths; and just at that moment, for one split second that was very sharply etched in his mind, he'd felt as if, in the deepest part of himself, the flimsiest of partitions was dividing him right down the middle into two distinct parts, hiding the actual repository of the life he was being called to lead while he stayed stuck in the regular course of his days with all their narrow confines and pressures.

Meanwhile, none of these reflections (they were like those little spots of color that go swimming past and then sinking away in our inner eye) did anything to rouse him, to motivate him, to point him in a given direction; all they did was flicker in a dull sort of way, fading even as they emerged from the mushy mass that was this morning, with the stale taste of beer still in his mouth and with the clear realization that even though the new month would be starting today or tomorrow, he was already swamped with so many bills and obligations that whatever money was left over would be barely enough to support him in the mere necessities for a week. Adrian felt at the same time, though, that he would be able to dismiss even this urgent situation as insignificant if he could only succeed—right now, for example—in holding upright, in solidifying, in grasping the fleeting vision touched on a moment before. But it began receding instead, and then he got sidetracked by the shuffling footsteps of his cleaning woman and the vivid thoughts of coffee that immediately came to mind.

In a defiant mood after breakfast, he decided to do no work that day, to let his books just sit, to stay away from his classes. Nonetheless, a mood of "*dolce far niente*" wasn't what grew out of his decision. To start with, here came a bill from the shoemaker. Then, after poking around in his room for a while, he was driven out by the broom and the cleaning rags. He went strolling through the center of

town, looked in on an art exhibit, and was just plain bored. As his day goes on, we find him eating in a restaurant at noon, somewhat tired and restless even this early. A friend he happened to meet there unwittingly touched a raw nerve by talking about how he was going to spend a fair amount of money he'd saved up on this or that; he was talking mainly about some old books he wanted. In short order, Adrian parted company with this fortunate young man and then whiled away some time sitting in a coffee house. He worked himself little by little into a state of dogged irritability. Someone barreling along in much too much of a hurry bumped right into him when he went back out onto the street. "I just love these people who think nothing's important except themselves and their business! Everybody else just better quick jump out of their way!" Still, he felt a certain enjoyment in grousing to himself like this. It gave him a place to store the volume of dough-like material inside him, though it was he himself who began rising as he began shaping the material into a series of derogatory judgments. "Stupid women. Every one of them will look down on us if they can get away with it; they act as if every man is supposed to be crazy about them, to roll over and fetch! Look at all these people putting on such a big act for one another, every last one of them! The face on that nitwit over there—trying to look so damn important!" He started to grow a little warm from his constant walking.

The streets were full of noise and surging motion in the thin winter light—it was really comfortless. Huge advertising signs brayed out the names of companies from high up on the buildings. Adrian didn't notice how everything was all moving in the same direction here, the whole mass of traffic taking flight in closed formation, as it were, including the pedestrians, now all coming the opposite way from him, unified in a single stream, all bent alike on getting away from the center of the city, whereas usually each individual pedestrian from among the teeming hundreds on the street seems to have a separate and different direction. Constantly having to move out of people's way was an annoyance to Adrian; he kept feeling bumped this way and that and was somehow offended as a result. "What a stupid, meaningless thing life is! Such pointless vitality on show here! And for what? It's nothing but misery, just misery"—by which he meant himself and the way he was feeling now.

Then he was gripped by a burst of absolute rage. The surroundings were relatively quiet and empty now, but he kept grimly trudging straight down this side street, muttering all kinds of things to himself. ". . . blow it all sky high, the whole goddamn mess!" Now he came to a stop. His eye was caught by a hundred little trinkets all neatly arranged for display in an astoundingly enormous plate glass window. He kept staring at the sheet of glass as if at some enemy, filled with every evil wish, while all this time there was a dull rumbling in his ears, though he didn't take any notice of it, because it felt as if it were coming from inside his own body.

Something moving quickly scurried past his line of sight in the dark—three, four, ten people. Then came the sound of a sharp blow, and with a tremendous impact, a shattering burst, and an explosive smash fit to frighten any heart or daunt any principle, the massive water-like, flowing sheet of glass caved slowly

in on itself; it had become surprisingly solid, though in the very crude form of thick and heavy shards that came skipping all the way over to his feet.

Noises of bellowing and trampling filled the street all the way up to the rooftops as a flood tide of people came storming along it. Just as artillery strikes come booming into the noise of battle, so the smashing and shattering explosions of breaking windows came thundering from every which direction into the fierce uproar here. Police whistles were hissing louder and louder like vipers. Adrian got swept up in the crowd; just like that he was punched in the face three times and kicked once in the behind. As if in a bad dream he went reeling through this hell, a hell that had broken out from somewhere inside him. It was like an extension of his own self—a tape from inside himself, yes, attached here inside him and fighting wildly with hundreds of fists on the other end, there outside him. Indeed, Adrian's head was filled with all kinds of extremely confused but vivid thoughts while he kept staggering onward, luckily unobserved. Red liquid dripped slowly out of his nose, staining his overcoat and shirt, but Adrian kept his hands at his sides.

He was completely exhausted and shaken, numb in his arms and legs, ready to pass out. Just ahead he saw a policeman with drawn saber leaping in after a man who had picked his way through broken glass into a store window, where he was crouching down and trying to stuff a large sack full of merchandise; here crouched this man, grabbing what he could, framed by the jagged pieces of glass jutting out all around the rectangle of the window, when the saber blade came crashing down on his head.

The street opened into a square now, and it was quieter here; only this or that fleeing person came running by. High above all their hurry the upward-reaching mass of the cathedral soared into the lowering darkness. The deep indentation behind one of the flying buttresses was now shielding Adrian well. By this point he could easily have made his way along the narrow old streets behind the church building with no more danger. Meantime, though, this resting place had become a real necessity for him. In his exhaustion he sat right down on the ground as if it were something he'd always done.

His mind started to regain some clarity after a while. He was just beginning to recognize as the sheer nonsense it was his notion that he himself might be placed under arrest for instigating these violent acts. The roaring surge of the crowd came sounding from farther away; single cries were still penetrating as far as the square here, which was also still echoing with the pounding noise of running footsteps. Underneath everything else, though, there still was fixed in Adrian's mind the image of a tape. It felt to him as if the tape were no longer wound so tight; now it was coming up out of his body cavity and issuing from his mouth. Throughout the whole time he'd been sitting here he'd been hearing a soft whimpering very close by, but up until this moment it was something else he'd felt to be a part of himself. Now he became aware of feeling human sympathy and thought it was his duty to investigate. And wasn't there something writhing right near him, back behind that old monument? A tangled shock of hair, and on a woman's head, at that. Seeing it caused him to stagger back onto his feet and make sure he could stand firm before he stepped in to help. "Can

you tell me what's wrong? What happened to you? Talk to me! You're hurt?" He helped her up from where she was bent down sideways, kneeling and leaning against a wall. "Just calm down; nothing else is going to happen to you. I'm going to see you home now, so please just take it easy." "No, no," she whispered, and Adrian realized that this blond-haired woman was no longer quite so young—or did she just look older through being so pale and having her face a little contorted? "No, no, nothing happened, not really, just a couple small slivers of glass, like here." She turned the right side of her face toward him; there was quite a fair amount of blood. "Don't you think I should. . .an ambulance. . .?" he said in confusion. "Oh, please no, for God's sake, just get me home; but you're all bloody, too, yes, you—yes, you are, mister; and those poor people with their property smashed to bits now; oh God, and all that jealousy. . .and then to be the one person who's to blame for all of it; yes, it's plain to see the whole thing's my fault. . .ahhh!" (By now she was screaming.) "I'm so afraid, I'm so afraid." "What are you talking about?" he said gruffly and very loud; the strong sound of his own voice was what saved him. All of this here in the gigantic shadow of the cathedral—it was all getting to be too much for him, and he had a feeling similar to the one in a dream when a person is falling and can't stand the downward plunging and the relentless gain in momentum any more. "Now I'll take you home, all right?" He listened. "It's almost all calm again. So. Let's go now. Where do you call home, by the way?" She gave her address very timidly, like a schoolboy being questioned by a policeman for an incident report. They went their way, dipping into the narrow streets; finally they were lucky to find a taxi that had somehow ended up here. They had to make their way carefully, traveling by back ways.

THE external structure of her life, from which she'd been blown off course (it was quite a departure) and made her emergency landing beside him in the gigantic shadow of the cathedral, can be outlined briefly as follows—her name was Rufina Seifert, and she earned her bread in that occupational category for which the expression "stationary cashier" is used in Vienna. Women so employed are perched right opposite the main entrance of a coffee house, set apart in a slightly elevated booth with mirrors and thus placed at a proper distance from the patrons. Further extensions of a stationary cashier's limbs include two tiered pagodas made of brass or chrome shelving by either side of her head; on the shelves are small metal bowls with individual servings of sugar and rows of neatly arranged cordial glasses. A stationary cashier actually does move from time to time, but only to a half-standing position as she turns to the rear, which is how she has to reach for bottles of liqueurs out of a little cabinet on the walls behind her. The waiters convey the various orders to her, so her attitude toward the patrons' requests is even more impersonal and uncritical than theirs. She interrupts her work on the bills to line up with a steady eye the little glasses filled with just the right measure of liqueur. She lives in a fat-free and hence rather sterile atmosphere of sugar, coffee, Cointreau, kümmel, brass, chrome, glass, and marble.

The coffee house in which Rufina did the honors within her enclosure this way had large picture windows facing the street on three sides; every one of them was attacked and shattered on the day of that outbreak—and at practically the same instant on all three sides. At the first faint sign of unrest outside, Rufina had at once felt some kind of violence coming; scarcely had a single guest present on that eventful evening laid aside his newspaper or billiard cue to take a look out onto the street in a perfectly everyday manner and find out what was going on out there than fear had started rising in her consciousness like upsurging ground water. This calm demeanor on the part of gentlemen she knew—the doctor, Herr Planinger, and Herr Joelschig, attorney for wills and estates—was able to do no more, however, than stretch a flimsy covering of reassurance over her deeper agitation as it mounted in waves inside her. She was overcome by shame to the point of trembling; all her most secret thoughts were now perhaps about to be exposed by outward reality to these gentlemen who knew her and for whom she always had a courteous word of greeting. Wasn't that how it was supposed to be, though? Certainly she couldn't let anybody get too close to her, after all. But these remonstrations with herself, much as they helped stabilize her, remained as weak as a spider web across the opening of a pipe out of which a jet of water as thick as one's arm could come gushing at any moment. She went on filling glasses and giving out sugar as she took notice that Herr Max, the head waiter, wasn't wearing his usual expectant facial expression while standing there before her elevated perch. He kept turning around at ever briefer intervals to look outside, then would take a quick glance at what she was doing, only to turn back right away and look outside again.

She took special pains to itemize the charges on the bills with beautifully shaped numbers and letters, as if that might still reconcile all this tension; she gave this task her complete attention, drawing her head down between her shoulders. Meantime there arose a roaring sound like breakers pounding on a cliff, soon followed by dark and heavy movement outside, along with noise ferocious enough to stun all ears. Dozens of chairs were now suddenly pushed aside, and the very second Rufina looked up, the two tall windows to her left and right came bursting like cataracts of shards and splintered fragments into the room, followed by a swarm of people. Rufina saw this or that person leap over tables and chairs, while another guest was trying to ward off blows, making all kinds of contorted movements that no longer had any relation to his habitual bearing and gestures.

She crept under the counter. She clutched her skirt desperately around her legs and pressed her left arm against her bosom. She was expecting to be dragged out from under there any second and. . . . The room was filled with a frenzy of pounding, while the little marble tables went toppling over with dull thuds. Now the noise was close around her; apparently the register with all its reserves of cash was being plundered. Nobody paid any attention to her; they probably didn't even notice that she was there, because the space under the counter was deep enough to hide her. Then all of a sudden it grew quieter. Rufina waited. But then she abruptly put a stop to the waiting, came creeping out of her hiding place, and ran right through the middle of the café (from which the crowd had

poured out, of course; only a few isolated souls were still fumbling around), out onto the street and then on and on, to the place where we just found her. It was during this mad flight that a burst of shattering glass had struck and injured her.

IN the following bright winter days, Adrian's usual routes around the city underwent such a rapid shift that he didn't even really become aware of it until the sharp edges of unknown streets and an unfamiliar section of the city—until now just a blank spot not associated with anything in his mental picture of Vienna—began smoothing out and looking entirely different from the way they had the first time he'd come here, with an injured woman in a taxi, on that night of December 1. Older things faded away before new; under an increasingly thick layer of preoccupation, earlier streets and open spaces—like an abandoned watercourse—began losing all traces of their everyday channels in him and subsided in their turn back into the mass of the city.

Rufina, soon able to report back to work, if with her head lightly bandaged, was sitting in her old seat, but amid strangely altered surroundings. The enormous window openings, which in effect would have brought the street right into the room without their glass, were now completely boarded up, so the electric lights were on during the day as well, bringing about a subdued, warm seclusion by sealing off the café from the shrill hubbub of the city, which people after all feel to be more jarring in the winter light, so to speak, than in warmth and sunlight. Several of the regular patrons described the situation as essentially quite cozy, and Rufina was feeling relieved as well. Her thinking ran along these lines: "It's a good thing that plywood is so thick; it keeps all the envy outside, because people can't see in." Furthermore, this notion about the boarded windows was connected in her mind with a step she took within the next few days. Just days before that violent outbreak, Josefina Pauly, a friend of hers employed in the same capacity in a large café nearby, had been given her notice. Specifically, the owner had decided to confront a dropoff in his business by cutting back to one cashier; his wife would take care of filling in on her days off. It was the wife who'd thought up the idea to begin with, in fact, and what if there was more behind it? At any rate, Josefina assured her friend Rufina that she wasn't conscious of having done anything wrong. This café had been spared all damage—thanks to its location off the beaten path, thanks to happy coincidence, and perhaps thanks as well to the doorman's presence of mind. As he heard the crowd coming, he took some whitewash that happened to be on hand and painted what looked like cracks on the inside of all the windows, applied so cleverly that the demonstrators thought their work was already done here, as it were. All of this taken together was connected with Rufina's addressing a letter to her friend's employer—some of the sentences in it read as follows:

Because the human degradation brought about by envy did not occasion any damages for you, honored sir, I would make bold at this point, on behalf of my dear friend Josefina Pauly, who is a sincere and good person, to implore you most urgently not to follow through with your notice to the aforesaid Josefina Pauly, which would be especially hard in the middle of winter, honored sir. You

did escape harm, after all, and it's even better for you than that, because here we have to have the electric lights burning throughout the day as well, which means even more of our good money going down the drain all day every day. Accordingly I'm writing to convey my most urgent request.

"What's this crazy stuff?" the owner asked himself. "Their windows were fully insured; it's a good thing for them they kept paying the premiums, even after the big increase. Still, she's got a point about the lights." He went right ahead and let Josefina Pauly go. The result was that Rufina felt placed under a great deal more anxiety; it didn't matter that she was now setting aside part of her monthly income to give to Josefina. That couldn't make up for her being fired (in Rufina's mind), and the somber fabric enfolding her—it was made up of recurring thought patterns fixed in her mind even before the upheaval, of shocking envy, of whatever "human degradation" she herself had suffered, and of that strange time of waiting when she'd huddled under her counter (that time somehow connected with all these other threads)—was being woven ever tighter, ever more entwined with guilt.

Adrian and Rufina met almost every day. He would wait for her when she got off work, and when she had to stay until the coffee house closed late at night, he would meet her and walk her to her front door. Only twice had Adrian gone up to her room, where she lived alone. Once was on that evening of December 1 for a few quick and busy moments; he left at once to go for the doctor, and when he came back he found the building manager, whom he'd alerted, as well as the landlady occupied with taking care of her, so Adrian had gone his way, since his presence was no longer necessary. And then on the following day he'd come back to find out how she was.

Then strangely enough, something happened that was practically like a story out of an old-fashioned novel; he had a brush with pure chance, which at just that time caused him and a proverbial rich uncle to bump into each other on the Graben, likewise ravaged by the riot. This uncle from the provinces was full of bonhomie and virtually made being the back-slapping, hail-fellow-well-met type into a profession; in a mood scarcely clouded by the recent incident, he welcomed his nephew with open arms as someone to keep him company and show him all the entertainment and attractions the metropolis had to offer. Moreover, the well-known jolly spirits of the corpulent brought matters to a point that forestalled any need on Adrian's part actually to have to make the embarrassing request he'd instantly resolved on the minute he caught sight of his uncle coming along the sidewalk, since the uncle himself took the initiative by making some droll observation while handing him a very hefty sum of money, which of course created a total reversal in Adrian's financial situation. Besides that, he found his needs reduced somehow in the following days to a new minimum, one he'd never been at before; he stopped associating with his previous cronies, or at least with their rowdier elements, and that sealed up a leak in his wallet. So after an agitated period of transition, there came a more collected time.

2.

She never told him anything whatever about herself. All he knew was what had been revealed by the circumstances under which they'd met. Oftentimes, when she'd be walking beside him along the street, he'd snatch a quick sideward glance at her face, her shoulders, her hands, her feet walking along; and her feet, when she was walking, were touching to him in some peculiar way. He'd never felt anything like it before. Then, after that kind of quick, ranging effort to fix her more precisely in his sight, his glance would once again drift past her to look inward toward the surging mass of the city, before the background of which he was seeing this new beloved of his; these were mostly street scenes, but sometimes they would be in a park, the bare trees letting through lights that might stand still or that might shift from near to far. It was here that he once happened to think back to the day that had brought them together, and in a manner typical for his age—the young are given to pouring everything into quick-setting molds, some of them filched at times from just anywhere—he allowed himself (or, better yet, allowed whatever odd remnants were still clinging to him) to enlarge on the topic of public safety and related social questions. He held forth. "Of course the leaders are forced to admit after the fact that they lost their power over the masses, as it were, the result of which is that those political demonstrations, quite contrary to their intention, degenerated into a widespread looting party. But if their 'party discipline' isn't in very good shape—and that became obvious—then they shouldn't be leading their people out onto the streets in the first place! That's getting to be a trend anyway—this whole business of taking to the streets is getting out of hand among all different groups. It's senseless and stupid! But I wouldn't have wanted to hear the hue and cry if the public safety officials had prohibited this whole march from the very start, which surely would have been the wisest course of action! Now it's grist to the mill of their opponents, of course. Isn't it strange, incidentally, how all those people got hold of rucksacks all of a sudden? I don't even want to think how much damage the whole thing caused!" (On and on, in the same key, feeling all the while very good about himself, very rational.) Rufina said nothing. She had no opinion about these things, unlike himself; she. . .

Paying no attention to his actual words as such, and understanding none of them, she was content to shelter under his soothing palaver in this key, to turn away from her own self and outward toward him, as a prisoner looks out from a jail cell. Even so, fear was already starting to rise up inside her, unstoppable, like upsurging ground water.

Something made Adrian look down at her, which tore the whole tape of chatter out of his mouth; her pale, rather plump face with its blonde coloring was looking up at him as if out of a deep shaft, out of some need he couldn't identify. He said nothing more; meantime, she began speaking softly, somewhat lacking in intonation (the way someone would speak a foreign language who doesn't have total command of it): "You know, Adrian, that'll never leave me, I know that now—any time I'd walk along Kärntnerstraße it was like that with those

beggars how can anybody even understand letting those poor cripples beg like that and lie out on the street and just step right over them so they smell the fine perfume and they're just people with eyes like you and me both but godforsaken they might as well be in the Sahara desert and so often I think something's got to happen, like a judgment, and it would only be right I've thought about that so often and wished all the poor people in the city would just rise up some day. But I'm a bad person why else would I wish that? I'm a jealous person and. . . I crawled under the counter when that all broke out, but down there I. . . The whole thing was all on account of me! And what made it all happen? Human degradation, that's what, one's to blame for the other!"

These last words came bursting out of her with moaning and weeping, heavily emphasized, whereas earlier her voice had flowed along, a sad rustling sound, without those gentle lowerings at the points where one would place commas or dashes if writing. Inside Adrian, meanwhile, it was echoing all the way into his darkest corridors; what he felt first was shame, but that quickly shrank back before the light coming ever closer, just as shadows loom up to gigantic size and waver, only to creep back down at our feet when somebody comes towards us with a lantern.

Weeks and months passed by as the two went on spending all their time together; for Adrian, the time passed very happily, and he felt it to be like soaring up into an open vaulted space, so that, compared with his movement now, it seemed he'd led his previous life in a dark room filled with dusty junk, the whole time aimlessly shifting useless, broken, life-draining objects back and forth. Now flowed out of new—he was working now with real zest, almost with fire. Life came flowing out of a hundred channels, all of them dried out not long before, and streamed into a river that bore him up and nourished him.

Soon the change of seasons began sending hidden, quiet little nuances into the noise of the city. Sunshine came and lay for a whole afternoon along the house edges in a narrow, out-of-the-way street. Or, too, overhead, right in the midst of all the pounding and the screeching in those teeming canyons of stone, part of a gable glowed against a pale blue sky, and then the light went scampering across the breadth of squares and far deep along the distances of streets, opening them out for eyes captive in the gray of stone. How soon springtime came to its fulfillment! Green shot up like flames from the ditch-like streets and courtyards, and the gardens were bearing its fullness, though still glassy and translucent, not yet with the dark core of ripeness, kin to the sky so bemused and the watery red that would shine slantwise through the windows toward evening now and lie in the frequent rain puddles.

In the many window openings boarded up in the center of the city that first of December, the glass had grown back—under the wood as if under a bandage, so to say, which was in turn removed in most places. Brand-new gleams flashed out boldly, reflecting people, automobiles, and the whole panorama of the street, oppressive and distorted to the eyes of those looking out. Rufina Seifert sat in the clear light of day, and she took from it some hope of escaping the turmoil inside her, of pouring herself out of it, as a white waterfall, gushing with spume

and spray, comes bursting forth from a dark, rock-filled ravine into the bright freedom of open space; she wouldn't start to grow afraid until dusk began turning to dark, when, the brilliant glow extinguished in the windows high up, the evening of the city streets, grinding and swirling louder now, would hurl down the sharp gleam of its sickle moon to shatter on the sidewalks.

Then one night, she stayed with Adrian in his room; it came about on its own, just happened, whether she didn't really want to or even flatly refused. It didn't make much difference to her, and he'd begged her so often. So now he had her on the pillows, and her frightened face beneath him was turned sideways with wide-open eyes that didn't seem to see anything; and in the midst of all the storms that were stretching his body out along his spine—as if it were going to snap, like a bow drawn too tight—in the midst of all that, she just lay there, somehow turned away from the bed and seeming to look, with sorrow and with not much hope, for something far away.

This room, high above the rooftops, a little alcove now containing warmth and sleep. Toward morning, Adrian could feel her moving beside him, and there welled up strongly in him, out of his first dawning and finding his way back to the world, all the joyful sweetness of his life. Meantime, Rufina was already up; she opened the window. He leapt cheerfully out of bed and went over to her. From some point high up a blackbird poured out its fanfares in the early light, while an invisible but mighty chorus of birds warbled its triplet figures under them with calm regularity. Adrian put his arms around the woman he loved; she looked (as so many blonde women will after a night like that) perfectly fresh in the morning light. Then he dashed off to the kitchen with the water pitcher, feeling the need to come fully awake and be clear-headed now for the sake of this delightful hour. The stream pounded with a dull sound against the bottom of the pitcher, in which the water was surging up.

Rufina appeared in the open door. She lifted up her hands as if making an urgent plea and warding something off; then she pressed her palms against her temples and her ears. He shut off the tap so he could hear her, since he thought she wanted to say something to him. They both stood there like that, quite motionless for a few moments, he with one hand on the water tap and holding the jug with the other, his face turned around to her with a surprised and questioning look, she, though, rooted to the spot, frozen there in the same posture. "What is it, sweetheart?" he asked her. She started to sway. Her face, all pale now, had somehow come undone, and her eyes, wide open, led deep inward, like tunnels. Her blonde hair was in disarray now, standing on end, as it were. She kept silent. The birds were making all that noise outside. It wasn't yet full daylight in the room. Adrian cast a shy little sideways glance out the window at the dirty gray of the massive city, now pushing so gloomily into the day. A feeling of oppression, from deep down and far away, grazed past him, close to his heart, but only for a second. Now, suddenly, they both smiled. What else was there to do? He held her and walked her over to the bed. "What's bothering you, my own sweet life?" he asked her tenderly. She said, "So strange. . .you know that's something I can't tolerate when water's gushing out of the tap so loud like that oh God I get so afraid you know it just gets on my nerves so

much I keep thinking the whole time the jet's gonna come shooting out as thick as your arm and flood the whole building. . . and then you know I found a spider web across a pipe one time and that scared me so bad. . ." "What are you saying, baby? Are you still asleep and dreaming?" "Yes, that might be it, maybe I had a dream, how can you have a spider web across a water tap anyway. . . that's right, I must have dreamt it, I must have dreamt it all!"

He kissed her and caressed her; and now, while the chorus of birds outside was making as powerful a sound as if it no longer consisted of numberless little creatures with tiny feathered breasts but instead were a single organ mechanism with tall pipes, while this day came into its own, they exchanged, over the inexorably dividing walls which were their bodies, whatever tenderness the one could give the other.

She never told him anything whatever about herself; also, she never seized hold of objects or actions with any opinion of her own, since her attention would always be directed elsewhere, though Adrian could never figure out exactly where. Strangely enough, he once caught himself thinking she might be somehow feeble-minded or even stupid—strange because he was so accustomed to the mental abstractedness of intelligent people, which is well known to be an indispensable component in maintaining the gentle but constant hum of their intellectual mechanism as it slowly moves around and around like one of those old-fashioned elevators called a "paternoster." Even so, Adrian's handle wouldn't hold, though he kept trying to hang on to it; instead, he found he was modeling himself after this woman he loved, and once told her so in a burst of sincere enthusiasm, in answer to which she was able to summon up not the faintest flicker of understanding.

So it was that Adrian let go—or rather, tried to let go—of a whole series of automatic movements, all of which he transacted day in and day out, and none of which he'd ever investigated the origin of. Besides that, he was heroically relinquishing no inconsiderable number of intellectual assets which had always dressed him to advantage and served him well in all sorts of ways.

The season now led everyone out of the city, whose outskirts were under the sway of the surrounding countryside as it freely billowed ever farther outward. And people's glances move out to it, to all that expanse of green surging like huge waves into one's vision; it makes them disoriented, unable to concentrate, and they think about a holiday out there. Rufina and Adrian are sitting in a tavern garden. Across the way, on the square, is an old gray stone church and next to it a house painted in dark colors but with a charmingly lopsided face; between the two buildings runs a narrow cobbled street from which the last sunlight is just departing, though it still rests here and there on the hunchbacked stones as the bells go on ringing. All of a sudden, as if the bright pealing of so many notes had grown visible, as if sound had called forth sight, a swarm of little girls, all in white dresses, came pouring out of the narrow street; so many thin little children's legs darting across the square in the violet light, now moving away from the stones—it was as if a stream had suddenly surged up

between the church and the house and were making a pure current as it went coursing away.

Some school outing, perhaps, a group of working people's children, or some other gathering of little girls not (yet) going around and around on their paternoster. They're singing. It's very beautiful, totally unassuming, like a sky of blue, pure and simple; to hear it is to say in one's heart that it is good.

Then Adrian has to be saying something or other. "Yes, I think they're more concerned about children now, I mean as a social issue. There's a whole group of corporations, for example. . ."

Rufina keeps looking at the square as it's emptying out again; over to the right, two or three little things are still skipping along, holding hands, and then they're gone, too. The last glow of evening has departed from the square as well. The heat is lying heavy among the trees, their leaves now seeming a sharper green in the lights from the garden. Now she starts to speak slowly: "So strange—you know the way those little girls came running out made me think about a beautiful waterfall I saw in the mountains once it came pouring so pure and bright out of these dark rocks too, I know I saw something like that once if I could only think where it must have been real far off I mean real far away somewhere it was a long time ago. . ."

Rufina was looking off to the side; the glare from the gaslight chiseled deep hollows into her features, which suddenly brought to Adrian's mind a vivid picture of how she'd looked that night when he found her in the gigantic shadow of the cathedral. Now he noticed for the first time, too, that she was just staring ahead, gravely afflicted. "Well, what is it? What's wrong?" "I have such an awful feeling," she said in a soft and mournful voice, "so awful." Tears were running down her cheeks. He kissed her hands, over and over. "Talk to me; tell me a story!" she said, more cheerful already. And Adrian started telling her some little anecdote from his short life, some episode or other, one he'd often enough regaled others with on different occasions; maybe it didn't completely tally with the facts any more, but it was funny and lifted people's spirits, a little tale all wrapped up, as it were, and ready for the telling.

But he fell silent right in the midst of it. He was seeing in his mind's eye the place where the story was set (the garden of a villa in autumn), and now all of a sudden that was what somehow seemed far more important, whereas he usually rode right past the setting as he followed the rut of the narrative, so to speak; the place was now newly fresh in his mind, as though it had just shed a skin. His thoughts grew a bit confused.

And suddenly there was a slight anxiety in him.

Rufina said, "Oh please keep telling your story. I was enjoying it so much; I feel all happy again.!"

As time goes hurtling past, no matter whether hurled in large volumes and volleys of life or in numberless dark splinters—with passing time, summer, darker and heavier, came on with such astonishing speed and settled onto the maidenly springtime. And if spring had flung open the whole mass of the city—shrill, gray in winter, closed in on itself—to the surrounding country, now the

rich, ripe surge of summer is piercing with its fragrance all the way into the narrowest of streets. Farther out, the roads are dusted with white, and a single window—suddenly ablaze!—in some farmhouse gathers all that white heat in its glass, which now flashes like lightning across the wheat fields and the tilled plots of the level ground, all the way to where the first hills commence to rise, all the way to where the first of the mountains begin, rising up higher and veiled in haze.

And the city sinks down into summer as if dissolving in a bath. The nights fling themselves aloft—masses of stone, turned upward to the light of the moon, are trying to do as the nights themselves are doing; they start growing, soaring up, taking flight from that heavy pressure which was their nature in winter. On every side there has broken out among them a fierce uprising of plant life, its very breathing fragrant, and now it surges and billows amid colored lights and music in all the gardens, courses through streets whose trees now shade one another, their thick foliage turning a moonlit night into blackness underneath but standing on the outside like armor all agleam. And most of the nights are too bright and airy to enfold people in sleep, so men and women are themselves like houses with their windows open on every side, and the streets and gardens are astir all through the night.

3.

Rufina was afraid of the empty hours facing her this evening (something was keeping Adrian away; perhaps relatives had stopped by unexpectedly). She was feeling afraid, but that didn't surprise her, and she didn't question it.

Everything abandoned her today—the street on which she lived drew back its houses and closed in on itself; not a person on the stairs, the building quiet, every living soul turned out into the bright and airy night, people gathered together somewhere for merry-making. Out in the corridor, water was dripping from the tap, drop by drop, the stillness making its bright metallic sound ring loud and clear all through the stairwells.

Nobody else from Rufina's building was at home, either. Suddenly she sensed a deep weakness that made her feel as if the best thing for her would be just to vanish, to sink below the surface, to die, not to rend another needless gash into this calmness, making no sense at all.

But just at the moment when she was getting ready to turn on the light in her room, in that minute interval between her touching the switch and the outpouring of light from the bulb into every corner, there appeared to her the fatal emblem of her destruction; just then the very portal flew open that until now—and as of late more and more in the grip of fear—she'd been able to slink past.

Rufina had caught sight of a horse's skull in each of the four corners of her room—bleached bones, teeth bared in the darkness. The four skulls all slowly nodded at the same time, as they said, "Yes, here we are again." She collapsed at the table in the middle of the room, now full of light. "Adrian!" she whimpered; he might have been able to help her now. Rearing back up in desperation, she forced herself to recall his rational, soothing way of speaking; she almost thought she could hear his voice now. Then it fled away from her like a faint patch of haze, and Rufina now found herself completely trapped inside her old suffering. It honestly never even so much as occurs to her to just get out of that room and go somewhere—it doesn't matter where—to a movie theater, to a café with live music. It's as if the four walls had somehow grown together to form the walls of her own skull, inside the thick, hard mass of which is left only a small cavity for her to sit in and dwell on the one single thought as to what these four horses' skulls mean; she's recalling the year 1919, she's recalling the time she spent in the psychiatric clinic. We're using the word "recalling," but in Rufina Seifert's present condition that's the wrong term for it. The wall between then and now fell away from her altogether, so she wouldn't have been able at this point to frame that part of her past in words, couldn't have said, for example, "They took me to the hospital in 1919 because I was mentally ill, suffering from the following delusions: that at night I had a horse's head; that I was being buried alive; furthermore, I thought my sister was a black dog." No, she wasn't even an arm's reach distant from it all, so she didn't have a name for it all, either: she herself was the horse's head; she herself was the burial alive.

Then around her it began to grow a little brighter again. Here was the table, from which she lifted her head. There on the wall was a colored print. That tight clamp around her brain loosened, or it might just have seemed that way, like people suffering physical pain, so glad to be able to take a few deep breaths for a moment, believing the pain has let up, all the while doing no more than learning to accommodate it to the point of making no effort to surmount it with the healthier parts of themselves, the final result being the keen ambivalence of living with it and living without it.

Even so, she went down into this moment of relief as if down into a valley. In it was lonely pain, feeling which made her ponder so much, immersed her in trains of thought that didn't last long at all if measured by time but that bore her far, far away. Whole long chains of images came to her, weighty with meaning, and all these long chains—while she was sitting there—got tangled together inside her and bundled themselves into the present moment; now this tape, fused from so many strands, crawled its way down into her body cavity and sought a further passage. What had been holding her head in such a tight clamp a few minutes before now loosened almost completely. Strangely enough, it was a picture of banners at a funeral; she'd been forced to think about them so often at the time, and the image had remained with her. Only by now she'd forgotten that they *were* banners; she'd forgotten the very word "banners" and was feeling only the darkness and a yearning to pour herself out of it, just as a white waterfall, gushing with spume and spray, comes bursting forth from a dark, rock-filled ravine into the bright freedom of open space, or as the blue sky can be glimpsed in a gap between the thick, heavy material of window drapes. There was her sister, who, as a little girl, often had to eat on the floor as a punishment for misbehavior, kneeling next to the table at which she, Rufina, would be sitting with her parents. Oh yes, she herself had always been very good, and later on she was forever at her sister with cautioning reprimands, because the girl lived so carelessly, wandered the streets as she saw fit, but oh yes, Rufina herself had always been wise and good.

Now all of a sudden here was Josefina Paula, saying, "So you begrudge me, do you, jealous witch, just because you're some crazy lunatic; I know you want a man for yourself, but you don't have the guts. What do you want to do, become Saint Rufina?"

"Listen, Josefina, I've told you over and over—I believe you when you say there was nothing going on with your boss."

They're all after something. They're all holding large, dark objects behind their backs, then suddenly out they come and everything's out in the light of day. Especially those long years that were so full of human degradation, almost every night, then later, when she lived alone, almost every night again; that was it. And that was why she ended up going with Tony Jaspinger; what a disaster that was! What's he up to these days—suddenly it was all over and done with, she just didn't want to see any more of him. And what good did it do her after all? But then it started out so fine, as fine as a spider web across a water tap. What? Getting beggars all fired up so the windows would get smashed and then waiting and crouching under the counter. This time, though: "Spin it as fine as ever you

might, yet it will end up out in the light!" Because of her human degradation, if it means getting hold of her Adrian, she'll let go of all that jealousy, she'll let everything go to rack and ruin. Those windows boarded up, that's all nothing but a fake, the jealousy comes out everywhere, yes, it comes out everywhere, and Josefina's totally right and if something like a judgment comes down there's no mercy left for me, it'll just sweep everything along in its wake, flood the whole building!

Suddenly she can hear, breaking in on the complete quiet, the metallic plink of the dripping water out in the corridor; it's growing louder and louder, drop by drop. Soon it will bash in her skull; she'll never survive it; the very next drop that falls will demolish this whole building. Now there's a roaring noise, and it's getting louder. She's scurrying around the room with a cloth in her hand, carefully wiping out the four corners in case any traces are left. But even now there's thunder pounding through her brain, as though a mighty stream were passing through boulders.

Not now, just please not now, because maybe she could still keep it hidden. Footsteps are echoing, echoing closer and closer, as they did that time in the long corridors of the quiet, white building. She'll say yes to anything now, and in the oncoming darkness there might be some hope for her in the gigantic shadow of the cathedral. She'll ask the woman outside to fill her pitcher a little later, just a little later; otherwise the whole building will be flooded to the roof, because the upsurging ground water will come, too.

With a dull sound the stream pounded against the bottom of the pitcher, in which the water was surging up. This stream wouldn't merely have washed away a spider web; it was strong enough to shatter an iron plate. Rufina stands in the middle of the room, spinning like a top. The jaws in the skulls of the four horses are snapping open and shut. Other than that, the whole mountain range, frozen into lifeless calm, is under the sway of an ice-bound quiet. Seized by faintness, her head whirling, she's no longer able to keep clear of those grinding teeth, and she goes plunging headlong into one of those gaping maws, tumbling down with a roaring sound into the sea-green throat of the monstrous beast. Then comes that long trudge through passages as narrow as pipes, her screams choked back mute between her gnashing teeth, even though her head is threatening to explode.

4.

The measure of our planet's revolution in its orb'd expanses toward morning and its flood of sunlight, land by land, sea by sea, is the measure whereby, segment by segment, the masses of humanity awaken after being shrouded in their abandonment to night and sleep. And while they're still as if adrift along the twining paths of dreams, the morning wind sweeps through the treetops with its powerful hands and daylight has risen over the countryside a thousand miles farther on; all stand facing it as it commences and swells out into its fullness.

Rufina woke up and found herself lying fully dressed in a corner of her room. That didn't surprise her, didn't cause her to react in any way. She undressed, got washed, and put on fresh clothes. She started work at eight, and she had plenty of time, so she walked slowly. A sparkling summer day was heightening the city in a brilliant glow. As Rufina strolled along, she was lifted completely out of herself; she was walking for a few steps alongside her own self, as it were. That was just the point at which I bumped into her at a street corner where once in a while our paths happened to cross. Her eyes reflected not the slightest sense of purpose, nor did they cast even the most fleeting of glances, as people will when they're in motion and going about their business. She wasn't actually seeing anything—a building as a building, a tree as a tree, the sky as the sky. The mainstays that held her surroundings in place—giving names to objects and seeing them as part of a whole—had crumbled away; a deep chasm, growing ever wider, was now separating this bemused woman from everything else and setting her on the opposite shore.

The morning hours didn't bring in many patrons, which gave Rufina time to write all kinds of things in the account book—for example:

I, Rufina Seifert, confess that through human degradation I am guilty of everything that's happened to all those people, and all that jealousy helped it along too. I swear that I never ever thought anything bad about Josefina and was glad to help her out and I swear I believe every word she told me. VVV I swear by Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to everything I've written down here. I also implore all people with utmost fervor to believe me and forgive me.

She wrote more along the same lines, too.

Adrian had spent a social evening—the one on which Rufina was alone—in a group with whom he'd previously had little contact; that was through his own neglect, and now he was deeply regretting it. A pleasant environment, genuine style, no trace of that inevitable boredom—there'd been good music and people who lived free, active, and busy lives, all in their own individual way, artists and writers, and also a few of the leading political figures from that time. And then the women; they made quite a distinctive effect, one arising from being able to combine apparently unconstrained intellectual sprightliness and alertness, on the

one hand, with subordination of these qualities to an artless instinct for good form on the other.

He'd ended the evening by seeing Sofia Mitrofanov home; because he'd known her for a long time, and better than the others, and because in addition she mothered him a little, there soon came tumbling out of his mouth—quite in keeping with his age—a good many of his innermost thoughts. All that did was put him into more of an agonizing state, though, because he just couldn't find a way of saying, a way of putting a name to what was actually bothering him. At the same time, it was very important to him to give an accurate picture of Rufina herself, as well as of his powerful "inner renewal" and the great significance it all held for him. He had a feeling that Sofia wasn't quite in tune with what he was saying; she might have been thinking that he was simply telling her about "some little love affair," which was very far off the mark. His experience with Rufina was something altogether different, not even to be mentioned in the same breath with. . .

His ears filled like this with all the howling noise of his own life, he of course couldn't see what was going on with Sofia Mitrofanov, who really wasn't very interested in his "inner renewal"—at least this wasn't exactly the most important feature of Adrian as far as she was concerned. To tell the truth, Sofia wasn't making the least effort to understand what he was talking about, and the question she interjected at this point could have adequately enlightened Adrian to the effect that she was moving along a whole different track.

"Tell me, Adrian, exactly what kind of position in society does this friend of yours occupy? I mean, is she a professional woman? What does she do? Has she had much education or not?"

All the wind went out of his sails, and he told her his friend worked as a cashier in a coffee house. That prompted a whole long discourse from Sofia, the main content of which was a full array of warnings and cautions—motherly ones, we might call them—about how careful he needed to be. He didn't know what women were like, and above all had no idea about women of her type; quite frequently, people from that social stratum had an entirely different outlook, much more crude and petty than he could possibly imagine.

They'd meantime come to the entrance of the building where Sofia lived. The moon was causing everything roundabout to soar in silver cascades. There she stood, Sofia Mitrofanov, so much smaller than Adrian, dark-eyed, alert, smelling of a fragrant perfume. He kissed her hand; the front door slammed shut. Drifting alone through the streets, now all awash in silver, he was irked; his words had been taken the wrong way, and, underneath it all, he was feeling tugged in opposite directions.

JOELSCHIG and Planinger were standing by the register in the coffee house and asking Rufina in a bantering, hail-fellow-well-met tone how she was feeling these days. She was looking much too pale, they said; some fresh country air would do her good, but she seemed to have other interests at the moment that were keeping her here. Just as Adrian was coming in, the doctor joined the group, too, but he didn't say anything; he took one close look at her instead,

suddenly quite startled. Rufina probably didn't quite understand what they were talking about. She was smiling. Joelschig, the estate attorney, was patting her hand. Rufina's eyes were focused somewhere out on the street. Recently, Adrian had been coming into the coffee house here quite often; Rufina hadn't wanted that at first, but it had come about on its own, or rather, he'd made an issue of it and insisted. Why, though? That was exactly what he was asking himself as he walked through the door and saw the three men standing there with Rufina. Her shift was finished, and she left with Adrian right away. The streets, filled with movement from the growing crowds evening draws in the city, were almost completely covered with people, a view into any distance closed by the streaming glory of the sun on the horizon, its gold pouring over the rooftops in torrents and setting long rows of windows aglow in a molten blaze. All the collected warmth of the day wafted out of the surrounding stones. Adrian, turned inward, had put up resistance between himself and Rufina, and they weren't walking arm in arm. He was telling her about how he'd spent the previous evening, but he seemed to be making a point, not just casually filling her in. "You can imagine, of course, how much good being in that whole atmosphere did me. I used to go there quite often, almost every week. But now, ever since. . . Anyway, just having a chance to talk once more with truly cultivated people whose viewpoint on every subject reflects the level they're on! There's nothing more beautiful than a highly cultivated woman; you might call a person like that the highest flowering of our culture." "Well I think you're really smart if you can go there and have a nice conversation like that; you should go more often, Adrian, not just once in a great while." "That's all well and good, but I don't think 'conversation' is exactly the right way to express it, especially considering what I imagine you think the word must mean—standing around in the coffee house with all those different admirers of yours." She looked up at him, frightened, as if she'd suddenly woken up; her eyes grew dark and led deep inward, like tunnels. His glance hardened, and he looked past her. Just then here came Josefina Paula around the corner with Tony Jaspinger—he worked as a typesetter—and some other young fellow, who was dressed in the most dapper style imaginable. All three were laughing very loud, and the last rays of the sun had caught them from behind so that their figures were just about glowing; Josefina's light dress was so transparent that her legs were visible all the way up to her hips. In all probability, Rufina didn't even see Josefina or Tony; she was staring ahead, deeply tormented and horrified—what could Adrian have meant? Her own thoughts, which had pretty much taken over for several minutes, were now receding once more. Josefina nodded with a certain mean air. Rufina was caught short, with no time to reply. "Who are those people?" asked Adrian, at which point Josefina came back around the corner and marched right up to Rufina in three determined steps. She stood rooted to the spot as she laid it on: "If you think for one minute I have to report to you about my comings and goings just on account of your crummy charity, you're sadly mistaken, dear. And you don't have to go turning your nose up at me, either! What, you don't know how to say hello any more? You'll get every lousy penny back, believe you me. I'm not one to take handouts, and whatever else I do is none of your damn

business!" Just then Tony Jaspinger came walking back around the corner, apparently to find out what was keeping Josefina. He didn't even see Rufina, but she was now following Josefina's glance, which is how she came to see him. "I'm coming!" Josefina yelled over to Tony; then she turned back to Rufina and said, "Well now you've heard what I have to say!" as she flounced off around the corner with Tony. "Some fine friends you've got!" said Adrian, loud and sharp. Rufina just stood there, totally motionless, even though a tremendous haste was building up inside her. Then suddenly it had her in its grip—and she began running. She went hurtling (as if out of a high-power firearm) down the street, headed straight for a streetcar whizzing by, and with a leap she was up on the platform (just as if she'd planned on taking this hurdle); her movements struck Adrian—he was standing frozen—as altogether alien to her, not flowing out of the way she usually carried herself, but eerily nimble and catlike instead. The streetcar disappeared behind the nearest block of houses. Rufina, at first not noticed by anyone on the crowded platform, waited until the car was fully underway; then she leaned out after riding for only a few short house lengths and jumped off the platform so recklessly that a few passengers cried out. She didn't fall, though; she stumbled, but then she ran, hurtled, tore along as if powered by a machine. For her there were no streets, no buildings, no squares; there is only that long trudge through passages as narrow as pipes, her screams choked back mute between her gnashing teeth, even though her head is threatening to explode.

ADRIAN spent the next two days in shattering restlessness. Practically every two hours he stopped by the café where Rufina worked or by her building to check with the landlady, but nobody had any knowledge of her whereabouts. That incident on the street kept rising up inside him—appalling, strange, and at the same time full of guilt on his part. He remembered the tiniest details. And now, after all that had happened, he kept making his unsteady way back to the image of Rufina that he carried in his mind, back to the path of his "inner renewal," as he called it.

At one point, the doctor came quickly walking up to him through the whole café, and he heard the words "psychiatric clinic," found out the address, and got up without waiting for another word from anybody (to the effect, for instance, that visiting hours would most likely be over, since it was almost evening); he bolted outside and leapt into a taxi. The sky was overcast, and the oppressive humidity hardly let up at all, even though the driver was speeding. Finally Adrian went through a large gate and was on the premises of the hospital grounds. He rushed along garden paths among level buildings whose corridors exhaled coolness. He kept asking directions as he made his way farther and farther in. Finally, set on an elevation, and with empty rows of windows looking out past the city and into the distance, there was the building he was looking for; a sign pointed the way.

He didn't see anyone, but he wouldn't have asked questions, anyway; he kept pressing ahead. He went up a flight of stairs leading to a wide corridor, where he heard someone speaking. He noticed a kind of coat room with many hooks on

the walls, from each of which a long chain was hanging. The room was empty. Adrian suddenly began shivering, though he really wasn't thinking about anything. (These chains had been installed for the medical students who had lectures here in the clinic; with a little padlock, they could secure their overcoats from being exchanged by accident or worse. These hooks were almost never put to use, and now, during summer, they were altogether empty.) Adrian opened a door. Sharp light struck his eyes. Stiff rows of benches mounted up through the whole auditorium; every seat was taken in the front ones, down here at the lower end. The professor was sitting at some distance from the benches and lecturing. No one paid any attention to Adrian, who was standing by the door behind a number of students who'd come in late. The professor was just saying: "In this case we can see with particular clarity that the incidence of psychic trauma from an external source is not alone adequate to explain the onset of the pathology, analogous to such episodes as follow more or less directly on a cerebral lesion; it is just as erroneous to regard this latter factor as in itself the sole cause—an etiological procedure, by the way, with which the older school of psychiatry was quite often satisfied to rest content." Suddenly Rufina stood up; until now, she'd been sitting in a chair behind the lecturer, huddled in her hospital gown with its blue and white stripes. She folded her hands and held them outstretched in a beseeching gesture: "More than anything else in the world I beg all you people here to believe me. . . please. . . I never meant Josefina any harm. . . no, never ever. . . in the name of Almighty God I never did. . . but all the bad things that happened are my fault on account of human degradation, that's why, nothing else!" A disturbance broke out. Adrian, who'd shoved his way hard through the crowd and taken a number of steps toward Rufina, dropped to his knees by the first row of benches, groaning softly and holding his left hand to his heart. "Get all the patients out!" the professor shouted, and the orderlies in the back of the room started moving. Rufina didn't seem to be taking notice of anything at all; she was standing there with her hands folded, her gaze fixed somewhere on the ceiling. Now she was led away with the rest of the patients, as Adrian stared after her with eyes wide open; she slowly disappeared through the high white arch of a glass door on the opposite side of the auditorium, her hands folded, her head lifted high, her loose blonde hair flowing down past her shoulders. Adrian keeled forward and lost consciousness; they carried him out. After a short adjournment, work in the lecture hall resumed.

THE professor of medicine stepped into the waiting room.

"You expressed an urgent request to speak with me? Our session didn't finish until just now. Are you feeling better?"

"Yes, thank you, doctor, I regained consciousness quite soon. I'd like to take it upon myself now to give you some explanation. . ." (Adrian was unable to ward off a sudden hatred toward the doctor that abruptly welled up in him.)

"Are you a physician, too?"

"No. I'm a student at the Technical Institute. My name is. . ."

The professor gave his name in return.

"How did you happen to wind up here?" The doctor was quick but accurate in assessing Adrian's facial type, eyes, cranial structure, and then all the interest went out of his expression; he kept casually looking past Adrian.

"I'm. . . I have an, uh, intimate relationship with Rufina Seifert, the patient."

"Ah, that would explain quite a lot." Pause.

"Why? Why is that? Why do you do that?" Adrian suddenly burst out.

"You can well believe that this isn't the first time I'm hearing that question," the doctor said calmly and in a friendly tone. "Toward someone like yourself, a person without the requisite insight into the process as a whole, I have no argument to advance. That is, I'm unable to give you an explanation as to why patients are demonstrated to the students, because we would have to presuppose a certain amount of professional expertise in the first place on your part for the pertinent objective reasons to be in any way comprehensible. Even so, I can tell you this much, at least: it happens, among other reasons, for the benefit of the patients themselves. As far as that goes, part of the patients' therapy—admittedly a small part—consists of their being personally in attendance at my presentations. Oh, I know the situation we're in here isn't exactly decorative, but that truly isn't what's essential, either. I must ask you, however, what it was you originally wanted to see me about. May I assume it's a matter of finding out information about Fräulein Seifert's condition?"

"Yes, doctor." (Adrian's inner attitude toward him changed so rapidly that he himself was amazed by it.)

"Very well. Concerning the point we just touched on, you may put your mind at ease, inasmuch as there will be no question of subjecting this patient to any further demonstration. Fräulein Seifert will not be remaining here at the clinic, either—I regret to say."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It would be quite tedious for me to burden you with technical terminology. Fräulein Seifert has to be pronounced incurable—given the current state of our medical knowledge, at least—and committed to the state mental asylum." Pause.

"Doctor, what is it actually that she's suffering from?"

"As I've said, I'm not in a position to give you an explanation of these matters in such a brief scope. The nucleus of the patient's current unfortunate state arises from an ideation of hers whereby thoughts which she previously entertained are responsible for the devastating events that took place on December 1 of last year."

"And—that's it?"

"Not by any means, I'm sorry to say. But you will have to be satisfied with what I convey to you."

"So that means she's—insane, if that's the word?"

"Yes. If that's what you want to call it. She is, to express it in ordinary parlance, out of her mind."

"And incurable?"

"For the time being, at any rate—incurable."

A gust of hot wind came through the open window from the darkness outside, and the trees in the garden grew restless with a rushing sound. Right afterwards,

heat lightning flashed above the clouds a few times, and the rolling of distant thunder was heard.

Adrian, who'd been totally absorbed, now stood up, suddenly agitated.

"Doctor," he said, "I know I'm taking up an undue amount of your time—nevertheless, I implore you to enlighten me now about a phenomenon that has great significance for me and did throughout the whole time I spent with Rufina Seifert. That was a period of several months. I'm firmly convinced that you can provide me with some insight."

"Well, what is it exactly?"

"That's very hard to say. . .it's a kind of inner revitalization, a sort of ,inner renewal. . ."

"It seems to me that it would be entirely attributable to—please forgive me—the erotic nature of your mutual encounters."

"Of course," said Adrian and kept quiet for a few moments, during which he could feel Rufina vividly present inside him. "It's true that I lack experience in those matters, as it were. . ." he continued, "but this strikes me as something different, I mean a direct emotional influence of great power, something that—all the more coming from a simple woman such as herself—is altogether exceptional" (he marveled at how clearly and calmly this was all suddenly coming out of his mouth!) "in having opened up whole new directions for me in my intellectual development, that is!" he added with animation.

"It's common knowledge that every interior experience of any intensity possesses that quality," the doctor said calmly, "but I nonetheless know exactly what you're referring to in this particular instance. Let me try to explain it to you at least halfway so that you don't have to go around brooding unnecessarily. There's a certain kind of mentally ill person—and the person you were living with is beyond a doubt mentally ill!—whose disorder is characterized by what we might call creativity along poetic lines. That is, the split in their entire being, down to the deepest parts of themselves, which the course of their disease occasions, gives them easy access to a whole series of extraordinarily elemental—we could almost say ,primitive'—capacities which often reveal themselves in quite astonishing forms, among others in the highly novel and vividly immediate ways—I want to say they fly in the face of all triteness—such patients have of making observations and expressing themselves. For them, the world simply won't fit into any conventional framework; they no longer possess the ability to put most things to functional use as as ,ready-made' objects—predominantly abstract concepts with all their concatenations—which is one of the signs that they're confronting the abyss. Other people—the ones ,with unimpaired mental health,' for that's how it's referred to scientifically rather than talking about ,normal' and ,crazy' people, the terms ordinarily used—other people stay healthy and on track by exercising, in the broad sense, a function for which psychology has coined the attractive term ,surrogate ideation.' It's a kind of emotional paper currency, you might say, which allows the physical weight of the original gold that's backing it to be forgotten. The best service I could do you, though, is to furnish you with a specific example. Among other expressions, our patient makes very frequent use of one particular phrase,

‚human degradation,‘ which is unusual to begin with, and she applies it predominantly to a certain bad habit acquired in her youth and persisted in through her later life as well. I think you’ll agree that this phrase ‚human degradation‘ has a peculiar aptness; it’s an appropriate designation, furthermore, for some unfavorable changes that arise in this connection over the course of years and that can hinder, or even preclude, gratification by normal means. Not just a moral ‚degradation,‘ then, but one that’s connected to a woman’s whole femininity. Please note, also, that in the very social strata in which the patient was raised the expression ‚that thing‘ is a widespread term for a woman. The strange but only too effective dehumanization that inheres in the phrase will surely be clear to you. That’s just one example from any number we could pick out. Now, in a young man such as yourself, with what I hope is a strong craving for intellectual freedom and a capacity—quite appropriate for his age—to adapt and readjust his whole being, it will come as no surprise that a strong magic would have made its way to you from ‚the other side of the fence.‘ And I must tell you that from time to time I myself have felt the same kind of thing coming from my patients.”

Adrian stayed silent. Outside, the rain, stirred by the storm, was pouring down in mighty gushes; the doctor closed the window, which was lit up brightly for seconds at a time by the flashes of lightning. The thunder was pounding and booming much closer now. “So what I felt wasn’t—it wasn’t all just a complete illusion,” Adrian suddenly cried, “even though everything I now know came to me from someone mentally ill!” “No, to be sure, it’s got a genuine kernel, all right,” the doctor answered, but in an undertone and suddenly distracted. “But then—I have to ask you this—what’s the difference between a madman and a poet?” Adrian asked in a fiery tone, downright eager to know. “You’re asking more than I can tell you. Basically I don’t think there is any. But would you please excuse me a minute? You have to wait until the rain lets up anyway.” The doctor stepped out the door, listened in the corridor, and came back in. For a minute Adrian thought he could hear voices calling out. He made a forceful movement and started speaking. “I can well imagine,” the doctor cut him short, “that you’re very concerned about whether you can see Fräulein Seifert.” He stopped and listened some more. “I’m sorry to have to tell you, though, that it would simply not be feasible just at this time. The patient probably wouldn’t even recognize you. Moreover, purely medical reasons forbid it; your seeing the patient could actually lead, in fact, to a worsening of her condition. Wait — !” Adrian stood up slowly; he could hear those voices again, now raised in a kind of singing. “I don’t want you to think I’m being cruel for no reason. Perhaps you should come with me after all, please, if you don’t mind, that is.” A loud burst of thunder exploded, while new bolts of lightning made their grotesque faces outside the windows. Adrian followed the doctor along the dimly lighted, echoing corridors. Here and there the building seemed to be infiltrated, as it were, by voices coming from underground. All the windows were rattling in the storm as it now whistled and howled. Adrian gave the doctor a sideways look. “Yes,” the man said to him, “it isn’t always comfortable here.” They stopped

outside a white door, and the doctor made a sign for Adrian to put his ear up against it.

Adrian heard Rufina's voice, exceptionally loud; he'd never heard it so loud.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by Thy name; Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses" (at this point the prayer rose to become a scream of desperation) "as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. . ."

A clap of thunder that seemed to tear the building apart swallowed up her last words; yet even while the powerful rolling could still be heard, Adrian became aware that he was saying the rest of the prayer in a forceful whisper: "For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen."

"I'm sure you must understand for yourself now that the patient couldn't possibly have a visitor," the doctor said simply. "No, no, of course; thank you, doctor, thank you. I have to go now, I have to get away from here." "In this rain you'd be better off waiting a while." But Adrian didn't hear a word; he bolted along the corridor and down the steps into the open air. At this elevation, the storm was able to pounce on him with ferocity. He went stumbling forward, into the wild flashes of lightning and the thunder that came right after them. There Adrian stood on this high ground, soaked through, buffeted by the wind and rain, contorted like a puppet. He took almost no notice of the storm, though. And just as, all around him, part of the city's mass, jagged, sharp edges of buildings against the horizon, would now be ripped out of the darkness by flashes of lightning, followed by part of the grounds, arching treetops battered in the light, so, too, was he now truly able, in these charged, even passionate moments, to succumb to an illusion, as if with each flash a new and unknown province of his own spirit was being illuminated that had previously been lying in the deep of night?

THE bandleader struck up the overture; just by chance, the program for the supper concert here had the same prelude on it that had set our friend to philosophizing in the opera house that time. The sky, high and deep in its midnight blue, was standing above the many covered tables out on the terrace, above the colorful lights and the flowers. Tonight, Sofia Mitrofanov fell all-out in love with Adrian, head over heels. She knew perfectly well that this wasn't the moment for her to make a move; he's looking far away, off into the dark, round waves of the hills and the woods, down into the glittering city, spread out in all its immensity. Is something on his mind?

Now, though, he seems to swallow it down, as it were; he turns with a lively little twist to face Sofia, lifts his glass, and tips it to her. Needless to say, she can feel things beginning to go her way already.

That's how we feel, too, and we wish them the very best of what's due them.

Afterword

As a student of psychology at the University of Vienna during the years when he wrote this divertimento—it was finished by 1924—Doderer had observed patients from the psychiatric clinic; they were in fact put on display as lecture subjects, just as Rufina is here. One of the few clear signs of human feeling in Adrian is his protest of this practise, and the lecturing physician's rejoinder sounds appropriately hollow and rationalized. Adrian is otherwise immature and self-centered, which gives the story its actual plot, since his inexperience—willed on some level—leaves him at a loss to examine any of his own inner workings, let alone anyone else's. He finds a kind of momentary release at the end, but he doesn't have enough self-awareness to attain resolution or even recognition. He's an early example of "Apperzeptionsverweigerung" at work. From the very opening, light and dark take on Expressionistic, apocalyptic meaning. Like the heavy action in the rhetoric depicting noise and motion in the city and the purposely bewildering synesthesia characterizing the meeting of city and nature, the wild thunderstorm owes a debt to Expressionism, too, which in turn found a new interest in the Gothic, with its inventory of madwomen, bolts of lurid lightning, and headlong flights into the raging elements. Despite (or because of) all its touches of conventional high drama, though, the storm works well as an analogue to Adrian's confused inner state, to say nothing of Rufina's. The ending is ambiguous, as are Doderer's preliminary notes about it. Adrian's unresolved confusion may mean that he's no less trapped at the end than Rufina. Her gentle, kind disposition toward him, her complete lack of any wish to dominate him, and her emotionally generous encouragement of his desire to find intellectual companionship away from her make a strong contrast with the kind of shallow, husband-hunting woman by whom he'd felt so trapped at the beginning of the story. But such women are the frying pan to Sofia Mitrofanov's fire; Adrian apparently sees her as a free-spirited, emancipated type—maybe the Russian name helps—but she's just the kind of smothering, narrow, possessive woman full of petty middle-class judgments he'd been trying to get away from, and she seems to be getting her hooks in deep. So much for the "inner renewal," one fears; the last sentence of the story—it's truly worth being a paragraph of its own—is gently but deeply chilling and puts the whole set of transactions into ironic perspective. Adrian had found energy and renewal with Rufina; her uncompromising honesty had forced him to see and talk about the world with much more concretion than he was used to. Sofia narrows his horizons from the start, on the other hand; her ways are certain to drive him crazy. Only a youngish writer would pile on so many ironies with such a free hand, but in doing so, Doderer skillfully works out his theme, which varies all those platitudes about the fine line between madness and genius. He examines his own artistic processes, to begin with; after all, the compulsive patterning by which Rufina repeats a limited set of expressions is exactly the same technique of lyric repetition he uses here and elsewhere for the structural framework of the divertimento as he defines it, and the doctor's description of her brand of

insanity sounds like nothing more than the manifestation of the poet's craft on a high level. In another irony, Rufina's madness is what has inspired Adrian's genius, taking the word in its older meaning of an indwelling spirit, his spirit of harmonious creativity and productivity; more than that, her madness exhibits in itself a mode of genius—of a kind unfit to function in the world because of its enmeshment in guilt and self-hatred, but no less creative an energy for that. And last, it may be middle-class values and taboos that actually end up making people crazy. (They were a tremendous burden to Doderer.) Rufina is only too eager to be thought well of in a "respectable" context, acutely conscious of rank and class and professional standing among the patrons of the café. She's painfully committed to being a "good Catholic" and an upright citizen with a clean work ethic. Irreconcilable conflict in the pleasure principle seems to be at the root of her undoing; what is the doctor saying if not that she acquired her now incurable feeling of universal guilt through compulsive masturbation as a younger woman, severely clashing with her need to be the "perfect" daughter? Meanwhile, her slap-dash, easy-living, loud-mouthed friend Josefina Pauly and the men she consorts with don't seem to know the meaning of guilt or inhibition. Like Georg Büchner, who was a physician with a special interest in mental illness, Doderer achieves pathos toward the end of the story by having the victim of insanity recite the "Our Father" (the "Paternoster"!), as does Woyzeck in the play of that title. Adrian's best moment may be his praying the last part of it with her, outside her door. And again like Büchner, in his great novella "Lenz," Doderer reaches technical mastery while creating deep empathy through his apparently unfiltered recreation of a mental crisis in part 3. His further handling of the characters, especially in what he refrains from pointing up about Adrian's failure to learn anything more from experience at the end than he was able to at the beginning, gives the story a sophistication it would lack if he dwelt too overtly on Rufina's innocence and Adrian's obtuseness. Beginning with Rufina's instinct to take refuge in the shadow of the cathedral, the treatment of the story is informed by the iconography of Catholic martyrdom as applied to vulnerable women, and Doderer does very well to let the atmosphere silently work on its own. Only the brief, awkward intrusion of a first-person narrator—so that somebody able to give an eye-witness account can see Rufina walking dazed along the street—reveals a writer still working on fundamentals of narrative structure.

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