

HEIMITO VON DODERER

The Strudlhof Steps
or
Melzer and the Depth of the Years

A Novel

Translated by Vincent Kling

IN MEMORIAM
JOHANNIS TH. JÆGER
SENATORIS VIENNENSIS
QUI SCALAM CONSTRUXIT
CUIUS NOMEN LIBELLO
INSCRIBITUR

On the Strudlhof Steps in Vienna

When the leaves upon the steps are lying,
from the old stairs is heard an autumn sighing
of all that's gone across them in the past.

A moon in which a couple, holding fast,
embraces, lightweight shoes and heavy footfall,
the mossed urn in the middle, by the wall,
outlasts the years between the wars and dying.

So much is past and gone, to our dismay,
And beauty shows the frailest power to stay.

Part One

When Mary K.'s husband, a man named Oscar, was still alive and she herself was still walking around on both her truly beautiful legs (the right one was cut off above the knee on September 21, 1925, not far from her apartment, when a streetcar ran over it), a certain Doctor Negria fetched up, a young Rumanian physician who was continuing his training at the famous medical school here in Vienna and doing a residency at the General Hospital. There have always been Rumanians and Bulgarians like him around Vienna, mostly in the neighborhoods close to the university and the conservatory. People were used to them—to their manner of speaking, which grew more and more interspersed with Austrian German; to the thick shocks of hair over their foreheads; to their pattern of always living in the best residential areas, since all of these young gentlemen from Bucharest or Sofia were well-to-do or had well-to-do fathers. They distinctly remained foreigners (ones to whom enormous packages full of their delicious ethnic foods were constantly being shipped)—not so consolidated in their foreignness as North Germans, admittedly, but a more local kind of institution, as it were, and yet "Balkanegers" all the same, because they never lost that characteristic intonation of their speech. Viennese ladies who were thinking of renting a room or two in their apartment or villa were always on the lookout for a "Bulgarian or Rumanian student"; they could then be sure of having their names passed along, for in the numerous cafés around the university or around the various clinics there existed a team spirit among compatriots.

Doctor Negria took Mary's marriage as an affront. He could not believe, he was simply incapable of believing, that Mary's marital fidelity might have adequate foundation. He was boundlessly irritated by her fidelity, and his irritation came into being at the same time as his first stirring of desire. (The author Kajetan von S. would no doubt have written here, "He desired her out of abysmal malice"—and among people of his type there may really exist such basically harmless foolishness that gets all gussied up in this bizarre way.) The really damnable thing about the fish-hook Doctor Negria had swallowed, though, was that the fidelity of this irreproachable woman was not at all unconscious. She was not naive enough for that; in her heart she had grown aware, as early as her girlhood days—during which, even at fourteen, she had felt as a grown woman feels—of various folds; and so, as she grew to maturity later on, she had unfolded and smoothed herself out, doing so, moreover, on that level for the attainment of which all persons are responsible who do not travel their path in life between unbroken walls of innocence, a road with no vista, like the one that led from ancient Athens to Piraeus. With all that, Mary was a virgin when she entered into marriage with her Oscar. On the other hand, her being faithful now was not a state that remained in effect owing merely to the emergence within her of a stable equilibrium out of a kind of irrevocable decision and to more or less a conversion to her duties as wife and mother—as the mother of two attractive children, a girl and a boy, she having reddish-blond hair like her father, he with dark, Titian-red hair like hers.

The whole matter presented itself to Doctor Negria (not to Mary) between the base lines just sketched, and the construction he chose to put upon this existing set of circumstances conformed by and large to reality. It was on this grill he inserted underneath—totally unable as it was, though, to change anything about the undetermined further life of the subject in question—that he kept his irritation sizzling.

There is a kind of fidelity that is nothing more than avarice in relation to qualities, a quality-greed which wants to stay in control, whatever it may hold by way of title deeds. Fidelity of this kind, of a merely meritorious nature, as it were—although *meritum* also has a meaning connected with one's just deserts—forms a handy little step to arrogance, and one gets into the habit of climbing up on it with pleasure, like a seat in a bay window from which one can look down upon the ordinary people passing by on the street below. Fidelity of this kind is not stable in its equilibrium and does not really deserve its name; it does not merit it for the simple reason that it is merely meritorious. Even so, it is given up only with a great struggle under certain circumstances, and when these circumstances accompany one along the road as invisible walls—but ones that blinker the vista nonetheless—as long walls, throughout the years, then there's never anything more to it than that pure abstraction called *meritum*.

That's what irked Doctor Negria, and he made it his firm resolve, strongly incorporating it into his whole being without the slightest bit of critical deliberation, to achieve a breakthrough here, and he was very much a breaker-through, through and through. A challenging, now-see-here, arms-akimbo temperament, an interventionist, one who was always trying to shove quickly aside whatever bothered him and who indignantly regarded anything as outrageous that tried to put brakes on him.

It is in connection with this "interventionism" that the doctor's name would later on assume the force of a proverb or a catch phrase in a closely related group; that is how there came into being the "Negria Organization," which ended up crowning its derring-do with a campaign against the Berlin automobile dealer Helmut Biese (this is all really out of place here, though!), the latter action overseen by Höpfner, a poet of advertising jingles or a poetaster, who was personally acquainted with Mary's Rumanian adorer, by the way. But with whom was Höpfner not acquainted? He was an address book, a complete business and social topography of Vienna (one of the traits he shared with Dragoon Captain von Eulenfeld). At the crucial moment, Doctor Negria—from time to time knocking back a glass of slivovitz with an abrupt gesture (racing excitedly around the room between times)—had uttered the following up at Höpfner's: "I can't stand to think how the spider has her snared in his web." The "spider" was Oscar, Mary's husband. Sometimes Negria also referred to him as "Oscar the Tick."

His relationship with the K. family had come about on one of the tennis courts in the Augarten, that pale park of the Josephine period, and it developed along more domestic lines through the childhood illnesses of the girl and boy; Negria was on assignment in the relevant department of the General Hospital and, oddly enough, had made his mind up for nothing but pediatrics. This Rumanian

enjoyed the esteem and respect of his illustrious department chief, so that the great man even made a house call at Mary's once to examine children in their sickroom. From that time on, Doctor Negria started showing up for social visits. His way of ringing the doorbell sounded abrupt and sharp, as if someone were breaking a window or giving a hard kick to a soccer ball from the penalty zone into the goal.

Mary had been sitting by the tea table, her gaze going out into the scarcely commencing dusk of a late-summer evening. Here one could look down along a street and then over the Danube Canal (which isn't a canal at all, but a considerable stretch of the river, wide and deep, its current fast), over to the other bank. The calling of boys at play came up from the street to the fourth floor; it was a noise heard every evening, a companion through the entire summer (or at least that part of it that one had not spent in Pörschach or Millstatt), a sound that greeted one on the evening of one's return from the country as something that had dependably stayed on, belonging to the season, and that was

still going to last for weeks, since it was staying warm, if more temperately so—the best kind of weather for tennis, Oscar said, "Indian summer." Oscar will be home in half an hour. Suddenly she thinks of Lieutenant Meltzer. Back then, as a young girl, she had known for certain that he was pretty stupid. It had been in Ischl, must have been the summer of 1908 or 1909; around that time there had been some political tension with Serbia. Lieutenant Meltzer's eventually decamping from her—taking his stupidity along with him—had, in a manner of speaking, cancelled out that stupidity and, with it, her own superiority, even though she was not at all in the dark as to the background of his retreat and his disappearance into some military post or other far away in Bosnia, where there were still bears, as he forever reporting. He was eager to go on a bear hunt himself. "If you bring the bearskin to me, Herr Meltzer, I'll be able to put it on the same way you've been putting me on." Fourteen years had passed since then, incidentally. On occasion, her father had said in Ischl that Meltzer would have to resign his commission if he wanted to marry her. Oh yes, he could have had her then, no doubt about it. He'd been a very nice young man, very nice indeed, unfailingly cheerful and courteous at all times. He hadn't had a care in the world. She would have deceived him later on, and today she knew that, too. Because of his being so even-tempered.

There was a taxi stand at the end of the street along which Mary could see from her armchair. The taxis usually stationed themselves in a long row on the cross street, left and right around the corner, so that on the left-hand side the front part and on the right-hand side the rear part of two different taxis were always in view. Police regulations back then stipulated that the first taxi in the row always be the one taken; and since both the head and the foot of the column were fixed by definite bounds, each car moved up a space when the front one had driven off; the returning taxis then got in line at the end. This arrangement resulted in the slow crossing over of one or more taxis from time to time; when they'd moved up, there would always be a taxi standing to the right, not much more of

which than the rear wheels could be seen, while on the left one would move up to the corner, but only far enough to show its front end.

The unvarying movement of the taxis there at the end of the street, like beads being strung, belonged in Mary's mind to the self-evident and unfathomable world of this apartment through all the years. It was a phenomenon related on the deepest level to the dropping of water from a faucet or to the falling beads of a rosary. And because it was a considerable distance down the street to the taxi stand and farther on to the "Canal," the purring of the engines was completely inaudible when the windows were shut. The phenomenon was noiseless, and that constituted its essence; it was noiseless, altogether unvarying, and calm; it was monumental in its boredom and monotony, and that was what made the connection now, in Mary's drifting thoughts, between the picture out her window and her recollection of Lieutenant Meltzer. She did have to admit, though, that he'd had the sweetest way of laughing. Doctor Negria's ring at the bell sent some shooting stars into the picture, not so very different from the ones a man sees when you punch him in the eye. Negria seemed to be ringing with special energy today.

The maid opened the door, but he did not just walk in. Instead, he launched an invasion, making a deep bow and kissing Mary's hand, already on the offensive and leading the advance; this impression stayed uppermost even in the face of the ceremonious deliberation in his bearing, his hand-kissing, his bowing and scraping. He looked all around the room, irately passing everything in review, and had in a twinkling uttered a great many words in silence or emitted them in some fluid form. All right, then. Very well. Same old thing, I see. Still with the old tick. Well, I'm just curious how much longer you'll be satisfied living like this. What a pointless existence anyway, missing out on life. Preconceptions are no more than a form of inertia, and inertia is a sin against life. An object with autonomous power of motion—a living being as opposed to a mere thing, that is—must simply not yield to inertia. And I just don't believe in you and the tick, either. Not one little bit! Out loud, a teacup in his hand, he had merely told her that the Zerkovitz children had the chicken pox and that he had succeeded today for the first time in beating the Polish emissary (a Herr von Semski) in singles at the tennis club, even if the score was close. For the rest, Doctor Negria looked, as Homer says of that unreliable dolt Ares, resplendent with strength and health. It is totally out of the question, of course, that the flash fire she had called forth would have no repercussions on Mary herself. At the very least, she was forced to become more clearly aware of her feminine power, and that already signified an invitation to a game, an activating of strength in free play. She wasn't the slightest bit afraid of Negria, for she considered him to be basically far more stupid than that Lieutenant Meltzer from her girlhood years.

And she wasn't thinking, not even remotely, of turning off this already paved high road, from which one could at any time lower one's gaze down into the ravine of crushing circumstances and into the waters of life, erratically pushing their way along, now gushing past huge boulders between which they'd been pressed, now gathered in a deep, blue-green trout pool and rippling against the overhanging, exposed walls of mysterious caves at its round edge. The glance

downward did much good, and the association with all that wildness—or with the small bit of it that had made its way up here and grown domesticated, as it were—heightened the feeling of comfort while at the same time chasing away the poison of comfort, boredom.

When Negria heard that Oscar would be coming home in half an hour, he blinked his eyes in peevish assent and conveyed more or less the feeling that he had accepted it anyway and could expect nothing better. What could you expect from her, after all, such a fatuous person?

Not that the fatuity of any woman had ever seriously hampered Doctor Negria, and so he soon opened up a new line of attack. For some time he had owned a rowboat, not built for sport and therefore sufficiently wide, but a trim, elegant craft anyway. It lay above the city in Nussdorf, near the branching-off of the so-called Danube Canal. Whenever a Rumanian or Serbian steamer with a string of barges came up the river, Negria, speaking his own language or Serbo-Croatian, would easily be able to get them to throw him an extra line; in this way he could ride up to Greifenstein and Tulln, or even much farther, and could then just cruise back downriver in high spirits, never failing, before he untied the line, to toss a pack of Austrian cigarettes, along with many thank-yous, up onto the high deck of the boat that had taken him in tow. As time went by he came to make the acquaintance of the ships' crews and of this or that steamer captain, even on the "Canal," along which Negria had traveled as well, right through the heart of Vienna and all the way down to the "Prater Point," as it is called, where the branch flows back into the mainstream below the city.

Along this course he naturally had to pass very close by Mary's apartment, and so he formed the resolution of inviting her to go on a boat ride with him, before which they could have a glass of wine in Nussdorf, at one of those secluded little country taverns called *Heurigen* that Negria seemed to know all about. He was quite aware that it was a question of hitting on a rubric for a rendezvous with her away from her home, and that was what he was aiming at first and foremost while at the same time preparing the ground further by occasionally remarking on little flaws in his comfortable bachelor apartment, which was in need of inspection by an expert eye (he also dropped casual references to some Rumanian peasant embroidery and other antique pieces he'd collected from his homeland, and one time he brought an exquisite piece of this embroidery as a present for Mary).

While cruising down the "Canal," Negria had spotted a convenient place for tying up, and when he rowed over to the bank, there was even a ring, which allowed him to secure his boat with chain and lock. It was in the immediate vicinity of the taxi stand, where the cars, crossing the street in their unvarying pattern, threaded their way through the years.

Oscar K. did come home in half an hour and was glad, in his quiet and not exactly transparent way, to find a guest present. He belonged to that type of person whose being has something concave about it, some suggestion of a curved mirror. With such people, one is always inclined to infer the presence of

spiritual focal points unless the opposite becomes evident. He who keeps silent hears and sees much, no doubt. No one ever starts off by assuming, however, that this kind of reticence can arise merely from an astounding lack of fire. It's one of those cardinal convictions held by everyone that still waters run deep; and, at the least, there is something uncanny about waters like these. Even so, some people have been known to bend attentively over waters no deeper than a hand and showing nothing more than ordinary pebbles at the bottom. The face of the man who was just now sitting down at the tea table belongs to a rare category, one more readily found among Jewish men than others, even though this kind of face represents the realization of an altogether general physiognomic possibility. It is a face that has not quite achieved cohesion, or, if one would rather, a face that is at once the display case and construction site of highly incompatible materials, which could not be unified in the forebears and which have now reached a state of crash and trash, as after an explosion. The result is that an extraordinary ugliness comes into being, a state all the more acute for not revealing itself as bound to a splay nose, a jawline askew, a drooping eye, or any other single structural part, but instead for remaining in suspension, for incorporating a little of each element, for being a ribbon (yes, that's exactly what it is!) hanging in midair, not tying disparate parts together and so allowing the disharmony to continue as is. Such a face looks as if its owner were carrying a weight of atonement laid upon him for an offense he knows nothing about.

Without a doubt, he was accurate in grasping the strengths and weaknesses of his position right now, to the extent that one can speak of accuracy in the first place when dealing with the kinds of emotions, drifting and swirling like fog, that one feels in situations like these. Oscar thought he understood his wife, though, and better than she understood herself, at that. In this marriage, even with growing children and a period of living together going on fourteen years, the nights were still an axle; set in place in the dark, it caused the daylight hours to rotate around it and held the cycle of the day in subjection to it. Here, at the inmost core of his life's condition, Oscar had observed some tremors whose aftershocks—felt in broad daylight and indeed belonging to the realm of day—seemed to him a necessary matter of course. The heightened passion to which his wife had been surrendering for some time now, and its inevitable reciprocal effect on him, and then in turn back on her—resulting in the bestowal by both of ever more lavish tributes upon the god Eros—created a crackling aura around her, which could have been overlooked only by a totally obtuse person, but never by one whose desire was already drawing out long, scarcely concealable sparks from her wrists, her temples, her shoulders, and the hem of her skirt, as it were. She knew that, of course, and she would tone it down, on the one hand, by completely avoiding all flirtatious behavior and by beclouding the issue a hundredfold simply through the fluidity she exuded, while on the other hand she would at the very same time also be rubbing salt into an open wound by her integrity—a wound from which, acting on her very secure power of judgment, she firmly withheld any respect whatever.

Aside from this, she did not emphasize anything, though. She did not, for example, play up the aspects of an especially happy marital harmony in Negria's presence. The little social gathering at the tea table was not thrown into a commotion by displays of any kind. Any such thing was at so far a remove, in fact, that the group managed to hold a pleasant conversation; by and large, Negria enjoyed conversing with Oscar, the "spider," the "tick," and would never have had a sense that he was doing anything like toadying when they talked. It can be said that he had a relatively high tolerance for the man, reviling him up at Höpfner's place, all right, but without the torments integral to jealousy—in saying which it seems to us that Mary's disparaging way of looking at the nature of that particular wound seems all but corroborated.

All these fine spider webs—finer even than the gossamer that once again would soon be brushing ghost-like against their cheeks—were manifest and evident to the spider, the very reason being that he was a spider. But in the Augarten, on the tennis courts, under a sun suffusing the air and mixing with water vapor from the Danube to turn the air milky and mild—so that, with the fruity taste of autumn in one's mouth, one could feel the passing of time almost as a thing of the senses, because it slowed down and stood nearly still—in the Augarten, even after duplicating the experiment repeatedly, Oscar achieved a result, in broad daylight and in the outside world, that unsettled him almost as much as the tremors around the axle in the inmost core of his life's circle. This result had reference merely to a little routine he and his wife had worked up as a joke— or now, actually, to the absence of this routine, or even, it seemed, to the impossibility of reviving it, although it was a familiar joke they'd been playing since the time of their engagement. They had a habit—which they especially enjoyed after a game of tennis—of appearing to start a quarrel with one another, getting everyone present to react in some way (whether it was that people stepped in or grew dismayed), and then abruptly marching off, arm in arm, tenderly and in complete happiness. It now became apparent, though, that Mary had been wanting no part of this game for quite some time.

A few remarks could be made about such games, of course. At least the following: they were the exhibition of something self-evident, namely of the concord between a married couple.

Her children had gone to school, her husband to his office, Mary to her bath. While she lay under the hot mirror of water in the tub, nonchalantly observing her own body—its impact in abeyance here, among tiled walls and nickel-plated faucets, under the bluish water—like a shot one sees being fired, but whose report one does not hear, a knock came at the door. Mary took herself away from the flowing watercourse of her reveries and her quarterer half-thoughts and told her faithful Marie, who was always taking care of her, that she did not want to have breakfast here, but in at the tea table instead.

The living room was cozier in winter, when the large coal stove, built in the form of a fireplace, spread its glow evenly through the isinglass panes. Now there was a certain palpable emptiness, but the tea table stood in the same place winter and summer. Even though Mary had shut the window looking out onto

the long street that went down to the Canal, so as to keep dust from flying in and settling on the polished furniture, the warm late-summer morning outside was leaning against the window panes, a friendly and soft openness of all the surroundings, lightly tinged with water vapor and still milky and misty from the early morning on the Canal; weather with much space, an open cavern of expectation, and in the middle of these surroundings, which diffused into a muffled form the sounds of city life, Mary was now sitting over her teacup; and that was the main point, for the remainder of her breakfast was measured out with great frugality. No, she was not to be numbered among those figures who, with a bad conscience, consumed mounds of whipped cream in that large café farther along the Danube Canal which has grown more familiar to the few readers of a holograph chronicle (more about it later) prepared by Sectional Councillor Geyrenhoff.

It's clear to see that the K.s' apartment must have had the same floor plan as the Siebenscheins' right underneath. All the rooms lay along an axis—four large rooms and a small one, resulting in a view that wasn't bad at all, except for the unusually outsized bedroom (a drawing room at the Siebenscheins') and a small room of modest dimensions (Doctor S.'s study downstairs). The K.s' apartment was very large, then ("is to be regarded as very large"—this is how Senior Councillor Julius Zihal of the Central Bureau of Revenue and Tariff Computation would have said it in his pragmatic officialese); indeed, Doctor Siebenschein had found space for his legal office, complete with waiting room, in the apartment downstairs; and yet there was only one more person here at the K.s' (since Titi Siebenschein's wedding, that is—until then there had been four people on the lower floor as well).

The silence, polished like furniture, was now interrupted by Mary's light clattering. What she had set on display at the bottom of a flat bowl here—as if on a shell and being presented, so to speak—was the circumstance of her having no plans at all for the day, which was rare for her. Furthermore, the day had even made room, yielding to her in a manner well-nigh tendentious: Oscar was supposed to have lunch with business friends in town, and the children had been invited to visit relatives at their villa in Döbling, a house with a splendidly beautiful grounds, where they would eat right after school and spend the rest of the afternoon. It belonged to the owner of a large brewery. The K. children were considered well-bred associates whom one was glad to see in the company of one's own boys and girls; and these two children really were above average to some extent.

There remained only the boat ride with Negria. Mary as good as had an appointment with him for the early afternoon in Nussdorf. But then it would be over too late to play tennis. Oscar, for his part, had taken to waiting on the courts now only until six o'clock at the latest; he would go there on tennis days in late summer directly from the office after a short afternoon rest.

She kept herself free today. She declined with a smile to look upon her arrangements with Negria as binding. He could just as well go on his ride alone; then he would inevitably tie up—or "make fast," to be quite nautical about it—

here at the Canal and stop by to see where she had been. He would just push his way into the room past Marie.

Mary laughed.

Just then the taxis started to move. One after the other they threaded across the street. The last car, whose rear wheels remained in sight, was still shaking a little, as was the first one, only its front wheels and hood visible. With that, all the soundless motion froze back into stillness.

But all that tensely waiting demonism, fragile as glass, of her slumbering surroundings did not, of course, come to Mary's consciousness under any such name. As a woman, though, she had enough depth, if not of spirit then surely of gut, to sense her state of exposure in the present, which was standing about her on all sides, upright on a tray, as it were, a small disk brightly reflecting the sun's rays while wending its way between the twin darknesses of past and future. A glance at her small gold wrist watch told her that she had been sitting here by the nearly empty teapot for an unusually long time. Nothing moved, and she kept still as well. By now, a good hour had passed since she had sat down at the breakfast table and thought, among other things, of Lieutenant Meltzer.

Something of the brittleness of life was in her today, as a cognition and a quality at the same time; she knew now how lightly all things leap, for she had it in her very limbs, this fragility, this Bologna-bottle quality of each good hour, which falls away and turns to dust. She wanted to touch nothing today.

Behavior quite foreign to her; usually she was always touching something or putting something to rights.

Which is just what she should have been doing now. She realized that when the taut silence snapped and a new situation leapt out of her with clinking and clattering. At exactly the same instant, she realized it in the way she stood up; a movement not decided by her head, but one running up her body like an ascending ripple, a manifestation of the unsuspected autonomy of her knees and legs, managing, while still only half-complete, to take the red earthenware teapot along with it by catching the fringe of a silk shawl that Mary was wearing around her shoulders in the little slivers of bamboo wrapped around the handle, where-upon the cup fell to the floor and the whole tray, along with the silver sugar bowl, slid and teetered on the verge of the same possibility. And the tumult, calmed to a result, yielded this:

cup and saucer lay on the floor, apparently unbroken; the spoon had flown far off to the side; on Mary's dress there was not a drop of tea dregs from the pot—so the darkly steeping tea had found no opportunity to create a lasting effect here, but it still kept trying, for the pot hanging from the fringe of Mary's silk shawl was tipped in such a way that the dark liquid almost reached the edge. Mary saw all this. At the same time she heard from the entryway the sound of a key being turned in a lock from outside the apartment, and so she called out, without moving, and remaining bent forward as well as she could in order to hold her strange wrap away from herself, "Marie! Marie!" There ensued a rush to the scene, a startled look, a burst of laughter, a careful release, and finally, an outcome surely peculiar—nothing was broken, nothing was stained, nothing was damaged.

For now, however, the substance of life in Mary paid no heed at all to this jesting declaration, under which heading it should have been ranged; it refused. That alone was the real reason why Mary did not go for a walk in beautiful Liechtenstein Park this morning, even though she had just been thinking at the breakfast table about how she would like to, considering all the free time at her disposal. Meanwhile, though, she no longer wanted to risk it. Now if this thought had entered her mind consciously and in words, she would probably have gone after all, out of a spirit of prudent contradiction. But it did not reach that point. She stayed at home, not from any reluctance or timorousness in her mind, but from some restraint in her limbs.

Anyway, it was pleasant here at home. Her well managed household surrounded her and permeated her from all sides. It was a sensibly run house, where nothing was wasted but also where there was no economizing in the wrong places when a solid yield of comfort could be achieved with a small outlay. For instance, the five-o'clock tea table, a charming glass cart, was always laden with coffee and tea alike, whichever one was in the mood for, as well as butter, jam, and black and white bread; by this time, too, Mary was able to rely on the children to be careful, so a lovely tea service remained in daily use. People turning up unexpectedly got the feeling that special preparations had been made for their visit. Consider, too, whether these little extras don't pay off handsomely on this or that occasion. (Oscar considered such things.)

These were bright people. They lived with their minds open in every direction; therefore, they heard and saw things, and they didn't close themselves off from what they saw and heard, and so there were no (as in certain other families, totally different ones) knotted snarls of entanglement in dark and guarded corners. And Grete Siebenschein liked to stop up for a minute and confided greatly in Mary and was very open to her opinion and advice and listened to her attentively.

The obvious thing for Mary to do on this free morning was just quietly to go and take a seat at the piano. Under Grete's coaching she had been working on three Chopin études and some Schumann in the course of the past year.

So there she sits at the piano, this woman, quite lonely, really, since the morning began, and she sets the silver meditations resounding. Everything around her arranges itself, an order comes into this loneliness, and one could almost believe that this order might be capable of radiating outward, all the way into the chaotic mass of the surrounding city, or at least of subduing the nearby demons through the Orphic power of music.

It is possible to give someone advice at a basic level. But advice at that level can almost never be accepted. After all, if a situation has reached the point at which advice is required, then usually some gear or cog has already worked loose in the mechanism, and the person caught in it gazes transfixed into this malfunctioning machinery of life, now illuminated, altogether consciously, from within. Life now seems to depend upon this mechanism, rather than the other way around, which would be the normal state of things. For that reason, advice given now can't be about anything but the mechanism itself—only an objective

new approach to which could reveal its purely relative importance—and so one is compelled to stick to small pieces of advice, advicelets, little jogs about the little cogs, which are whirling madly because they've been shaken much too loose from the whole. A little piece of advice, a tweak. Dilatory or palliative tactics. With a great deal of variety, depending on the situation—as an outcome of it, and not as just one of the small waves from basic springs that always remain the same. Then even the advice-giver has lost a sense of direction, to say nothing about control of the steering wheel itself.

Mary hadn't had much else to offer Grete Siebenschein since the summer of 1921, meaning since the end of Grete's half-hearted engagement to little E. P. and the beginning of her relationship with René Stangeler. Mary knew the first man, since Grete had brought him up once or twice; the second one she had seen—but only that—on the stairs or on the street with Grete; and taking everything she found out about him from Grete along with what Grete's not infrequent state of near despair told her, he seemed to Mary the man perfectly suited to guarantee her young friend complete unhappiness.

Still, at the point where we are now stopped, which is in the late summer of 1923, Grete Siebenschein had already passed her twenty-eighth birthday.

No, that René, about the same age as Grete, did not appeal to Mary, and she had no desire to get to know him—as though she were still privately hoping that this relationship would dissolve within a foreseeable time; as if she did not wish to function in her own person as any more of a clamp. Enough that Stangeler had already been coming and going for some time down at the Siebenscheins' and that the weight of familiarity was already starting to bear down gradually on Grete and her lover, pressing them ever closer together, as it were. No—she really didn't care for him. His eyes were somewhat slant, and his cheekbones were in some way Magyar or gypsyish. One time she had seen him down below, out on the square in front of the train station, apparently waiting for Grete—he was lounging against the base of the street clock, legs crossed, hands in his pockets, hat pushed back on his head. Just like that, right out on the street. There was a challenge in his bearing, an air which didn't strike Mary as casual and natural, but as overemphasized. It was ludicrous, unsound, unlikely to inspire much trust. Her own boy, at that time a youngster in the lower grades of his preparatory school, would never have stood around that way, and this fellow was close to thirty. Besides, they said he was from a good family. A grown man. By the time her husband was twenty-eight he'd been a breadwinner holding down a responsible position for years. They said Stangeler was still pursuing his studies—plausible, granted, because of his military service and his four years as a prisoner of war. But after that, he could have been expected to start doing something sensible and useful right away. Well, let people do what they do best (Mary was not at all narrow in the ordinary sense!), but his behavior toward Grete should have been entirely different from the very start. Meantime, everything else could be left open to discussion—whether to get married now or to wait a while; whether to choose a practical profession or to continue with his degree program, and all the rest.

Everything was really that little E. P.'s fault anyway.

He was the one who had brought Grete and René Stangeler together. At least that was how it looked to Mary, for in all of her meditations and cogitations on this subject one point she'd never taken into account and wasn't taking into account even yet, something she'd never thought through—not with the proper emphasis, at any rate—was the altogether indisputable fact that Grete had never loved little E. P. And precisely this fact was what lay out in plain view. A blind spot for Mary. Had she loved her Oscar? Yes—no. Now she loved him. It appeared to her not as an essential prerequisite, but as something that had just happened on its own. And in the deepest part of herself she didn't see anything decisive about that, anything that could be directly confronted or that needed to be dealt with face to face. Not a stipulating force, but a stipulated one. Not a self-sufficient entity but instead something likely to appear later, something, indeed, that couldn't be added until later; therefore, it could never serve as a point of departure for acting or reasoning. (This is roughly how it would sound if one were to voice what Mary carried with her on this subject as a set of totally self-evident ideas, no longer recognizing them as peculiar to herself alone.)

Nonetheless, it lay just as open to view that the inclination going by the name of love pure and simple—life's prime number, needing no factoring and accessible to none—did not exist on Grete's part (whose feelings were entirely different), as it did that little E. P. had made a mistake, one which presents itself in this light as no such thing after all. Otherwise Grete would not have left him after the war to travel abroad for ages on end, no matter how pressing the need might have seemed. And that would have been because her father, Doctor Ferry Siebenschein, must be classed among the kind of people who are capable of carrying their integrity to such lengths that their families starve in the process. It had almost come to that in the time right after the war, or for that matter, even before 1918. This case might very well stand alone among the owners of thriving legal firms at that time in Vienna; after all, the members of this profession were the very ones who always managed, thanks to the numerous connections they inevitably forged through their activities, to obtain basic necessities, make discreet exchanges of favors, conduct under-the-table dealings harmless in themselves, and they were able to do so, if not month by month, then at least week by week. In all of this trafficking our Doctor, Grete's father, proved almost monstrously untalented, much as if he were a ram with an unalterable propensity for the path of greatest resistance. For this reason, among others, Grete loved her father very much. The mother of the Siebenschein family, on the other hand, was always getting over one kind of spell only to be seized by another and different kind, to bring on which nothing in particular had to be happening in her world, since this agile little lady was fiendishly resourceful when it came to inventing illnesses. But should her productivity begin to diminish, the most unusual events would occur to fill in the gap: she would break or sprain some small extremity, a toe on her left foot or the ring finger of her right hand, thereby demonstrating an understanding, even in the intermissions between her big production numbers—insomnia, swellings, shivering fits, or simply, to use the words of Johann Nestroy, "constriction with inflammation"—of how to keep the family spotlight fixed on herself. Doctor

Siebenschein's not being a physician made matters easier, allowing each new pathological episode to emerge in full vigor. It's well known that physicians act as cold as icicles toward such nuisances, and Chief Medical Councillor Schedik, whose patient Frau Siebenschein did not become until much later, by the way—namely until 1927—was accustomed, whenever he met a member of the family, to asking not, "How is Mama?" but instead, quite offhandedly, "And what is troubling Mama now?" It was possible, after all, that a complete new array of symptoms had emerged since her last visit to his examining room the day before yesterday. Schedik, who had not a few patients of this type, treated them with the greatest success on a purely psychological basis, eschewing almost entirely any course of treatments or series of prescriptions, without any of these individuals ever posing the question to anyone as to how their treatment by Chief Medical Councillor Schedik always caused them to recover so quickly and so many times each year from the most assorted ailments, which set in one right after the other. They considered him an extraordinary doctor. And indeed he was. An outstanding father-in-law, besides—sad to say, of Herr Kajetan von S., already mentioned. One of his professors at the university, who knew Doctor Schedik, had remarked to Kajetan, casually but pensively, after his divorce, "You know, Herr von S., you can get along without your wife if you really have to, but that father-in-law of yours represents an irreplaceable loss."

Not long after the First World War our Grete (ebony black hair and classically ordered features) parted from the Siebenschein father, from the mother, and from younger sister Titi (a twig which was even then revealing the bent inclination of the future tree); not the least reason was to take some of the burden off the family provider, though he didn't want any part of it removed. Surely, though, her mother's periodical and pathological calendar of festal observances constituted another driving impulse, one which the retarding force of E. P. could not muster enough weight to counterbalance.

And so off Grete went to Norway. Countries which had remained neutral in the war were admitting young Austrian ladies.

She fought the good fight there, giving it her all, and as a result her personality emerged for the first time in its fuller dimensions. The unique and the differentiated in her being came to the fore, since that being was measuring itself against a foreign and comparatively straightforward environment. She proved equal to the occasion, which may mean all the more considering that she had gone from a ruined and impoverished country to a relatively well-ordered and prosperous one. Each day, a quite general danger of becoming *déclassée* there in a foreign country threatened to deteriorate into a specific, personal matter, especially since Grete wasn't able to remain on a consistent and thoroughgoing basis inside the profession, class, and style within which she had originally come out or come up, which was as a trained musician (a graduate of the conservatory in Vienna). She couldn't stick purely to teaching, though, for opportunities were not exactly offered thick and fast and the leisure to wait and choose even less so. Grete also played dance music in a resort hotel. Free room and board, low pay. She sat at the piano, and the ladies and gentlemen (or whatever they were) chatted and danced. In northern countries, as long as

people don't drink, the surface of manners and appearance is more uniformly polished; the furrows and wrinkles that separate classes are not as apparent right away to the foreigner from the south. If, in addition, the language has not been mastered yet, or imperfectly so, then the directional signs are missing that point to good breeding, a quality which, barely tangible though it may be, constitutes a liquid poured out on an international scale, not unlike the gravy served in the dining cars of big express trains, which for quite some time was showing suspicious resemblances to itself between Biarritz and Paris, Bregenz and Vienna, Manchuria and Vladivostok, so that one could stumble onto the preposterous notion that it was being transmitted by a system of pneumatic tubes running alongside the tracks. The same goes for breeding. But if one speaks only a few words of Norwegian, then one can't take a test sample on the Holmenkollen. Even so, Grete was soon drawn into the social life; they would put just anybody in her place at the piano, and that person would play just anything in just any way (still not such a ticklish point there, at least not then). It turned out that Grete was able to produce a more direct effect in her own person than through her pianistic resources, which were occasionally given a chance in a Viennese waltz, perhaps, but which were otherwise pounded away in the kinds of trots and steps that ruled all dancing back then. Granted, she was well dressed, in a style that hadn't quite established itself there and that was also bound up intimately, both in the individual details and in the total ensemble, with her native city. Furthermore, it's a decisive note in the opening chord of any person's entire life if that person hails from a famous place known to everybody in the whole wide world. Paris or Vienna provide a special significance and an effortless contrasting background for attractive women; a man won't be totally unconcerned, either, as to whether he comes from Paris or Landes-de-Bussac, Vienna or Gross-Gerungs, Moscow or Kansk-Yeniseisk.

Grete Siebenschein was drawn into the social life, but not entirely without a helping hand from herself. In Oslo (which as of then had still not been called that for very long), at the home of a dentist where she'd been giving piano lessons for some time, they'd advised her against getting involved with this job at the resort hotel; the word was that only wheeler-dealer types, or outright crooks, as we tend to say here, patronized the place. One of the dentist's patients, though, had presented the matter to her as a sort of oh-live-a-little change of pace. And Grete, being a young person, truly wasn't afraid of anything or anybody. She was brave and honest and not overly tormented by imagination, usually a weak point in brave people anyway. In addition, something dwelled inside her that could be called an impulse for research work. Whenever she was abroad—later on as well—she would always see a great deal and make no fuss about her own likes and dislikes. Perhaps these were weak, too. She adapted right away. Very soon her shoes were no longer carrying so much as a pinch of soil from her homeland. Limited imagination promotes failure of the memory. One has no luminous and scarcely touched places back there in the past, no votive altars of a private religion, so to speak, or small hooks in the heart attached to lines reaching far back, so that any connection at all in the imagination, or anything that one merely sees, can exercise a gentle

pull. That way is not conducive to objectivity. Grete was very objective and only occasionally sentimental; this latter she would be aware of and, as a protection, would keep open a narrow marginal gap of irony between herself and her feelings. Her disposition was akin to that of an eighteenth-century lady—she loved nothing more than *esprit* and a measure of it was inherent in her—and so she very often actually looked like one. The clear, at times almost sharply penetrating eye, the long neck, the fragile slenderness of a woman not in the least scrawny (*fausse maigre*, the French call it)—looking at her, one was not seldom reminded of Countess Lieven, the wife of the Russian ambassador in London, known as "*la maigre Lieven*," the mistress for two decades of Imperial Chancellor Clemens von Metternich—except that the Countess had been a blond. Along with all the other scholarly gibberish he'd crammed into his head at the university—lashed on by a ravenous craving—René Stangeler was also a devotee of Austrian history; so he knew everything about *la Lieven*, of course, and in fact had even had to present a lengthy seminar paper on her. He carefully avoided ever telling Grete anything about this notable personality, although she certainly would have taken a lively interest. "I didn't want" (this was how he once later put it to Kajetan) "to bring this archetype of hers directly to her attention." That's understandable. He didn't exactly have it easy, either.

Now then, we said earlier, "They would put just anybody in her place at the piano" and "She was drawn into the social life."

In the beginning, however, she herself did the putting (of someone else at the piano, that is), and it was not so much that she was drawn into the social life as that she herself took the initiative of entering into it. By doing so, she was deliberately performing a very characteristic action and at the same time executing one of the many counter-maneuvers against the threat of becoming *déclassée*, maneuvers that were a constant accompaniment to her Norwegian years (or that even occupied them to a great extent), just as one must continue to tread water without stopping if one wants to remain upright in a standing position at the surface. Her whole life long, in fact, Grete kept herself busy with treading water in this sense, and her high-strung sensitivity toward the family of Herr High and Mighty René could be explained by this trait of hers. At this juncture in the resort hotel, though, it was only a matter of saving face for her to fit in as part of that social group (or whatever it was), and not just as the keyboard "artiste" by the bar, the tickleress of the ivories banished to total exile behind the piano. Since men promptly began asking her to dance, and since she was a real expert at it, she found herself able to accept a second invitation, following right on the first, then to turn down a third by alluding to the somewhat too much neglected piano, and finally to retreat, gratified and genuinely lighter in heart, back to the keyboard.

Nonetheless, these kinds of rational, well moderated ways and means (people like ourselves probably would have flailed away at the baby grand for five hours, banging out fox trots without giving a damn about anybody or anything else) were, as so often with Grete, thwarted by eruptions of an entirely different kind. For suddenly, in the space of just a few minutes, she had fallen head over heels in love.

With her, such things could happen lightly and quickly, and the first of these adverbs must also be understood as a designation of weight; it's not that she was about to be crushed, but just that she was feeling emphatically rushed. Even so, the marginal gap remained open. A certain reserve guaranteed. This cryptic circumstance—one would almost like to say "as if by virtue of her long neck she still felt herself capable of surveying the situation"—permitted Grete to go very far while yet preserving undiminished the elemental sincerity of the sensations she felt. Something of this kind would repeatedly occur during the first two or three years of her relationship with René Stangeler, who, intimidated by Grete's individuality and enmeshed in boundless admiration, believed in a theatrically generous way that the thing to do was to shrug it off. But the stones he was purporting to swallow effortlessly lay indigestible on his psychological stomach, so to speak, and his heroic gesture came down in the end to the pettiness of dishing out paybacks in kind. How unfortunate for Grete Siebenschein, coming at the very moment when the well maintained marginal gap seemed to be trying to close, if not completely, then nearly so.

So now, back at the piano, she got her first good look at someone whom she had already seen in passing and about whom she knew nothing except who he was, a man enjoying a sort of minor fame in Norway at the time. The Norwegians occasionally strike us as an almost Hellenic people; and even if that which has been called Nordic ugliness not seldom comes crawling out of deep old pits, still the faces and figures of people in that country quite often, and seemingly by the way, achieve a significant—to a foreigner, staggering—degree of perfection. This particular man was one of the most dashing, a big name in all kinds of sports and rich to boot, so that in Paris and London he'd smoothed away entirely his last provincial rough edges. Grete sniffed all this out at once, and the marginal gap grew appreciably narrower, especially when she came back out from behind the piano after half an hour and danced with him—with one who, being a well traveled man (even in the Himalayas) and being the acknowledged center of the circle, apparently considered it a duty proper to one of his station to look after the foreigner. Besides, she created an exotic, southern impression—though not a disconcerting one—with her blue-black hair. The austere structure of her face, together with its flawlessly white skin, was closely related in many ways, beyond all contrasts in ethnic features, to a physiognomic type often encountered here.

What followed is an obbligato voice that we don't need to file all the way down from its many little starting points. The demigod, who conversed with Grete in French (spoken quite fluently by both parties) took advantage of this situation—and some others—in short order, and when the social gathering had broken up, they went for a nighttime walk by themselves. The snow lay deep. Without further ceremony, our aviator captain—this he had been during the World War, serving in the British army with dash and distinction—led Grete Siebenschein along a stretch of railroad track that ran just behind the hotel and that was covered with a kind of wooden tunnel as a protection against snow drifts. We may assume that she was led willingly. The conversation soon grew so animated that the little bit of jewelry she was wearing fell off unnoticed into the

snow. But because he met with decided and tough resistance, he put a stop to his forthright manner of speaking as if cut off and brusquely remarked that there could be only two reasons for such opposition: either virginity (which she denied) or a certain physical condition prevailing at the moment (which she confirmed). This statement of his pleased Grete Siebenschein so well, however, that a complete understanding was arrived at, albeit with a slight postponement as to time. Suddenly, as he led her along the packed snow near the entrance to one of the tunnels or protective roofs—its black mouth stood like velvet in the white and star-clear night and swallowed the faintly glistening ribbons of the rails as if cut off—she missed her jewelry. He helped her look, even though doing so seemed quite futile in the snow. But extraordinarily enough, not thirty paces from where they were and after only a few minutes, they found everything lying in one place and glistening faintly on the snow cover. This sacrifice had not been accepted, then, and the ring of Polycrates came back, as it were.

The smoking room and billiard room of the hotel had a concealed side door that opened onto the corridor almost exactly opposite Grete Siebenschein's room. In these purlieus, which were frequented almost exclusively by men, Grete's demigod could linger till all hours of the night, since there was always some spree or card party in progress, and the *pojoler* served up so bountifully (we would call this a punch, but one that only bears could drink) took the clarity out of everything and threw a fog over all vigilance. Through the concealed door, across the corridor, and into her room. It may be that the captain had allowed himself other escapades of the same kind besides this one with Grete. On the third night of these carryings-on he found her up and at the table. She pointed him to a chair. "Now we're going to speak plain German," she said (he was versed in this language too). So she said, "Now we're going to speak plain German," and the new resonance between them changed everything with real dominance, worlds away though the captain might have been from grasping the actual import of an expression in which "plain" has the meaning of "blunt" and "German" is used to mean the same as "germane"; perhaps he understood it to mean simply that she wanted to speak that language now. He said nothing but took a seat in the chair. In the room it was rather cool; the heat was shut off, Grete was still completely dressed, and the wide bed, made of light birch wood, was not turned down.

"You will," continued Grete, while her neck lengthened out over the situation and the vitreous humor of her eyes appeared more transparent, "dance with me in the bar tomorrow evening and converse with me as well. Anything else is over with here and now. I propose to keep my doors locked. Your way of just wanting to get something started with the piano player is unfamiliar to me from Vienna and is not at all suitable. If, however, you should wish to visit me later on in Oslo—I'm going back there the day after tomorrow—I have no objection." She then gave him the telephone number of that dentist mentioned earlier. He left without saying anything, even though her whole act was really a bit too much; he might have been justified in saying something to her, looking back, for example, at the way he had reached complete understanding with her a few

days before, near the snow tunnels, where the glittering night and the faintly shimmering rails had been swallowed by velvet while not far away the snow had held the modest pieces of jewelry on its surface, facing the sky—a gold bracelet and pendant with a broken chain and an earring with a little screw, since Grete's ears weren't pierced. However, the captain said nothing; he left and went on to do as he'd been told. Only he never did call Grete on the telephone in Oslo. She thought it possible that he might not have been able to get through because she had forgotten to write down on the slip of paper a kind of index code required at that time for reaching a number in Oslo. In any case, Grete was quite ready to assume that the demigod simply didn't want to be bothered with her any more; that was what she said herself when she told Kajetan von S. (the right address!) her story. That was eight years later. Stangeler, who knew all about this part of Grete's biography and cherished it highly (!), felt that pain for her which she was not capable of feeling because of her ruthless judgment of herself. Jealousy, too (but toward Kajetan, whom he had just come to know and only because such things as these had been told to him).

Even the most impassioned of Grete's affairs were irradiated by a luminosity of consciousness whose nature was like this, and it may be amusing to note that she would often, later on, take René to task for the same kind of inner bearing, an attitude he could never actually have managed (in default of a sufficiently long neck) but which he, on occasion only, affected to be taking so as quickly and heroically to throttle some individual instance of jealousy, doing which was meant as the enactment of a cultic ritual before the altars of Grete Siebenschein's idiosyncrasies. He who thrusts forth and extends a pose for too long, though, will be grasped by it sooner or later, as by a handle, and will be taken at his word, though it is one he has been interminably saying without really meaning. Makes no difference—he loses his balance outwardly and falls behind his word into the tumult of objects. What's more, exactly the same thing can happen to him inwardly. After all, new prosthetic limbs like these will grow in both directions—outside and inside—when strapped on.

As for what pertains to Grete, though, we have to give her her just due in this one respect, anyway—she was precisely the opposite of what's called a flibbertigibbet. But Herr High and Mighty René, over whose head we will see in the further course of events (to use the words of Johann Nestroy) suspiciously long ears sprouting, would appear to have been so immeasurably awed by none other than that very trait. It was from that awe that the rest of the Siebenscheinean components, attractions, and weapons achieved ordination into the fullness of holy orders, as it were.

Amid such constantly renewed counter-maneuvers, of which we have offered a small sample here, Grete's long sojourn in Norway elapsed. She had not only short and abrupt affairs, but also some that lasted longer. She got herself into situations that were not only amusing and dubious (as we have seen), but also some that were better—and boring.

Once in a while she would write to little E. P. His answers were what are called half-pound letters. Later on she even sent him some Norwegian *kroner*, which

made quite an impressive statement in an Austrian currency that even then was beginning to fall rapidly. Coming from his background, he really wouldn't have had any need for them. But this little man, along with the rest of his family, had fallen onto bad times, even though he still lived at home with his parents (Mary K. disapproved of this falling onto bad times, as she did any and every other brand of contrariness). Number 44 Porzellan Gasse in Vienna (it is still standing) is one half of a double structure, made up of two identical houses which together result in a symmetrical edifice—an unnerving architectural style. The architect was named Miserovsky, or were there two brothers Miserovsky? Maybe they were twins; that would be most appropriate, after all. E. P.'s father—one holds only a vague memory of that short, Bohemian-looking, bald-headed gentleman—was an industrialist and owned textile mills in Smidary. (By the way, E. P. had lost both parents before his marriage, which took place in 1924, but he kept the apartment on Porzellan Gasse.) There was also a brother, but people hardly knew him in Vienna, since he kept busy in his father's mills. That is just what E. P. did not want to do. He was secretly on

Once in a while she would write to little E. P. His answers were what are called half-pound letters. Later on she even sent him some Norwegian *kroner*, which made quite an impressive statement in an Austrian currency that even then was beginning to fall rapidly. From his family background, he surely wouldn't have needed them. But this little man had fallen onto bad times, along with the rest of his family, even though he still lived at his parents' home (this falling onto bad times displeased Mary K., as did every other brand of contrariness). Number 44 Porzellan Gasse in Vienna (it is still standing) is one half of a double building, made up of two identical houses which together yield a symmetrical structure, a disquieting architectural style. The architect was named Miserovsky, or were there two brothers Miserovsky? Perhaps they were twins; that would be most appropriate, after all. E. P.'s father—one has only a vague memory of that short, Bohemian-looking, bald-headed gentleman—was an industrialist and owned textile mills in Smidary. (By the way, E. P. had lost both parents before his marriage, which took place in the beginning of 1924, but he had kept the apartment on Porzellan Gasse.) There was also a brother, but people hardly knew him in Vienna, since he kept busy in his father's mills. That is just what E. P. did not want to do. He was secretly on bad terms with both his father and his brother. This enmity and this family problem were a part of him, like his blue eyes, his dark-brownish skin, his hair of the same color, and perhaps as well his extreme allegiance to the Kaiser in the thick of the republic.

When René Stangeler returned home at last from his prisoner-of-war camp in the summer of 1920, E. P. welcomed him back with a telegram fourteen lines long, which produced quite an impression at the country house of Stangeler's parents, where the repatriated soldier had betaken himself without delay. It began with the words, "How splendid is the occasion of your return. . ." From then on, the half-pound letters to Norway always said something about René. That was how the ground was prepared.

And so everything moved quickly when Grete came back in the spring of '21. Between her arrival in Vienna and her joining forces with René Stangeler—which of course, in keeping with the disposition of little E. P., soon entailed his breaking with the new pair—only a few weeks passed by. They were quite sufficient, nonetheless, for Grete Siebenschein to take care of the little one in every way. She secured a job for him with a large banking firm (the same one that was to collapse ten years later, though not through the machinations of a certain Levielle), and it was possible for her to do so because one of the directors was a friend of the Siebenschein family (Director Altschul, to whom Levielle did more dirt than anyone else; his good, heavyset, blond wife, by the way, was a regular patron, as was Frau Irma Siebenschein, of the same café into which Kajetan von S. was much later to drag Sectional Councillor Geyrenhoff from time to time so he could sing the praises of certain corpulent married couples there in a manner that cried out for censorship and that was uncouth in other respects as well). Simultaneously with this job—which finally made E. P. totally independent of his family, for which reason he continued living on Porzellan Gasse without discomfort—Grete indirectly helped the little one to

his wife, too. He met her in the mortgage department, where she worked as a shorthand typist. Her first name was Rosa, and later on, after she was married to E. P. (as of 1924, then), she was called Frau Roserl. They both kept their jobs at the bank, which they would not absolutely have had to do. Come to think of it, though, the factories in Smidary had gone to the brother, and the rest of the inheritance from his parents had not exactly been lucrative for E. P., either, even overlooking the partly depressed value of the estate in the aftermath of the war. The large furnished apartment was pretty much all that was left to him. After the break with Grete Siebenschein, E. P. never came to see Mary K. again, which seems understandable.

He and Stangeler had first spoken with one another in the year 1915, in a low little house at the entrance to a Slovakian village. Coming back from the drill field in the summertime, the men almost always rode past this house with a strong thirst. Nearby was a tavern sign that said "*Bor, Sör, Palinka*" (beer, wine, spirits), and then, farther on, there was a storage yard with a sign announcing concrete pipe and similar materials, which were likewise portrayed in picture form. These two advertising signs affected a man suffering from thirst in a very sharply differentiated way; to be precise, the first one exercised an attraction, but the second, the one with the building materials—which one saw, or else just imagined, lying stacked out back in the blaze of the noonday sun—distinctly repelled. The men in the reserve officers' training school never stopped at this tavern; indeed, they never had any occasion to, for they knew of closer and better places in the village once they had dismounted. E. P. was standing by the window, because his squadron usually came marching back in about a half-hour earlier than the one in which René rode and which was now going by at a walk. Stangeler, who was assigned to the left flank of a row of four, returned the salute and then waved from his saddle. E. P. drew his face into a little smile. The whites of his eyes were not entirely clear; in their almond-shaped pattern was a cloudiness which, oddly enough, made up one of the elements of his attractiveness. His very small, stocky body, though sinewy and muscular, was nonetheless inclined to gain weight, and it would have been the right place for it, we could say. The fat would have been well suited, but not pleasantly so, especially around the throat and the back of the neck. E. P., had he in fact been fat, would have made actual some potential aspect of his physiognomy—not a very winsome one—that was extant somewhere within him. At that time, though, he was far too gaunt and too unhappy, forlorn and in need of support—one could read his feelings in his eyes. His legs were somewhat too short, so that his small stature made him look on horseback more like a jockey than a future Austrian cavalry officer; his appearance once got him into trouble, too, in spite of his eminently sharp horsemanship. A droll originality was inherent in him, as well as a very considerable charm of the same stamp; in him the vanity of short men had taken the form of mordant self-irony. He was a thoroughly good man, an open book, a heart ready to share itself, but he was also not infrequently seized by wild outbursts of passion, which made him look like an enraged squirrel ready to pounce onto its enemy and sink its teeth in. He once

attacked Grete Siebenschein in this way and actually even tried to bite her on her neck—according to her story.

His parents' apartment on Porzellan Gasse, in most respects typical of a "luxury apartment" of the 1880s, contained only one room which was not, like the others, a world without a midpoint, but which, on the contrary, was completely centered around one. It was E. P.'s room; before a backdrop of conventional furnishings it pointed, as if on placards, toward the individual touches and arabesques of a highly specific life. This room, incidentally, would resound in a strangely hollow and lamenting way, like an Aeolian harp, whenever a streetcar went quickly gliding past on the long street, which ran perfectly straight here; that was because one end of a strong transverse cable, from which the conducting wires were suspended, was secured in the corner of the house right near little E. P.'s room. "Whenever I heard this sound later on, in anyone's apartment, anywhere at all," René said to Kajetan von S. in 1927, when he told him all these things, "E. P. would come back to my mind, and so would his room with its garishly colored puppets, his books, his lightly clouded eyes, his intensity, his goodness, and his merits."

This room was large, square, and more on the dark side; as has already been noted, it was on the second floor, because otherwise the suspension equipment for the overhead streetcar wires could not have been there.

In the entryway of this large apartment there was a telephone installed remarkably low; a person had to sit down in order to speak into it. Even so, this arrangement had been made for talking while standing up, of course for someone exceedingly small indeed, namely for E. P.'s mother—that's how tiny she was.

People seldom saw her. Every appearance of his relatives, by the way, produced in E. P. a kind of horror, which he did nothing to conceal. By those few who knew her well, the mother is remembered as a good, delicate, sad creature. It could be that the younger son hated his father because he thought his mother had been made unhappy by him.

Major Meltzer met E. P. and his wife in 1924, in a little restaurant where Meltzer, a bachelor, also used to have dinner now and again; the place was not far from the Miserovsky twins, on the same side of the street, only somewhat farther in toward the city. E. P. and spouse came here pretty regularly on Saturday evenings, for Frau Roserl, who had to be in the mortgage department until one in the afternoon, just like her husband, wanted on this one evening at the end of the week to be exempt from her housewifely duties. The acquaintance with this quiet and modest married couple was struck up by the major—at that time already an official in the office of the general director of the state tobacco administration, and likewise a resident of Porzellan Gasse—out of simple affinity, if not congeniality, and the situation was probably just the same as far as E. P. and his wife were concerned. They had once been seated at the same table by chance, and the rest just happened on its own. One is tempted to say that E. P. was in general inclined toward inclination, even before any specific object presented itself. Not long after their first meeting—some four or

six weeks had passed in the meantime—E. P. asked his wife to invite the major for Sunday dinner. And this contact here in private surroundings—there remained even yet the large dining room with the palatial oak sideboard—worked out so well that a continuing association was established. The little man had possibly, as he imagined, found for the first time in Meltzer, six years after the war and the undoing of the Habsburg monarchy, the constituent parts, all correctly assembled, of that which he had always pictured under the heading of "Royal and Imperial Officer"; indeed, perhaps, without ever having encountered in outside reality, during the time of his own military service, any full and complete counterpart of his inner image (with a single exception, that of Rifle Captain Sch., whom he in fact spoke about on occasion, and by no means infrequently). In this way, then, a concept survived the demise of the thing itself and achieved concretion for E. P. six years after that demise. Whenever something living inside of us suddenly approaches us from the outside, we are always highly gratified (that is true even in unpleasant cases as well, at least for a split second).

Not until a conversation that took place—or rather, that began and would be continued at greater length some time in the future—on August 22, 1925 (a Saturday), at the lower end of the Strudlhof Steps, did the major discover that E. P. had known René von Stangler. (The "Strudlhof Steps" in Vienna are a stairway structure connecting Boltzmann Gasse—not named after the great mathematician until the republic of 1918—with Liechtenstein Strasse and constituting the middle of this part of Strudlhof Gasse.) It was only then, one could well say, that René began to become interesting to the major, and so the images that Meltzer had preserved in his memory of the prep-school boy and his parents' home were superimposed with a kind of linkage that wanted to establish itself between him and the now adult (at least as years go) René. The two images permeated one another at the same time. E. P. and Meltzer did a great deal of talking about René on that evening of August 22, 1925, and that was the very source from which stemmed a partly mistaken notion of the Major's, one to which he was subsequently to hold fast because it owed its existence to a very direct impression.

Specifically, Meltzer believed that René had exercised an excessively dominant influence over the little man, the traces of which had continued operating quite perceptibly after the break between the two. And "perceptibly" may be just the right word, since it lay on the surface—in ways of expression, turns of phrase, even outright quotations. But what E. P. had, for his part, left behind in Stangler was something of a more enduring kind—his way of being. It penetrated deep into René, deeper even than the Aeolian tone in the corner room when the streetcar would whiz by below. The evening-like smokiness in the being of this little man, the cloudiness of the almond-shaped eye, right behind which the heart seemed to take up its space so as to penetrate the veil with a ray of extraordinary warmth. This evening aura, suited to winter evenings. "I'll come around dusk," he had always said to Grete, never stating a definite hour. E. P. had lived through only a single winter with Stangler after the war, though, the winter of 1920-1921. Grete came home from Norway in May, and

then everything was soon at an end, consisting of nothing but *faits accomplis* that no longer tolerated any dusk among them but that stepped into the light of day in hexagonal, cubic, or some other crystallized form ("crystallized race of men," says Mephistopheles at some point). These were influences, then, that went deeper than turns of phrase. The tone, the soundless Aeolian one, not the audible one. The glance.

And besides, there were physically identifiable remnants and traces as well—it's simply a matter of exploring for them! All right, then, let's do some exploring.

It was René Stangeler's habit not to wear suspenders any more. Not since those days. Let this one example suffice for them all—surely it's trivial and handy enough. We leave traces

of ourselves on one another. They don't always have to be scars from saber duels. Since those days, then, he no longer owned any (René—suspenders). There follows the not very intricate conclusion that E. P. possessed more chic than the other (René), more innate basic style, stronger elemental health, so to speak, and a deeper, less easily threatened sense of well-being (all his unhappiness notwithstanding). René simply imitated his doing without suspenders and never wore them again, neither with evening dress nor with the regional outfit featuring leather pants (even though they're supposed to be part of it!); he never so much as owned any again, in fact. The ones he owned at the time, he threw out—that was an action with a purpose, by which he meant to improve himself and build himself up. He threw the suspenders out. He couldn't just leave them hanging in his wardrobe, somewhere off in a corner (all this according to Kajetan von S., to whom it was expressly told).

It's an influence, no doubt about it, or even an encroachment, a permanent groove in the wax disk, to wean someone away from wearing suspenders. If Stangeler took off his suit jacket ten years later, he found traces of E. P. on his upper body—not a scar from a saber cut (nor a scar from a bite, either), but his suspenders were missing. That fact brought with it a whole series of changes in his dress and habits: he was more likely to remove his jacket than he had been earlier (and yet never again presented himself before a woman in his shirtsleeves and suspenders); he began omitting a vest and from then on very rarely ever wore one at all; he had his trousers made with the waist cut near the hip and with buckles at the sides. This is only a rough idea of what one can deduce, using simple common sense, from a man's ceasing to wear suspenders. No doubt there are also changes in the way he carries his upper body, in the way he breathes; and then there are further changes yet, some barely discernible as hairline strokes, as grooves in the disk, some that have already dissipated along the nerve paths and become anonymous, changes in one's outlook on life—without suspenders.

It would have been difficult to try explaining and imparting to Major Meltzer the comparatively epoch-making nature of such an influence. He'd never worn them, after all (suspenders); he'd always worn a plain belt instead. People have to go through every experience for themselves, or else they don't understand a thing.

But to make a long story short—along with deleting suspenders went a kind of attitude, which E. P. thereby roused from its latent to its manifest phase in René back then.

It seems quite conceivable that René's bearing, when he was lounging against the base of the street clock in front of Franz Josef Station, might have been different in some way without that E. P.-esque influence. And perhaps he would have been less displeasing to Mary K. At any rate, he was already out of the habit by that time.

What do you wear on a boating party? Mary asked herself after lunch, which her faithful Marie had, as it were, tailored for her with care today, since just this once the menu did not need to consider the man of the house or the larger appetite of the children. Accordingly, there was less, but it was choice—a cup of bouillon, a morsel of fresh goose liver broiled, a sweetbread. With her coffee Mary drank a small glass of Malaga—she had had just Giesshübler to drink with her lunch—and she smoked a cigarette, her only one all day, incidentally, afterwards. So what do you wear on a boating party?

She blew smoke onto the tray and laughed, and yet she was forced to realize that getting involved in a situation means having to devote oneself to all its details as well, which demands a kind of humility, one could almost say, that was oftentimes anything but the angel on one's shoulder when the decision was being made in favor of the situation as contemplated. In Mary's case, irony was able to hold itself in place above the situation, though, by means of an unexpected loophole, one that permitted her to deny this matter any acquiescence at all (as though she'd actually involved herself anyway), but to keep rolling it in front of her like a ball instead—or, for those who want to be so disagreeably hairsplitting about it—to keep shoving it forward; after all, a glimpse at any summer spent in Millstatt or Pörschach was enough to make it clear that one had to wear white for an outing on the water, just as one could never set foot on a sailboat in anything but tennis shoes.

It wasn't very long before Mary was standing ready in the entryway, enveloped in the upholding cloud of her well-tended power, so to speak, and in a new pea jacket, white, over a tennis shirt, which became her outstandingly. Then she went down the staircase, with its relatively slender newel, walking around and around the built-in elevator, carrying her exquisiteness through the high, echoing gateway and past the porter's lodge (this building, like so many in Vienna, dates from the Gilded Age, as it is called, and its builder and original title-holder, Herr Doro Stein—a prominent owner of racing stables, by the way—had placed considerable value on the entrance for his carriage and a certain amount of representation through sonority); passing the concierge, then, who was looking out and waving, Mary stepped up to the little door in the large gate, pushed it open—the automatic doorcatch was sticking a little—and was now standing out on the sidewalk amazed, in the midst of a genuine summer day, which had meantime achieved perfection outside here, despite the waning season, and which instantly folded Mary in its embrace.

The square in front of the train station for Bohemia, the Franz Josef Station in Vienna, had even then grown over time to be a kind of converging place for the streetcars (similar to the cathedral square in Milan), with all the different lines arriving from every direction—what a hubbub of trolley cars moving every which way, brakes squealing and bells clanging, suddenly turning off into side streets or whizzing away, straight ahead and across the bridge. Mary stood on the shore of this sea of traffic, in which the red and white streetcars were among the lowlier vehicles and the trucks in such profusion the most formidable, while threading their way through them all was an endless chain of taxis pulling up to the departure end of the rather modest and dated station building or moving out from behind the arrival end—Mary stood on the shore, and the summer day holding her in its embrace had not so much enchanted her as, on the contrary, bemused her somewhat and made her distrustful, in a way. She stood on the edge of the sidewalk, as wide as a boulevard here; she stood there like a person standing at the edge of a swimming pool but not really feeling today any urge to take the usual headlong plunge.

The stop at which she would have had to board the streetcar for Nussdorf could only be reached in those days by crossing the square, and leftwards on a diagonal at that, where a traffic island afforded rest and safety. A trolley with a second car had just gone around, and now, ringing its bell with a short yelping sound unquestionably directed at Mary, it pivoted on its wide red front and gathered speed as it turned onto long and straight Porzellan Gasse, where it would go whizzing past the Miserovsky twins and produce Aeolian sounds in one particular room. Little E. P. wasn't at home, though, not at that hour. He was sitting in the accounting department at the bank, completely engrossed in deliberations about whether to get married or not. His future wife was sitting in the next room. She was wearing a dark red blouse and was just now working at an adding machine with that measured degree of attention peculiar to all women who work in offices—not too much, a bit restrained to keep from getting totally drained, but still attentive enough to avoid errors and their ensuing trouble, including a pointed request to do the whole job over. Down below, on Teinfalt Strasse, a horn beeped. The summer day, which had folded Mary in its embrace at her gateway, was taken to cognizance by both E. P. and his future wife at just about the same time through glances out their windows. They thought about the Vienna Woods. E. P. looked out somewhat slant-wise, and the yellow in the whites of his eyes intensified the melancholy of that face.

Mary stepped back onto the sidewalk, from which she had just started across. She balked inwardly, one might say. She looked out at the ceaseless, bewildering movement of vehicles driving and people walking, which filled every inch of the broad square, as if at some fairly brazen piece of audacity; she didn't want any part of it, and nobody could make her. With no argument at all—which, given a personality like Mary's, would at once have brought a counterargument in its wake and hence a whole polemic—she turned around slowly and strolled back along the sidewalk the way she had come, walking past her own gateway; continuing across the bridge, she turned right along the Canal and, pleased like someone who has found a lost or misplaced object, was full of

contentment as she made her way toward the Augarten. During no step of this entire operation would her body have needed its head attached; that part remained anonymous and thus was able to steer Mary along with the best of success.

The odor of fruit drifted toward her, coming from the vending stands that had spread out all around here, as they do everywhere in Vienna about this time of year, flooding the city with peaches, pears, and grapes, so that everybody winds up feeling more or less compelled to walk around carrying a little paper bag in their hand, whether they want to or not, wherever they go. Mary stopped now, too, and—not before tasting a little sample held out to her—bought some white pears and some muscatel grapes. Walking along, Mary began to eat some of the grapes, for it was deserted here along the canal and so she wasn't self-conscious; her fingers reached gingerly into the bag. She felt superior in some way. Perhaps, on the deepest level, superior to Lieutenant Meltzer, and for the first time.

Soon Mary turned into the park; it stretched roughly along a straight line in the sun and the calm of the wind, so one might have thought it was warmer here than out on the street. Augarten Palace stood in the background, flat like stage scenery and somewhat blinding under the blue sky. She presently caught sight of her husband dashing up to the net on the sand surface of one of the courts. Apparently it was a hard-driving game; on the other side of the net was Herr von Semski. Mary grew irritated, but very slightly and only for a second—without her head attached, so to speak, organic irritation—at Oscar, who had gone to his game all rested and unflustered after a short afternoon nap in the office, while she. . .she'd been through such difficulties (and now she thought of the teapot dangling from her neck). What's more, he had to be playing Semski, where he could do nothing but lose. Negria represented a completely different class of player.

Meanwhile, Mary had reached the courts. Semski, a short man with a head somewhat too large for his height, was sweating heavily as he smashed the ball time after time hard over the net, but as good as his stroke was, including his backhand, he didn't understand how to place the ball with the same degree of skill; being a diplomat, he really should have been able to do that better. In general, Oscar was holding his own—all that practice this summer had sharpened his ability, for they'd played incessantly in Millstatt, too—and so Herr von Semski could not force his opponent down to defeat except through chipping away little by little, as it were (some time back the same strategy had worked well against Negria, incidentally). During a break, Oscar waved to his wife with his left arm raised and cried, "Mitzi, Mitzi" (that's what he called her). Mary went into the locker room to take her racket out of its press.

Embassy Councillor Semski was a Pole who spoke the Viennese German current in the high society of those days. The son of a Polish nobleman, his father had been on the staff of the diplomatic corps in the time of the empire, and the son, whose name was Stephan, had likewise entered the corps as a young man, starting out, of course, in the Foreign Ministry on Ballhaus Platz after the usual period of studying law—without a doctor's degree, which is how

they did it then—and the usual one-year course in "international law" and other such things, which we smile to think about today. So this Semski was really a Viennese whose Polishness had gotten lost somewhere in parts unknown; he remained versed in the language, however, from periods of his childhood spent with relatives at their estates in Galicia and from subsequent visits there. At any rate, in view of how tiny Austria had become after the collapse of the empire in the year 1918, Herr Stephan von Semski was better able to advance his career in the newly reestablished independent nation of Poland, which was what then induced him to opt for that country. He stayed for several years at the ministry in Warsaw and finally found a way of landing in Vienna, on Allee Gasse—now called Argentinier Strasse—in the building that houses the Polish embassy, with its wide entrance, its imposing staircase in dark wood, and its garden, not having much width along the side but running deep toward the back.

One might ask what this gentleman thought he was doing by belonging to a thoroughly middleclass club, and the question is rather awkward for the narrator, since it forces him to give a stupid answer ("*Cherchez la femme*"). In a word, our Semski had a bone to gnaw on here, and that's why he'd taken membership in the Augarten Tennis Club.

Semski was a bachelor. The root causes (he was no longer conscious, or was barely conscious, of them) lay back in the time before the First World War, that is before 1914. There'd been a scandal in connection with a Fräulein Ingrid Schmeller, whom Herr von Semski then hadn't been able to marry—no matter how much he wanted to!—because he'd been kicked out by old man Schmeller. I'm saying "a scandal" because something comes up in the story about a bathroom, namely the one in the Schmellers' house. During a fairly large social gathering one evening, a garden party late in the summer, a certain Fräulein Pastré came walking into this room at exactly the wrong moment (because it was on purpose), even though Asta von Stangler—the youngest sister, olive-skinned, of our friend René—had posted herself as a sentry; however, she wasn't familiar enough with the layout of the Schmeller house, and besides, the arrangement of the rooms on this floor, the one above the rooms used for entertaining, was entirely different, so little Fräulein Pastré was able—evasively and invasively, one could say—to reach the door, which no one would quite have dared to lock, after all.

Neither the frivolous (unconscionably simplifying) nor the soulful (unconscionably magnifying) standards and explanations pertain; instead, both the frivolous and the soulful pertain, and both at the same time, too. It hadn't been some dashing adventure of a cavalier, but objectively, that's what it was after all, and it could just as well be called *mesquin*. A kiss at the wrong time, nothing more. Herr von Semski paid for it, though, paid for not having been able to found his life's happiness on the bedrock of patience, for allowing rapture to steal that alert readiness to capture which is appropriate and needful not just in the lower regions of life but which is also required by the likes of a field commander or an artist for consorting with his daimon. Is Eros, a god, supposed to be content with less refined manners?

Mary came out of the locker room with her racket. The game between Semski and Oscar was still going on. Mary stood at the edge of the court, watching with irritation. At the same time, she felt that this irritation had a deeper cause than she herself was capable of grasping; it came gushing out of her like water out of a fountain. What's the sense of playing this way? Sports are meant to be a pleasure, whereas the veins were bulging out of Oscar's forehead. Semski had to be under a great strain, too, by the way; his large head was completely soaked. And so those two men went scurrying about on the sand, as Homer might say in summary. They came over for Mary now, since she was going to play doubles. She was in for some surprises. On the opposing side was a married couple of about her age, and for her partner she had a Frau Sandroch, ash-blond, fortyish, an ethnic German from Russia or some such place, an elegant, dissipated-looking woman who always seemed to have something of a dry and somehow dusty effect about her. This Frau Sandroch (no one had ever seen a Herr Sandroch at the club) was a far better player than any of the other three persons on the court. And today, furthermore, Mary had arms made of glass, the joints of which felt as if they were made of wood. Even before the game started, she wanted just suddenly to walk back off the court. She was convinced that she wouldn't be able to hit the simplest serve. It might have been better that way, too, for she struggled so! The Sandroch woman played in silence, setting the pace in a casual, very nonchalant style; she played her opponent right into the ground. She excused herself and left after twenty minutes, and Oscar, who'd meanwhile been enjoying a break, came back in to take her place—whereupon Mary's irritation grew helpless. The path was barred that could have directed this irritation toward Frau Sandroch; after all, she'd asked right from the beginning to be allowed to play, even though she had only a little time and would have to leave the court in the middle of the game—so she and Oscar, then, must have made arrangements for him to take her place. Mary knew all that. She also knew that Oscar would not overexert himself in this situation. And so it was, in fact. As much as possible, he left every ball to her—and she missed every one.

After Frau Sandroch left, then, the K. couple soon started falling behind, which Mary thought was unnecessary.

She began pushing herself, making a hard job of it. It didn't help much. Nor did it exactly help when, after a short time, she saw Frau Sandroch—who must have really rushed through her shower!—walking past in the background with Herr von Semski in front of some close-mown, practically gray plots of grass that had a dry and almost dusty look, oppressed as they were by the sunlight of the advancing afternoon. Frau Sandroch was wearing a jacket that shone out in brilliant electric blue, and Semski had on a summer suit with hat and walking stick. They ambled along slowly before the open prospect; in the background could be seen just a few rows of trees and some houses in the adjoining section of the city, but quite indistinctly, only in outline. This couple struck Mary like something introducing itself, as it were (promenade in its literal meaning)—like a moving set, a stage, a play. And just what might they have in mind right now? Joining forces, anyway, that much was certain. Perhaps they were going to get a

bite to eat together. Mary stepped suddenly into the picture she'd made up and began walking around inside it in place of Frau Sandroch; to a certain degree, a demand on her part was insisting that she act this way, at least today. She could have had all that.

"You've got to help me out!" she called in an aside to Oscar. "All right, Mitzi," Oscar said smiling. It was just now his turn to serve. He started off strong and continued that way, placed the ball, ran up toward the net, and their score began to improve. But then he slacked off again, and Mary, for her part, was really worthless today, a bumbling walk-on. To all the other participants and observers, Oscar's abruptly animated game had formed a surprising and perhaps even embarrassing contrast with his behavior during the rest of the set.

The K.s were beaten, of course; the other couple won hands down, but not hearts up, so to speak. Mary hurried off to the locker room at once, not thinking even remotely of playing again today. In fact, it seemed to her at the moment that she would soon give up playing altogether at this rate. She crawled under the shower, and then she took a fresh sport shirt out of her locker. While she was putting her wrist watch back on—for some reason the little clasp was resisting and not wanting to snap shut—she grew seriously irritated at her husband. When she came back out, he had already changed and was standing in his summer suit by the benches near the courts, a briefcase under his arm and his soft, lightweight Borsalino hat pushed back on his head. Mary cast a backward glance across the park; Semski and the Sandroch woman had vanished. "Mitzi, we've been trounced, annihi lated, slaughtered; we've disgraced ourselves," cried Oscar gleefully when he spotted his wife. The way he spoke these words, he was virtually flaunting how narrow the margin of Semski's victory over him had been today, at least as Mary saw it. "It didn't have to be like that," she said, somewhat at a loss, and then, "all I need now is for you to say it's my fault." "Not at all," said the male partner of the married couple they'd played—he was an attorney very well known in Vienna at that time—"no one would dream of maintaining any such thing." "Why not? I'll maintain it flat out," Oscar said. "That's outrageous, and you know it," Mary cried, the charmingly pretty, slender bridge of her nose now looking as if it were being shattered by small flashes of lightning; "you could have given that game a completely different turn any time you wanted!" "You did play below your strength, Herr K., there's no doubting that," said the lawyer soothingly, uneasy at seeing what appeared to be a marital *causa* developing here. "I was just tired," Oscar replied off-handedly.

"But then you suddenly knew what to do after all!" Mary cried out in a thoroughly committed tone of voice that could not but catch the attention even of people who knew nothing at all about this game and who hadn't witnessed a minute of it. "Either you play or you don't play; but to go against weaker players with such condescension, deigning to take a few strokes now and again, and then make it so obvious. . ."

Frau Adler (that was the name of the attorney who had played against the K.s with his wife) had joined them in the meantime, and so Mary was practicing a kind of demagoguery, looking for adherents in the war against Oscar, even if

her undisguised recruitment (of her own person as well, to be sure) from among the weaker players would not be demagogically very advantageous to her. You should have seen Oscar K., though—he seemed to have the feeling that today was some kind of real red-letter day, and those disparate facial features of his achieved nothing less than unity through a smile flashed while getting in another dig as part of the effort to continue the dispute with his wife. "If I'd kept taking strokes away from you, that wouldn't have been right, either." "Of course not," she flared up, "but you might have done a better job of taking care of your own!"

"Mitzi," he said, "I didn't do a thing except follow your lead—that's what I do all the time anyway. You know that."

This heated exchange of words had taken Mary to a place where she did not want to go; it gushed out of her like water out of a fountain, or rather, this bickering wriggled its way out of her like doves and rabbits and guinea pigs out of a magician's top hat—and already those little beasties were scuttling all over the place; all kinds of guinea pigs had come popping out!

But Oscar, who now took Mary's arm so affectionately and said good-bye to the group by smiling and waving backwards to them at the same time, was holding out to her a large piece of paper or a cloth or a container into which every one of these accursed, swarming creatures could be made to disappear again—all squared away and all just a joke. Now he was really and truly giving the game a completely different turn! She was suddenly full of gratitude and allowed herself in her innermost being to sink into his sheltering arms while she walked away leaning on him and snuggling up to him. Yes, some pointed little flame inside her was leaping up past the usual boundary of their old joke; she planted a quick kiss on her husband's cheek as they walked along. Finally they both turned once again, laughing, and waved to the people standing by the courts, who waved a farewell back. Then Oscar and Mary turned off behind a group of trees and a pavilion. So there they went; or no, for they soon came to a standstill and embraced, here where it was secluded. They pressed closer and kissed passionately, as if they wanted to send one another into a daze. There's something that fits in right here and therefore has to be told—Mary, according to her own statement, was keeping two thoughts fast in her mind during this scene: the first was that she was sorry she was wearing only that white pea jacket instead of some sweater or coat in a bright color; and the second was that she was thinking back to the year 1910 and picturing the newly opened Strudlhof Steps in the Alsergrund district of Vienna, where her husband, whom she'd married such a short time before, had kissed her all of a sudden on a warm evening in autumn when it smelled of the leaves lying on the stone stairs.

Doctor Negria, meanwhile, had become trapped inside a double-edged barricade, as an officer of the Royal and Imperial Austrian General Staff once expressed it in reference to a similar situation. The cause was an explosion that had just taken place in the large café on Nussdorf Platz, where he was waiting for Mary. It was totally silent and totally personal, happening to Negria alone. So now you've either guessed or you haven't—a woman was sitting there, a

woman who, as she sat there, looked to Negria like a gateway standing open to the fulfillment of all his wishes.

Now he began to fear that this gateway might be slammed shut at any moment, be it that the focus of his rapidly awakening instinct for a breakthrough would not remain sitting alone much longer (even the appearance of a female friend would have foiled his campaign, his intervention, and it was possible, or even highly probable, that in this café she would indeed be expecting a female friend, frequented as it was by ladies and by families), or be it that Mary's arrival and appearance would occur right at the time arranged. He still had fifteen minutes. And nothing on the face of the earth could keep a man like Negria from moving into action. Yes indeed, things had to be done without delay, and so they were done.

Some Eros in a happy mood, whom we might picture as rosy-cheeked and plumpish in the Baroque style (almost like a Gambrinus, then, and armed, though not with the classic bow and quiver, but perhaps with a cannon instead, specifically the type they use for shooting at sparrows)—some celestial little rascal along these lines appeared to be running the show here and steering everything from the very start toward the end result. To begin with, the two tables were standing close together, favorably situated and screened by a corner from the rest of the spacious room; above all, though, a fluid contact had been made at once, the only kind that really counts. She was paging through some fashion magazines. Negria was paging too. By this time Mary was a full ten minutes late, and the silent preludes had progressed so far that Negria—making sure to be seen doing this—was able to scrawl a few lines onto one of his calling cards, slip it into a newspaper, and then exchange it for one that was lying there on the table where his new prospect was sitting, for which he received, in answer to his curt little bow, an equally formal consent (the patrons of any café in Vienna pester one another unrelentingly for the different newspapers and magazines). He watched her slowly pick up the paper after a few moments and skim the card; now the mechanism would have to catch. And it did. She looked up, squarely meeting Doctor Negria's waiting, submissive glance, and gave a scarcely noticeable nod of her head in acceptance.

Our pediatrician friend was no bungler, after all, and he was conservative about using the methods he had mastered through a technique practiced to such a high degree of smoothness. As a sample, here is what the card said:

Boris Nicolaus Negria, M.D., Assisting Physician at Pediatric Clinic #2. .

.Please, please, please, dear lady, before anything else, forgive me for being so forward, that's not how I mean what I'm doing now. . . People keep walking past one another in life, never seeing one another ever again—right now I'm being bold enough to try and prevent that for once. If your time at the moment should happen to be as free as mine, I entreat you to grant me the privilege of taking a short walk with you outside here on this beautiful late-summer day; I'll explain everything. . .May I wait for you outside on the

square? I'm going to take a chance and try it. With a kiss of the hand and very truly yours, Boris Negria.

He was a remarkably good-looking and elegant fellow, besides; let's not forget that.

Mary could have walked in at any moment while all this was going on. Negria forgot about her altogether during his campaign, though, so taken up was he by his breakthrough tactics and his interventionism. Only when he was outside on the sunlit square did he start recalculating the danger (which is what it had now turned into for him) from that quarter. Mary had exceeded her time by twenty-seven minutes (how precise was the reckoning against her now!). She had to be coming on the streetcar; one had just pulled up here and let out passengers. There were at least five minutes until the next car. Moreover, Eros-Gambrinus was running the show, and he cut short the torment. Just then—while Negria was growing happily aware that he was totally in the right and, so to say, fully covered as far as Mary was concerned (she really couldn't leave him waiting for more than half an hour; no sir, there was no such thing with him)—just then the glass door swung open with a flash and the woman of his dreams appeared and began walking toward him in a relaxed and casual manner. The streets on the other side of the square met at an acute angle, and there was Negria, lifting his hat with a flourish and greeting the young woman like an old acquaintance. But then he took good care to steer her (old boatman that he was) away from there, so they walked down to the river, toward the docking places.

E. P. and his future wife had good luck that afternoon in being able to escape from the office early. The department head had quietly sent word around in a friendly spirit that the staff would not have to sit waiting till the end of the day, since the necessary work was already finished (and his managing director had gone off around noon, anyway). So then the employees began leaving one by one.

E. P. waited for Roserl in a bakery there on Schotten Gasse; they thought they would quickly have some coffee and then take a ride out among the green trees. Everything was magnificently awash in floods of sunlight pouring through the streets from heavy mists of gold in the west.

Here she came. He pressed the sight of her inside himself, as a person holds something close to the heart or presses a bandage spread with soothing ointment onto a wound. That was how he felt. On the other hand, he'd never bitten Roserl on her neck. And he'd never lost a friend on her account. He had no rivals for her.

E. P. had many wounds, "pretraumatic" ones, so to speak, and thus constitutional.

Had there been no sword to inflict wounds on him, some would have opened up on his body by themselves. But of swords there were in the not unalluring fields of his life almost as many as pointed blades of grass in a meadow.

From Nussdorf they went further upstream, toward Kahlenbergdorf, where they would climb a steep, short path to reach the mountaintop and the vanishing

sunlight again. Near the Kuchelau, a very elegantly dressed couple crossed their path, evidently just coming from a *Heurigen* tavern—as though it were a kind of insigne, they were carrying wine between them in a large straw-covered bottle (those demijohns are uncommon in Vienna, or at least not customary). They were conspicuous in the way they were both holding this basket or casket and swinging it to and fro. Their loud laughter could be heard from far off, and were they perhaps actually having a little tussle for the wine? At any rate, these two people were extremely carefree and exuberant, enjoying themselves to the heights, one might say, but in a sense taking up the whole width of the empty road anyway. Our more idyllically resigned couple simply had to turn, as if under compulsion, and look back after they had passed; they really had no choice. Then they saw that an embarkation was in progress. The bottle of wine was just about to be stowed somewhere off to the rear when the captain, bent over the quarter-deck of his trim craft, seemed to change his mind; he rummaged around under the helmsman's bench and finally fetched out two sparkling wineglasses from some compartment or other—these were for the stirrup cup, for that one to travel on, a good part of which missed its mark and went into the water, an offering to the river god or to Neptune, for that matter, since the Danube does eventually flow into the Black Sea.

The shadows of the mountains began cutting sharply across the sunlit swell of the river's wide stream. The boat suddenly picked up speed, propelled into the current by a few powerful strokes of the oars, and soon it turned into a spot of color drifting quickly away.

Negria kept to the left above Nussdorf, bearing away from the Danube Canal and keeping to the mainstream; this trip took him far away, then, from the taxi stand near Mary K.'s apartment and far away, too, from the Miserovsky twins on Porzellan Gasse. E. P.'s room stood calm in a stillness like furniture, in the deep wisdom of silent objects, and unheard went the Aeolian song of the transverse cable when the streetcar whizzed by below. The nice little silly things in this room—signs and labels all over the place, like the one on the bookcase that said "Bookcase," the same on a little table, another one on the armoire (to avoid mix-ups); mounted on the wall was an emergency brake that E. P. had taken during the war from the ruins of a railroad car, and under it was a notice: "Pull Down Handle In Case Of Danger. Penalty For Misuse."—all these nice little silly things, including a large number of puppets, had a share in this furniture-like stillness, this silent wisdom, and they were now showing a completely different face from the one they were actually meant to. They lost all their jocular names. They stood here in the light of the waning afternoon, and all were somber at the core; true, they showed color and contour, but the edges once honed for them had dulled, the points once whetted now fallen off.

The suburbs of Vienna that lay along the Danube unfolded in front of the boat like a folio being opened. On the left still the silver-gray foam of the treetops in the Au Woods after the empty stretches of grass-covered meadow opposite Nussdorf, but also streets, houses, and factories already coming down toward the river, just as on the other bank, where the city is. A train of barges with monotonously grinding machines was going slowly upriver, and over on the

right, where the Prater ends, by Kaisermühlen, many large black ships were lying along the bank.

The boat skimmed along quickly and calmly. Negria only had to play a little with the oars. His partner was sitting astern, on the helmsman's bench, and leaning far back in the seat, which was like a small easy chair, without securing a life jacket or even bothering to put one on. The boat, the man, his familiarity with the river—all these were immediately prepossessing.

Below the docks, and well before the winter harbor and the Prater Point, as it is known, Negria guided his craft, without using the rudder, more and more toward the right and finally over against the bank, where a convenient landing stage beckoned. People called to him (he was known here, obviously, since they were calling him "Doctor") and helped his lady up onto the landing.

In this section of Vienna there has always been a particular kind of small tavern that makes its living from contraband Greek wine, the cleverness of its Hungarian cook, the excellence of its fish dishes, and the warm recommendations passed along by Serbian, Rumanian, Hungarian, and Austrian sailors and mates.

That's where she was sitting now, little Fräulein Pastré, now Frau Schlinger and yes, divorced again. It can safely be said of her that she did not do the right thing. What was more, she belonged to that very numerous group of Viennese women in whose lives Dragoon Captain von Eulendorf had been a factor, and that didn't do a one of them any good, which was why even Kajetan then often used to call his old sidekick "Buffoon Yappin'."

That's where she was sitting now, and she was feeling a strong urge to pour her heart out to Negria; it might have come from the tipping of the moment and the attraction of novel surroundings. She would have been glad to tell him everything, absolutely everything, starting back when she couldn't land her Semski, really a good many years ago by now, and coming up to this very morning, when she had run into Ingrid Schmeller, now styling herself Frau von Budau, on the Graben, near the corner

of Stephans Platz, by the bookstore, whereupon, as always since those times of long ago, both ladies had walked past each other with no acknowledgment.

It had been in the year 1910, and not, as Mary wrongly recalled, 1908, that Lieutenant Meltzer left Ischl and saw her for the last time; so it had been scarcely three months before her wedding. Through 1908, after all, the affairs of the monarchy were at such an extremely critical point in the southwest—in Vienna, marching battalions of the Royal and Imperial Fourth Infantry Regiment, the *Hochund Deutschmeister* Regiment, were already being entrained—that no officer in any company of the Twenty-Second Regiment, stationed at the fortified post near Trnovo in Bosnia, would have been authorized a leave to Vienna

or Ischl. Questions like this are basically matters of complete indifference to women, though. They will never take seriously, deeply seriously, the assorted imprisonments and prisons that men lock one another into or let themselves get locked into, and will thus never accept, really accept, down deep in their hearts,

any explanation based on such arguments for behavior like being late or not showing up at all.

What was happening to Lieutenant Meltzer for the first time in his life was that he had disengaged from something and yet was still carrying it around like a stone. He was surprised, even frightened, at feeling the burden of it—no trifle, either—as he rode along the Traunsee on a beautiful summer morning and then stepped across the platform at Attnang-Puchheim to wait for the express train to Vienna. For him, this occurrence was like a disease hitherto entirely unknown but now suddenly attacking him, and with nothing short of savage virulence at that. The situation in Ischl, which Meltzer had drawn out and dragged out to the very last possible moment, meaning until the end of his leave time, had finally been decided by his simply failing to propose and his avoiding a discussion with Mary's father, Herr Allern.

The father was probably just as glad, for it was clear that Meltzer would have had to quit the service if things had turned out the other way, and what kinds of requirements would have cropped up *in spe* for the father-in-law then? Find him a job somewhere, to start with, but the boy hadn't learned to do anything else, and he didn't seem to be exactly the brightest light, either. Herr Allern had probably been relieved to see Meltzer go (and had also had breakfast with him at the café before his departure, incidentally).

Our lieutenant's lingering in Ischl had been a totally hopeless cause from the beginning, however, a campaign of watching and waiting in the face of an impossibility. His prison wall ran right straight down through the middle of himself, so to speak, and it barred him from setting foot onto the terrain of his own

soul, which lay before him in plain view. Opening a breach in that wall would have seemed to him an act of out-and-out self-destruction, and it is not our place, in consideration of his personality back then and the ideas that occupied it, to assert the exact contrary, namely self-liberation. Biologically, Lieutenant Meltzer's condition was grave. He may have sensed it as the cause of the weight on his spirit. No, this leave had not brought rest and recuperation.

That was what he was thinking just as the express to Vienna came roaring in. Now there was no going back. This is how people were shifted around. By powerful forces. On and off it would occur to Meltzer that he hadn't worn a uniform in weeks. This sport suit he had on now and other nice things. In Vienna he'd check in at the Belvedere Hotel near the South Station, change clothes, and take the rest of his luggage. The train for Zagreb leaves in the evening, so there would still be time to eat at Schneider's (this was the proprietor of the restaurant in the South Station, really renowned in Vienna at that time). Meltzer found an empty second-class compartment. Pressing a gulden into the conductor's hand, he said, "Make sure I'm left alone." In those days, it was still possible to ease life's burdens in many little ways through a mild form of corruption kept within proper bounds, humane and not without dignity, we could almost say. Just now, though, there was no need for the gulden, as the train stayed half empty.

In a better novel, the thoughts of the solitary traveler during his journey to Vienna would now be imparted, if necessary as pilfered or as reeled in, gasping and spluttering, from the character being presented. Such a thing is truly impossible with Meltzer, though; he never had the ghost of a thought, not now, not later, not even as a major. As far as we know, the first time he ever thought anything came on one particular occasion in his life, and then only at a very crucial and very far advanced phase—we will find out more about it later. Once he finally did it, he did it all the way; he didn't use up his gunpowder early on small sprightlinesses and artfulnesses.

First Meltzer rolled himself a cigarette, holding it over the handsome old silver tobacco case that had come to him from his late father, who had been in the service of an imperial personage for nearly two decades as an expert in equestrian matters, since he had been a cavalryman. Then he opened the newspaper he had bought in Attnang-Puchheim, but since there was nothing in it, he took out of his elegant traveling case—a book. He reached for a book.

A surprising development, no doubt. It's one that over the last few days had been completed by Meltzer again and again, but only to the extent of reaching for the book—he never succeeded in getting any further, not with this book. He just kept getting stuck. Mary Allern had given it to him, a good while ago now, not long after they'd met. Right at the beginning was a passage that Meltzer had recently stumbled over again:

My environment had its dangers wherever I was, and, regarding this point, every place, even now in the twentieth century, is a forest. We must distinguish between two kinds of dangers. The first are the ones constantly in motion, the "narrative" dangers, if we may put it that way; the forces of environment and of conditioning, of deeply ingrained laxity that robs hours from each day and is soon demanding payment of these stolen goods, this fraudulently obtained property, as a levy and a tribute. This laxity, in turn, has some kind of connection—it carries us past the switches and the crossing places of bad conscience and past all the crowded tracks busy carrying the regularly scheduled trains of character—with the "dramatic" dangers, the ones that part the tangled vegetation like a gorilla leaping out from among the lianas in the African jungle (and at five paces away, how much is the hunter going to worry about noises that have been pestering him for weeks, like the buzzing of mosquitoes or the rustling of snakes and lizards in the bush? He won't even hear them; they're somewhere far away, now that this angry red eye is fixed on him and bloodcurdling rage is rumbling out of that hairy, powerfully heaving chest). . . .

Meltzer read the passage all the way through this time. On the spot he related it to everything he had experienced at Ischl, and he placed the image of it next to the image of those experiences and that sensation of a heavy weight inside his chest (the stone he was carrying now). One more item added itself as if it somehow just belonged—the locomotive roaring in while he stood on the platform at Attnang-Puchheim. Then it occurred to him for the first time that there had always been amazing things in his life, even in a place like Zauner's in Ischl, say (not the coffee and ice cream, though); outright monsters, if one will, but certainly no gorilla and no rustling of snakes and lizards in the bush. As we can see, Meltzer was already applying something like a critical faculty to his imaginative life and its arbitrary way of making patterns, but we cannot bring ourselves to call that faculty thinking. At any rate, he suddenly wiped away everything inside himself as a sponge erases a blackboard, dismissing it with a gesture that would have roughly the same meaning as exclaiming "Nonsense!" Meltzer's gesture was merely the result of his inability to bring to completion that simple process of thought the point of which consisted in discovering that inherent in every one of the mental images occupying him just now was a common element, even though the images might be presenting it in such very different forms as a gorilla, as his experience in Ischl and its burdensome aftereffects, and as the locomotive of an express train roaring into the station—each of these was above all an object or a phenomenon of enormously greater power than he himself, surpassing him in strength many times over. He couldn't dismiss it completely, and he felt it again with fear. Like a red wall draped in purple (or was it raw flesh?) it was suddenly standing there, cruel and menacing, behind all of life, behind each and every life, and that was what it all came down to. He kept seeing this color for several moments, a red like flesh or blood, gushing powerfully and making pools and puddles. Because our lieutenant, warrior or not, felt genuine terror for a split second, he reached for his tobacco case again. And now it was over—he still didn't know what to make of these images, so he lowered his book and slept until Linz, where a couple of sausages with mustard and a stein of beer were handed up to him through the window when he called for them.

Meltzer arrived in Vienna at around one thirty, took a fiacre at the West Station, and went to eat in the center of the city; while he was doing so, an old Vienna baggage man, a type sporting the customary white beard modeled on the emperor's, went with his luggage in the cab to the Belvedere Hotel near the South Station. This would be the right occasion for mentioning that our Lieutenant Melzer was none too stingy with his money; he enjoyed a nice income thanks to an uncle in the beer-brewing business (*nomen est omen*), who had secured it for so long as his nephew would remain an officer. This liking for the military on the part of a one-time master brewer and current majority stockholder of a large-scale brewery made life easy for Meltzer (who was so cold-blooded, though, as to order a glass of wine with his noonday meal). Also, the

garrison at Trnovo in Bosnia was of decided benefit to the finances during leave time, since a man needed practically nothing down there.

After the hotel called Meltzer on the telephone during his meal, as requested, to confirm that his luggage had arrived, he had a cup of black coffee right away and then walked slowly through the city to take care of a few errands that friends in Trnovo had asked him to do. His last stop was in Seidel's military book store on the Graben.

This was 1910, remember, a late-summer day.

It was gratifying for Meltzer to have all this movement swirling around him. Had we been able to see deep inside him at that moment, behind his jacket and shirt and past his heart and kidneys, we would have discovered, I believe, that his enjoyment of the scurrying and darting and weaving on the streets of the metropolis had an unconscious tinge of "So all this is here nevertheless"; further, that the walking or dashing, the standing around, the rushing or the strolling of the people here, as well as the more than lively mixture of well-maintained horse-drawn carriages and purring automobiles gave him encouragement in his life as a whole. And really, the surroundings were eminently suited to produce that effect. Streams of sunlight lavishly grounding every moving detail in gold, the blue banner of the sky fluttering high above the Graben, and by the bookstore up at the corner, Saint Stephen's tower stepping onto the scene as if with the stride of a giant.

Clap-clap tapped the horses' hooves. A strong-smelling cloud of cigar smoke drifted past on the sidewalk like a greeting from all the tropical islands, and that cloud at once collided with another, one that caused the glance to turn back toward a someone disappearing into the crowd—*Bois des Iles*, wood from the islands, smoke from the islands.

He sauntered up and down the street a few times. It was getting close to three thirty. His idea about going to the Café Pucher wasn't very definite. Right here and now, though, he was given the resolve to go ahead, in a way; just by being a *flâneur* among all the rest of the *flâneurs* he was gaining a feeling of having things in common with the world around him and was at last rescuing himself from an isolation which not long before, in Attnang-Puchheim, had been really intense.

Ballhaus Platz frequented Pucher's. No one belonging to the Foreign Ministry was a stranger to this relatively narrow café squeezed in on Kohlmarkt Strasse. Meltzer's connection with such circles—by no means a given through his position as a line officer in the infantry, which did not count socially for very much in the old Austria—came from his mother's side; now living a retired life in Innsbruck, Meltzer's mother was the daughter of a former Royal and Imperial General Consul.

The lieutenant found only a few of his acquaintances on hand at the Café Pucher. Sitting on red velvet benches in a large booth at the rear were Herr von Langl and Herr von Semski, as well as a Baron von Lindner, who just at that time, in 1910, took a significant step forward in his career, having been appointed that autumn to the post of district commissioner somewhere down in Carinthia. Herr von Semski was the only one of the three affiliated with

Ballhaus Platz. Herr Benno von Grabmayr (the son of "Charlemagne," as they called his father Karl, a member of the Upper House) stopped by for just a few minutes later on. This Benno was not fond of sitting around in cafés, and he was in a hurry, already changed into his golfing outfit immediately after the office closed and on his way to the Krieau, where the golf course was; he was in Pucher's now only because he wanted to find out who was going to take a ride out to see the Stangelers at their villa tomorrow, Saturday.

That had become something of a custom. Everybody chattered away at once while cordially welcoming Meltzer at the same time.

"Grauermann's getting engaged to Etelka Stangler," said Grabmayr. His accent stood out somewhat from the Viennese German this group spoke. He had pronounced the consonant *k* in the name "Etelka" with that real Tyrolean hardness.

"Who else from Waisenhaus Gasse is going tomorrow?" asked Semski. He meant the Consular Academy. As noted earlier, Waisenhaus Gasse had its name changed later on, in honor of a great mathematician, and as a result sounded much less pathetic, no longer named for the orphanage ("*Waisenhaus*") once on it. It starts on the right side of Währinger Strasse—facing toward Währing—goes downhill, and runs into Liechtenstein Strasse. About halfway down the street was located the Royal and Imperial Oriental Academy, an institution founded by the Empress Maria Theresa; it was a college at which all the students boarded, and they were supervised pretty strictly. The young scholars were permitted only their uniform, which was very becoming, though, and which included a sword; on the other hand, civilian clothes were prohibited, except for traveling or sports purposes, and in the first year no one was allowed out past ten o'clock. All in all, however, it was a good life for the students in that large, handsome building, for they truly had everything they needed—a wonderful park, riding, and tennis. Even so, it's fair to say that they did have their share of rather unusual house customs, most of all in the autumn, when the start of the semester would bring the tyros for their first year, the "hound dogs," as they used to be called there. On the very evening after they arrived, these "hound dogs" would be subjected to a kind of test in the large salon, with everybody present, and of course each one of them without exception would fail, because a boy would either be able to answer the tough questions put to him, in which case it was a damn shame how spoiled and arrogant the kid was before he even started, or he would not, in which case the kid was simply a first-class moron. The committee of examiners was drawn from the members of the highest class, the fourth year, who were addressed as "Your Excellency," while those who had already completed their studies and been appointed attachés were accorded the rank of "demigod" on their occasional visits to the academy.

For the rest, it's daunting to think how much they had to learn. Aside from legal studies, especially constitutional law and commercial law, they were naturally expected to master English and French to the point of perfection. The chief emphasis, however, was still placed on the Near Eastern languages, specifically Turkish, Arabic, and Persian as absolutely mandatory, with a very extensive range of command representing the acceptable minimum. The prerequisite for

entrance into the academy—fifteen or twenty beginners at the very most were accepted each year—was passing the comprehensive final examinations in the humanities curriculum at a preparatory school; most of the students were likely to have come from the Maria Theresa Court Academy, which people in Vienna still today refer to by its shortened name of the "*Theresianum*."

So much on the subject of Waisenhaus Gasse ("Golden Days of Yore" would be the label in the parlance of dotage). The students had gradually gained the entrée to Herr von Stangeler's house, one bringing another on the next visit, and they appeared there during the winter done up very presentably in their green tail coats and at the villa during the summer in traveling clothes.

"Grauermann and Marchetti are driving there tomorrow," said Herr von Langl, "that much I know for sure. Honnegger's playing in a piano quintet at my aunt's in Döbling on Sunday."

"Marchetti seems to enjoy talking with Asta," Semski noted in passing. He had a way, incidentally—he was a few years older, after all, and an official with an appointment at Ballhaus Platz—of treating the students at the Consular Academy somewhat patronizingly.

"What's wrong, Meltzer?" asked Lindner quietly across the table.

Our lieutenant had indeed become unsettled and was just at the moment struggling with some overwhelming feelings. They were all connected to the name Asta Stangeler, and they were grouping themselves around that name as if around their source and their midpoint. He'd as good as missed out on this whole leave by frittering it away. He could have been out there in the mountains, staying at that beautiful house with so many cheerful people, instead of in Zauner's in Ischl. (The single appearance Lieutenant Meltzer had made at the Stangeler house always constituted a noteworthy exception—he was the one and only officer it would have been possible to encounter there, since the father harbored an invincible prejudice against this class; everybody knew it, too, and the daughters were never allowed to invite officers to their home, although a few naval officers might be tolerated, because Herr Stangeler discerned in seafaring men people "who know something about something." Meltzer was once snowed in at the country place during a mountain-climbing party, and he, on the contrary, was pointed out as a "nice, alert, simple young man" and given the seal of approval.) Meltzer had then started to get a feeling like stabs of pain as his friends talked over their plans for driving out tomorrow to the Semmering area, since it was Saturday, and the feeling had finally developed a midpoint, an axis it could rotate on, as it were, in that one name—Asta Stangeler.

In reality, though, what was it that linked him to René's darker-skinned sister, still a half-grown girl just yesterday, so to speak, since she'd been seen at dances and parties for the first time only the winter before last? Now she stepped before his inner eye with greater distinctness, as part of a group sitting near the edge of a rocky cliff above the valley, with mountains standing close behind in preternaturally sharp resolution (a sign of bad weather coming), and Asta in her red and blue Styrian outfit with its many-colored shawl, laughing as only she could laugh. Meltzer now remembered that he'd always done a great deal of laughing with her; it seemed to him now, in fact, that he never laughed with

anyone else more heartily than with her. Hope instantly attached itself to this picture inside of Meltzer, but what kind of hope was it? This memory went back to a time before he'd known Mary Allern, and indeed it stood in our lieutenant's mind for that whole carefree manner of living. So his way of hoping was paradoxical, directed as it was toward the past rather than toward the future. And isn't that what we mostly do, by the way?

"I don't like it, but I have to go soon, you know," he said to Lindner. He still had time to hear them talking about "garden parties." During the summer just past, the Schmellers out in Grinzing had adopted this new way of entertaining for the season now in progress, when everybody in creation would fetch back up in Vienna from the spas, the mountains, and the seashore; these were summer gatherings in a garden high above the city—whose rows of lights coming up the hillsides added to the charm—where the guests had supper outdoors and danced afterwards. A less formal way of socializing, without tail coats and evening gowns, and a kind of preview of the winter season that one could enjoy in a comfortable summer suit.

"Well, why don't you come back soon, Meltzer? You don't always have to use up all your leave at the same time, you know."

"And then run right off to Ischl. . ."

The glass door swung open, closed again, and the bath of movement in the streets received him. He hailed a fiacre on the Graben. Turning around at Stock-im-Eisen Platz, he saw the lofty cathedral standing amid the swarming crowds, and then he looked ahead, along Kärntner Strasse toward the Opera—he was going off in that direction. Off to one of those curious lands far to the south which had been parts of the old empire and whose allurements, fascinations, aromas, and even dubious odors all met right here, at this very point of intersection. Meltzer's eight hired hooves went clop-clopping merrily along paved Favoriten Strasse on their way to the South Station, near which was his hotel. Now he would have to change out of his sport suit; from this point on Meltzer was traveling on official business and in uniform.

Dressed accordingly, he left Schneider's restaurant after his dinner and walked over to the station café.

Back then, those places were beautifully kept up, relatively quiet, and more spacious than required by the amount of traffic in those days, before every little waitress started perpetually gallivanting. It's tempting to say that inside them there still reechoed all that was meant by the opening of the Semmering rail line, even though that had already been half a century before. Around the columns of dark marble wafted the traditional atmosphere of a Viennese café, the aromas of mocha and cigarette smoke, and that absolute innocence of any cooking odor or smell of frying, since one could have coffee prepared and served in any of six varieties but could not order more to eat than a little ham sandwich or a couple of eggs at the very most. There were always plenty of empty tables, and everyone who came in to take a seat tried to get as far away as possible from the ones already occupied, which is in itself enough to show the

reticent and well-nigh meditative demeanor of the patrons in a Viennese café expressing itself.

"Has the lieutenant placed his order yet?" the waiter asked, knowing full well that Meltzer had just walked in; avoiding any head-on manner of address, though, was counted as one of the ceremonial prerequisites for service here.

Meltzer felt tired after this day full of activity, the more so as he'd gotten up so early that morning (and had breakfast with Herr Allern). Moreover, he'd had two mugs of Pilsner beer to go with his evening meal in view of his upcoming journey by night, to help him sleep well, that is (but even that seems cold-blooded to a certain degree, since his munificent uncle's investments were in a different brewery, Dreher's).

It began to get dark. A porter from the Belvedere was standing on the platform, in front of the car with the first and second-class compartments for Zagreb. He handed Meltzer the baggage claim ticket and told him that he'd saved him a good seat by laying his travel bag on it; "only one other gentleman in the compartment, a major," he added. There were still twenty minutes until departure time. Meltzer boarded the train, the porter opened the compartment door for him, and the lieutenant saluted when he saw a gold collar in the dim light.

"How are you, Meltzer?" the major said.

"My respects, sir," Meltzer answered, not able to make out who the staff officer was, not even when they stepped closer and shook hands; only when the other turned up the gas lamp, which had been all the way down on low, did his name come back to our lieutenant—it was a Major Laska, battalion commander at Banialuka in Bosnia.

"Coming off leave, it looks like, Meltzer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Listen, how about if we each give the conductor a gulden so we can be left alone and get some sleep?"

"Very good idea, sir."

Meltzer was dominated by a strange twofold feeling, and while he was unbuckling his saber and putting it up into the lower, narrower of the two luggage racks above the seats, he was inwardly still standing out on the platform, so to say, on this same platform, where he had also at one time boarded a train for Payerbach-Reichenau to reach the Stangelers' villa. All that was still waiting for him out there, unfinished business, as it were, and he had grown vividly aware of it right before he stepped aboard, as he looked out through the open mouth of the terminal. Now he had an urgent desire to go back out onto the platform again. Just then the movable stand that sold books and news

papers went rolling past. Meltzer excused himself for a moment.

"Bring a bottle of mineral water, too, all right?" Laska called after him.

The lieutenant left the car, stopped the newspaper vendor, and quickly bought five English detective novels (another errand for someone in Trnovo, and he'd forgotten to do it in the city!) as well as some newspapers and magazines and finally, when the refreshment cart was being wheeled past, the mineral water

and some fruit. Then he stood there with all those things in his arms and looked up ahead, out of the terminal. Tomorrow afternoon that whole crowd would take off from here—Grauermann and Marchetti, Semski and Grabmayr and Edouard von Langl, the master of easy piano music. There was a mild odor of railroad smoke, just as there had been then, and in Payerbach they'd really smell the fresh mountain air when they got off the train. Then they'd ride up in the landau, and maybe Asta and Etelka would meet them on the serpentine road leading to the villa.

"You brought the mineral water? Good job," said the major when Meltzer came back into the compartment. A wonderful aroma came at him, and Laska took out a long cigar case directly and offered Meltzer a Kaiser-Virginia. "You know what?" he said in a happy mood, "I brought a bottle of Poysdorfer from Schneider's with me, chilled nice and cold. Let's have a little glass now. I hope the mineral water's cold, too." He felt the bottles, seemed satisfied, and produced from his travel bag a yellow case that held two small silver drinking cups, gold-plated on the inside.

"May I ask if the major is also coming off leave?" Meltzer said, after they'd sat down by the folding table at the window.

"No, I'm not. I was just in Vienna for a few days, sort of a courier, at the ministry. Among other things, there was one item of discussion that will interest you, by the way."

"Oh, what was that? And incidentally, does this train stop in Payerbach?"

"No, I don't think so. This one here goes straight through from Gloggnitz to Semmering. But how did you happen to think of that? Are you planning on getting out there?"

"No, I just heard people talking about it earlier."

"The express to Graz is the one that stops in Payerbach. It's standing right over there on the next track."

"Oh," said Meltzer, "the Graz express stops in Payerbach."

Pain gripped him all of a sudden. Mary would look at him so oddly. He never had really quite understood her. She was something special; she was unique. Fear of the irretrievable, of true loss, squeezed his chest; he could feel it like a pressure on his throat.

"Listen," said Laska, as the train began moving almost unnoticed and glided out of the terminal, "they've just made me game warden for Bosnia, and that means your bear is guaranteed. I'm taking you to the Treskavica with me. Your old man's going to have to turn you loose for a few days. I'll ask him myself. He's a friendly guy, anyway, your man Captain Zeisler. Cheers, now!"

They toasted one another.

"Many thanks and deepest respects, sir," said Meltzer, "that's really great!"

A sudden sense of well-being coursed through him now, along with a vague astonishment at the drastic changes in his moods throughout this day, now drawing to an end. Laska filled the cups again and improvised in a beautiful bass voice:

Why feel strange?

Just arrange
To forget
What you can't change. . . .

"Cheers!" he said in closing. Meltzer stared at him in boundless amazement for the briefest of seconds. The train went gliding along, thrusting gently through the darkness, and stopped for two minutes beside the empty platform in Meidling. The two gentlemen leaned back in their padded seats, the glorious local vintage trickling delicious down their throats, the blue haze floating under the hemisphere of the ceiling light.

Now Meltzer was traveling with nothing less than passionate eagerness back down to Bosnia. However, it wasn't the prospect of a bear hunt—even as much as he had been wishing for it—that had the ability to cause a turnaround like this; instead, the atmosphere diffusing itself through the compartment seemed in itself to be producing a powerful healing effect that no part of him was able to withstand in the long run. Something here was lifting him up and supporting him stalwartly. Above their seats, on both sides, the same saber with the same black tip was lying in the narrow luggage racks.

By the time they passed the country around Baden, their talk had long since taken them down to the minutest details of their hunting plans; Laska, an old Bosnian from way back, knew his subject exhaustively. When the platforms at Payerbach went flying past a good hour later, Meltzer didn't even take notice until afterwards, as the train was crossing the large viaduct. They'd slid air-filled rubber pillows under their heads and stretched out to go to sleep. The hollow whooshing sound in the Semmering tunnels penetrated agreeably into the slumber encompassing them, which also had wrapped inside it, as it were, something else Meltzer found agreeable—his firm resolution to spend his next leave in Vienna and a part of it in the areas around Rax and Semmering, too. And what was there to stop him, anyway?

A month later, Laska and Meltzer were riding uphill along a stony path to the hunting lodge, a Catherine hut, on the Treskavica, the sky virtually an endless blue above bare and wooded hills. The Treskavica itself is both at the same time in its lower part; on its north slope is a deep forest of beech, while the south slope is all meadowland, and so the mountain as a whole looks something like an old man with a mighty beard but a bald head.

This was the second hunting expedition these two officers had set out on together since their trip back from Vienna. Two weeks earlier, Laska had taken the lieutenant with him on a boar hunt into Siersha Canyon near Dobropolje. This was totally virgin territory, still under stringent preservation in those days—in fact, the actual presence of the game warden himself, appointed by the Ministry for National Defense, was required for anyone to enter this region carrying a rifle. The major's had missed fire at the crucial moment of that other hunt, just as the quarry broke out from the underbrush and the black dogs were storming over a ridge with trees farther apart; it ran past the two huntsmen close

enough for Laska to fling aside the rifle that had failed, draw his pistol, and kill a strong boar with it at scarcely ten paces. The major had practically jumped after his own pistol bullet, continuing to fire the whole time. As they later saw, three hits lodged in the boar's skull and several more in its lungs. Everything was full of blood—bushes, grass, moss; over so great an expanse, Meltzer had also had ample opportunity to use his rifle (besides, it may be that the major wanted to put his hunting skills to the test before they went after the bear—it worked out satisfactorily, in any case).

Meltzer was thinking about that earlier hunt now, after they had dismounted for the day. He had gone off a short distance from the horses to a place where the stony ground was partly covered with hazelnut bushes. The scene of Laska's killing the boar now stepped in front of his inner eye—the barking crack of the pistol, the wild expression on the major's face as he leapt forward, the collapsing animal thrashing about, and the blood spattering everywhere. This image gradually spread out inside Meltzer, the way a pool spreads out, and it sent little trickles off in many directions as if seeming to seek out a dark, inexpressible connection with something else, kindred but hidden. All the while, a slow, lazy, slight motion was taking place on a flat rock among the hazel bushes, but only now did Meltzer take notice and realize what it was—a hazel snake or smooth snake, a little reptile hardly a foot long that abounds in Bosnia. Sunk deep inside himself, Meltzer observed the serpentine writhing and slithering of the little body. Under other circumstances, he might have turned around and said, "Look, sir, here's a smooth snake." But the one here seemed to him to be like a motion of his own inner self, like the most secret of thoughts, ones it would be unimaginable to reveal.

From back where he was, Laska now offered Meltzer some cognac and chocolate. He was glad to sever the bonds of this isolation, which had lasted for some minutes, or only some seconds, but which burdened him more than it beguiled him.

Late that afternoon, when the sun was shining on a slant and making it impossible to see at any distance, they came to the lodge. Nearby was an "Alpfield," as people would say in Bavaria or Austria, the livestock still out to grass for the summer. The herdsmen, notified in advance that the officers were coming, had slaughtered an ox, most of which was going to be used as bait for the bear. They had taken the best pieces of meat, though, and grilled them superbly, in the manner customary to the region, for the evening meal. Now, just after their arrival, there arose the bracing smell of coffee, which Laska had distributed in generous measure among the herdsmen, along with a kilogram of sugar, some packs of cigarettes, and a bottle of slivovitz. "One hand washes the other," he said to Meltzer in passing, "but now we're going to have our special treats, too." With that, he unwrapped some fine Turkish pastries—tolumba and baklava, as well as kuravi, crisp and flaky, in slices as large as the palm of the hand.

Before nightfall, they set out their enormous bait in the beech woods on the north slope, with the help of the herders and of both orderlies, young Bosnians

who seemed to be taking special pleasure in this expedition. There was a shoulder in the mountain, in itself an almost level tract of land with a kind of trough-shaped hollow in the middle; this was where they laid out the ox. Then Laska and Meltzer carefully picked out their covered stand, checked the range of fire from there, and took exact bearings on the spot by several signs, doing likewise on their way back to the lodge with the path, from which they now removed all the dry wood, because it could snap, and tossed away underbrush and branches here and there so as to forestall any noise on their return by night. The herders knew exactly the main direction of the night wind here on the north slope of the Treskavica, and it favored them, blowing as it did from the bait toward the approach route. After all that, Laska and Meltzer were able to lie down for a couple of hours in the lodge.

When they moved out at one o'clock, by themselves and with no dogs, the moonless night was lit only by the twinkling stars. It was so cold that their breath clouded slightly in front of their mouths; that was why Laska and Meltzer were bundled up in short fur coats. Later on, when their eyes were accustomed to the darkness, it was not hard for them, walking slowly and cautiously, to find the path in the forest. About three hundred paces before they reached their cover, they could hear sounds from that direction in the silence of the night, and when the hunters reached the spot, the presence of the bear was beyond any doubt; even though they couldn't see it, they could hear it smacking its lips and chomping with its teeth now and then. These sounds were often separated by long pauses. Then the bear would tug at the bait, and they would hear dragging and rustling. At around three there was a real burst of noise amid which they could make out the snap of breaking bones, and soon afterwards they were sorry to realize with certainty that the bear had torn pieces off the bait and was just now dragging one of them off.

Laska and Meltzer sat there until it grew light enough to shoot, listening for a long time in the silence of the night to the sound moving farther away. For the moment, there was nothing that could be done. When it had grown somewhat lighter, they looked through binoculars at the remains of the bait left behind, but they did not again go near the place where they had set out the ox. Its left hind part was almost completely missing, which went to show right there that the herdsmen's reports about the bear's size were hardly exaggerated.

The two officers returned to the hut to have breakfast.

The orderlies and the herders were excited, and someone went so far as to suggest picking up the bear's trail at once, with the help of the big dogs, now out in the Alpfield. But Laska brushed all that aside with a laugh. Not for another good hour, after a hearty and satisfying breakfast, was he to be found walking along the path with Meltzer, the two alone again.

It was this outing that was to become unforgettable for Meltzer, not like something that one can put a name to but then just calls unforgettable; no, this image of memory settled much deeper inside him, a thing enduring, dwelling within him at all times and never shoving its way to the fore—but later it often seeped through, times untold, in a quiet and barely perceptible way, gradually

spreading throughout him deep down inside, sending off trickles and flowing together with other images inexpressibly connected.

Admittedly, almost nothing happened on the outside. They walked along roughly the same path as the one at night and turned off it at a bowshot's distance from the spot where they'd first waited for the bear, striking out to the right through the beech forest so as to get to the bear's trail, the direction of which their intently listening ears had made sufficiently sure of the night before. And on this walk, without any dogs, they in fact did find the streak, distinct at first, left by the bear when he'd made off with his prey. They were even able to observe some small pieces of meat and slivers of bone that had come unstuck and were caught on branches in the underbrush or in the moss. As the way went on, however, these signs began to dwindle.

Their path led them across an open, flat forest floor, the dense growth receded, and they walked, as if through pillared halls, among the dull gray tree trunks. Meltzer felt pleasantly fortified and warmed by his breakfast; he went along easily while yet sensing every one of his responsive muscles in the enjoyment of walking. There are inner states which are like being untied from the stake of one's own self and in which we govern even our bodies as never before. That was how Meltzer was feeling on this reconnoitering walk, meanwhile registering everything with special clarity and sharpness, as when the image of a garden comes into a sunny room through a newly washed windowpane.

They lost the trail as time passed and were led on more by surmises than by signs. The sun had gradually climbed high, and now it set the mighty treetops in motion, dappled the forest floor, made the air warm, and invited them to rest.

This they did on the crest, while eating a second breakfast. The woods dropped off steeply ahead of them, and all the space between tree trunks was filled with underbrush, farther back along the ridge as well as closer by, so that only this front part of the mountain rib, which the hunters had chosen for their resting place, was left clear. Meltzer felt utterly happy. Everything lay easy on his soul, like a fragrant foam, the soft envelopment of his consciousness at this moment completely undisturbed by any pressure, however slight, or even twinge, however faint, of images or actualities.

He was probably not aware that Major Laska's way of living, the style of his life overall, was what was evoking and making rise up in him the sense of well-being just described. Inside Meltzer, that sense immediately transformed itself into a liking for the major, toward whom he simply felt gratitude for bringing him along.

Taken up with enjoying their food, the small, shiny cups from their thermos bottles filled with strong-smelling coffee, the cognac affably waiting, they felt more than that they were merely experiencing a sensory perception which would soon grow coherent when they heard some kind of rumbling along the crest, in the undergrowth about a hundred yards away, and reached for their weapons. But hardly had they put their drinking cups aside and lifted their rifles than there was an absolutely tremendous jolt in the thicket, a sudden, extremely violent movement from a mass of considerable size. Right afterwards it went barreling off down the slope. Laska and Meltzer had jumped up, and perhaps

the lieutenant might have been really hoping to fire a shot, but they caught sight of the fleeing bear for only a second, as a shadow, and almost totally covered by trees.

"We'll get you yet!" Laska called after him.

In that moment when the bear had suddenly sprung up, it felt to the lieutenant as if a section of the forest floor itself had exploded into the air. The ground still seemed to be shaking even now. In his mind, this excess of power, unleashed in seconds, nay in fractions of seconds, sent the entire forest flying away, as if with a kick, from the idyllic mood he had just been savoring. He couldn't quite understand it himself, and he stared in vague wonder at the profound impression on his own soul as at a cave that had opened unexpectedly.

After it was all over, they ended their meal in peace and then turned back. As they came near to the bait in the level hollow, a swarm of vultures rose up, and they saw that the part of the skeleton left behind had been picked clean of nearly every remaining bit of meat, right down to the last little bone.

Despite everything, Meltzer got his bear two days later, after they'd set out as fresh bait a he-goat they thought might be good for the purpose. Laska had left the shot to him; the major just stood at the ready, but Meltzer's bullet hit home. He got the skin, and he kept possession of it for the rest of his life (years later, when he was living on Porzellan Gasse in Vienna, diagonally across from the Miserovsky twins, he liked to lay it in front of a fireplace he had in the first of his two rooms). They and the orderlies ate the paws back at the lodge, and they gave one of the two haunches to the herdsmen.

Whenever I would think about Meltzer in April of 1945, thirty-five years after that bear hunt, in my cold hotel room in Oslo (and it's something I did fairly often), I was forced to take notice that there was one period of his life during which my lieutenant never underwent—not in any way, shape, or form—the kinds of inner experiences he'd gone through on his journey from Attnang to Vienna in 1910 and, in a sense, on the Treskavica as well; it was a period, too, when one might have anticipated to the extent of flat-out certainty that he would undergo them, and at their most intense pitch, right off the bat, an open-and-shut case: I mean the war. From 1914 to 1918, Meltzer was in on the action just about wherever there was any action to be in on—

Gorlice, Col di Lana, Flitsch-Tolmein. . .unforgettable, but we can put a name to it! Someone going through a war, though, gains again and again a sense, not of himself, but of everybody else. Inside the world of legally organized terror, the harvest is not gathered into the core of the person but is instead redistributed throughout the collective. That's why, incidentally, there's such a special fondness for story-telling in almost all of them.

Now then, Meltzer learned later on to tell the difference between the two basic elements of his biography, which is how he was able to fill me in, during our many talks, about never having the slightest occurrence of one of them all through the war. I've conversed with Meltzer often, first a good twenty-five years ago, on Porzellan Gasse in Vienna, our feet on the bearskin from the Treskavica, and most recently in Kursk, in the year 1942, where he turned up as

a lieutenant colonel (being a former Austrian officer, he had an obligation to report again for active duty in the German army). Frequently having to take independent action during the First World War—what else was there to do?—Meltzer wasn't the least bit equipped to exist independently, as he assured me. (By the way, dear reader, o reader wise whom I fantasize, what's your opinion of taking action—I mean, do we really control it? Does it always indicate who we really are? Watch out, now, this is a comprehensive oral exam question with a lot riding on it; for instance, your whole approach to dramatic literature is going to have to take its direction from the answer you give now! And don't try getting around it! Every *avis au lecteur* is dubious.) Meltzer added that he stayed that way, totally unchanged, for a good many years beyond 1918 (up to a certain Saturday afternoon). As in the military, where nobody ever goes *to* any place but simply keeps reporting for duty *at* some place, Meltzer, his military career brought to a halt by the collapse of 1918, at which time he was a major (in the little army of the new republic he wasn't able to continue serving for very long), reported for duty at the Austrian Bureau of Tobacco Administration, as a civil servant, that is, and not as the proprietor of a cigar store, a post for which none but totally disabled officers were eligible. So that was all well and good, for he continued serving his country. On Porzellan Gasse. That was where Meltzer's civil-service job was. It was in a large building quite near the Bohemia Station, and it contained some offices for tax supervision besides. Going past on the sidewalk, a person would be engulfed in waves by all the fragrant odors of Persia and Turkey, from "Sultan Flor" all the way up and down the line, since the building also housed one of the main distribution centers, and the old Austrian tobacco administration, even though it was no longer royal and imperial, really understood how to go about such things—we have to grant it that much.

Meltzer didn't walk past the building very often, though, but mostly into or out of it, the former—apart from going out for his midday meal and later on to the café for a short while—between eight and eight thirty each morning, and the latter between four and five in the afternoon (inhuman working hours were still a thing unknown in those days). He never made his way in the opposite direction, to the corner of Althan Platz in front of Bohemia Station, because instead of eating his noon meal in the large restaurant located there he used to go to a wonderful little place closer in toward the center of the city and more in the neighborhood of the Miserovsky twins.

Even so, Meltzer frequented Bohemia Station on many a Saturday throughout the summer of 1925, and that was just one of the changes that the Buffoon Yappin' von Eulenfeld brought into the major's life, most of whose modifications hadn't been of much consequence or of much duration. The dragoon captain and his whole crowd, called the "*troupeau*"—every weekend during the summer, if the sun was shining, these good people would without fail take a trip out to one of the Danube spas like Kritzendorf or Greifenstein or Tulln. They would stay overnight in some little weekend cottage or other that somebody or other owned or somehow or other had the use of.

Making the acquaintance of Dragoon Captain von Eulenfeld back then in Vienna must have been very difficult to avoid, at least so it seems. Mary K. had that impression, too. In the course of her much later dealings with Katejan von S., the Buffoon Yappin' was naturally bound to turn up some time, although his buffoonish yappin' had no effect on Mary. In fact, she thought of Eulenfeld as a kind of illness.

Meltzer was right up his alley. The dragoon captain's instincts and talents, all oriented toward pleasure and probably even toward dissoluteness, found no sharp edges to bump up against in Meltzer, where they might have hurt themselves or broken something. In addition, there was the implied pathos of their common experience as former officers of the allied German and Austro-Hungarian armies in the First World War (well before 1914, Eulenfeld was nursing on the mother's milk of his first drunken loads at the breasts of the Fourteenth Hussar Regiment in Kassel; like Meltzer, he was a one-time active officer). The dragoon captain did not share the mistaken and warped views harbored by so many of his countrymen when it came to Austria, and so he never gave cause for offense, a thing his good—by and large—manners would have precluded anyway. Fleeing from years that had had their ups and downs and no doubt now and then their shadier sides as well, years he had spent from 1918 on in South America, in England, and in the German civil war, he arrived in Vienna while the great turn of events of 1922 and 1923 was going on, at first as the manager of an automobile driving school, which was how he had originally come to know Meltzer, who one day started getting it into his head that it just would not do at all for him to go on not knowing how to drive a car, and who became obsessed at the same time by the notion that now, after the collapse of his military career, he was going to have to earn his bread starting all the way at the bottom, as a newspaper vendor or maybe a taxi driver—it had just been broken to him that his retention in what remained of the little Austrian army was no longer a consideration. So he learned from Eulenfeld how to drive. The dragoon captain gave up this teaching activity soon thereafter and secured himself a more comfortable berth in a Viennese agency of the Wakefield Company. At around the same time, Meltzer's rather far-fetched notions about struggling for his very existence were automatically brought to a stop by his being accepted for work in the Austrian Tobacco Administration. Not long afterwards he rented those two rooms (already mentioned) on Porzellan Gasse and spread out the bearskin from the Treskavica in front of his fireplace; what was even more, he had come into the inheritance—no paltry sum—left by his uncle, David Meltzer, the militaristic master brewer, which likewise played its part in helping him consolidate his affairs.

The reasons for Meltzer's friendly relations with Herr von Eulenfeld went deeper, however, at least as far as the major (or civil-service councillor) was concerned, than might perhaps appear from the facts brought out so far. The dragoon captain stood in Meltzer's mind for a direction, leading toward which there existed in him a certain pull or perhaps even a yearning—if one can imagine such a state as something almost unconscious—and at the same time a

feeling of inferior competence, this latter fairly pronounced. It could be said that the dragoon captain appeared before the outer ramparts of Meltzer's being at the precise place where their defenses were weakest—and in the case of military men like these two, such comparisons will surely be admissible. When the dragoon captain (it was universal practice to call him simply "the dragoon captain") would tell stories about his past life with such great relish, Meltzer, a public servant now, would see him entering and exiting all sorts of imprisonments and prisons (and with regard to the second of these terms, I am regretfully obliged to ask that the reader take it in its literal sense this time, for Herr von Eulenfeld had brought a number of his acquaintances to an end behind bars!), would see him entering or exiting, whether in South America or at the Spartacus disturbances in Berlin, in addition to which Herr von Eulenfeld would just lock the door behind him, totally unperturbed, on the most varied kinds of situations whenever he felt like walking away from them. The other thing that pertains to South America, and especially to Buenos Aires, is that the dragoon captain seemed to have kept some continuing contacts more over there than anywhere else. He liked to talk about that metropolis, where he had lived for a good while, and quite often he also received letters from there, which in its turn interested the stamp collectors among his friends and colleagues.

Now Eulenfeld really had started out in Vienna by selling newspapers for a few weeks, and when he wasn't doing that, he was in a hotel of the very seediest class in Mariahilf, guarding a locked trunk that held his clothes, very good ones still. They were what enabled him to march right into the lobby of the Grand Hotel after the list of guests from abroad printed in the *Neues Wiener Journal* had informed him that a *grand seigneur* from Germany, at one time a former bosom buddy of his, was staying there. This gentleman immediately set the dragoon captain up, all nice and neat, as manager of that driving school mentioned earlier, the owner of which was an automobile dealer who not only had Count X. to thank for one showroom already but who was hoping for another one from the same quarter. So there was no more selling newspapers; instead, rings, watches, and cigarette cases were soon being redeemed from the pawn shop. Meanwhile, Eulenfeld's patron had already established contact with the Wakefield Company, since he was now getting ready to travel to England anyway. You need a lucky break, of course. That's what everybody says for whom lucky breaks are a matter of course. And that was how it seemed to be with Eulenfeld.

He knew virtually untold numbers of people in Vienna, the fewest of them, really, from the time before the war and from occasional trips to Austria; almost all of his acquaintances dated from the few short years of his continuous residence there. It was well-nigh incomprehensible. Mary K. had been quite right in saying that the dragoon captain was a kind of illness that spreads fast. If he needed an automobile, say, to take a quick trip out to Greifenstein on the Danube with one or another of his women and stay at some weekend cottage there (which would likewise be somebody else's property), he would chatter over the phone for a little while in his most engaging manner, cock his beat-up hat onto his head, and be sitting at the steering wheel half an hour later, his pale

leather driving gloves unbuttoned, on his way to pick up the lady outside her house by serenading her on the horn. Then they would go roaring off into the green country. His later position made it possible, by the way, for him to keep a little sports car of his own after a few years.

Before he owned it, he once took Meltzer with him on one of these impromptu car trips (with the pale leather gloves and with a monocle, too; I nearly forgot about the monocle, and yet it was somehow an essential ingredient in Eulendorf's make-up), because it just happened to come about that way by chance. A vivid picture of the trip—in many ways a vivid picture indeed—stayed with the major, an outer image of memory as well as an inner one. The car, a red four-seater, was parked on Wickenburg Gasse in Josefstadt, by the corner of Alser Strasse, near the café; in those days, this was the place where American physicians who were continuing their studies at the medical school in Vienna used to meet regularly. Naturally they knew Eulendorf in this group, too. He was chatting with two ladies and a gentleman in front of the streamlined red vehicle; the man was one of the doctors, and he had just left the café for a minute to walk Eulendorf to the car, which he was willing to lend him for a few hours. Eulendorf was conversing with the American in English (the dragoon captain spoke it as fluently as he spoke German, since he'd been to school at Eton for a few years). The doctor was leaning against the car, no hat on, hands in his pockets. And here came Meltzer walking quickly down the street. Through Eulendorf he knew the doctor, and likewise, he thought, one of the two ladies, but not the other one, who was now climbing into the narrow sports car next to the dragoon captain. The second one, however, the one with whom he would be sitting in the back seat, Meltzer seemed to be seeing now as if for the first time in his life. She had grown to be more than strikingly pretty; she was fascinating to the highest degree. Her name, originally Pastré, was still Schlinger at the time; several years later, her name wasn't Schlinger any more, for she'd taken a second husband—no, not Doctor Negria, but a Herr Wedderkopp from Wiesbaden instead. With some kind of tiny little nod that words can hardly describe, Eulendorf nudged this woman, as it were, over toward the major now as he turned around from the driver's seat and called out—cheerful, friendly, and agreeable (as always)—to the two of them to jump quickly into the back seat. He didn't notice, or else he just ignored, the way they said hello like people who are already acquainted. The American waved from the curb, turned away, and went back into the café. The car went roaring along Wickenburg Gasse.

Meltzer sat beside this Frau Schlinger, née Pastré, who had such extraordinary appeal for him (this was the first time she'd shown up within Eulendorf's orbit, and then just fleetingly, at least as it seemed to the major), with an entirely unequivocal and strongly oppressive feeling of being degraded—there really isn't any other way to put it. He'd been simply swept up and taken along, just squeezed in somewhere with a woman next to him, and then she was so appealing to him into the bargain. And there was Eulendorf up front, slouched over the steering wheel. The dragoon captain was driving much too fast, zooming around the corners, and naturally he knew all the streets wherever he

went. Meltzer was feeling the way any person would feel who is compelled at a moment's notice to move toward the direction of his weakest competence and hence of his greatest resistance—the result is a feeling reminiscent of a little toy train car that a child has set by mistake onto tracks of a different gauge. The major sat beside Frau Schlinger as if he were tied up there. A prisoner. Yet during the war he had led a company into combat, month after month, almost more times than he could count; that's what suddenly came into his mind, and at the same instant he thought he could see that this situation belonged to an entirely different area. But how so? It was very painful. Painful, too, that the dazzling blue and sonorously soaring sky of a still warm September day had unfurled over all things, a flood of light that swept everything into itself—the red car, the busy streets, the beautiful woman.

The trip didn't last long. Frau Schlinger had only asked for a ride home. They stopped at the entryway of a house in District VII, Neubau. The entrance was high and narrow, to the right was a store selling typewriters and office supplies, and the green leaves of a tree could be seen back in the courtyard when they looked along the corridor. Over the store was a sign with the name "Lasker." Of course Meltzer was going to think right away of the battalion commander at Banialuka, later on a colonel, who had been killed in the war. At that moment he seemed to himself to be uncoupled, at a standstill, isolated like a railroad car on a siding out in the sun. Now he was by himself in the back of the car, missing his neighbor, whom he couldn't observe from the side any more; indeed, he missed her so much that the blinding red color of the empty leather seat struck him as ferocious and offensive, so he turned his eyes away from it. And yet Meltzer also felt relieved now that Frau Schlinger was gone. Sitting next to her, his frame of mind had had a distant kinship with that of an unprepared schoolboy in one of those dreams we can have now and again all our lives and whose content is the cumulative oral examination one must pass to earn a diploma.

Meltzer got out on Porzellan Gasse, in front of the building where he lived. It was on the dragoon captain's way in any case, for his thought was to drive straight out to Kritzendorf with his current woman. When they stopped and the major had climbed out and walked around to the driver's seat to say goodbye, Eulendorf, who should not be counted among the insensitive, couldn't help noticing the expression on his passenger's face. "Well, friend, looks to me like you're not in your most chipper mood," he said quietly, speaking low, and held on to Meltzer's hand for a few seconds. The young lady sitting beside the dragoon captain was just now subjecting the house in front of which the car was standing to an inspection, from top to bottom, with a vacant look. "I'm a bit tired," answered the major, "I think I'll lie on the couch for a while. Take care." "Good. Why don't you? Goodbye," said the dragoon captain and stepped on the clutch. Meltzer gave the lady another slight bow, and the car drove away, immediately gaining its top speed again, along the straight stretch of Porzellan Gasse in the direction of Bohemia Station. Meltzer just stayed standing outside the house for the time being, and he could feel the flimsy mask of the forced smile he'd held up so quickly to his face now dropping away from his features

again. There are certain skin lotions that put a rapidly solidifying protective layer over the face after shaving; one feels a slight resistance with the first movements of the facial muscles, but then they make fine cracks which allow the layer to adjust again. Until that happens, though, one is in possession of a slow face, as it were. Meltzer was feeling something like this while continuing to stand outside the house after the car had disappeared. But on the whole, his now being alone brought him great relief. Finally he went up the stairs. It was a relatively new building, bright and airy. The windows on the upper stairway landings had a few panes of colored glass inset, and they were now glowing in the sunlight shining through them.

In his own rooms, the major quickly—from long practice—brewed some Turkish coffee in an embossed pot with a long spout. He used a service he'd owned as far back as his days in Bosnia—a long, slender coffee mill that takes its shape from the Arab's carrying it buckled on his saddle bag, a large, engraved copper serving tray, tiny white porcelain cups in copper holders, and a sugar bowl with a vertical half-moon above the lid.

Then he did something unusual. When the mocha was ready, he put the tray down on the floor, next to the bearskin, filled up his chibouk, and stretched out lengthwise on the skin.

The chibouk is the strongest way there is to savor tobacco, in contrast to the nargileh or hookah, the Turkish water pipe, which might be considered the most healthful, because of its essentially drawing the poison out of the tobacco smoke as it passes through the water. The chibouk, with its wide, flat bowl made of Turkish clay, has a very large surface of combustion, on the other hand, and connects to the smoker's mouth by a strong, straight cherry-wood tube with an amber mouthpiece, but not tapered in the slightest, so that the smoker has no way of putting it into his mouth but can only keep it on the outside, holding it to his lips instead. The chibouk has to be smoked dry, and only the very best grades of cigarette tobacco can be used, such as the kinds that the Austrian Tobacco Administration used to offer in those days under the brand names "Sultan Flor" and "Persichan." It goes without saying that Meltzer was able to get his packages of tobacco in the freshest of condition, since he was right there at the source, as it were.

If one smokes the chibouk only seldom and in the way described here, and then always in conjunction with Turkish coffee correctly brewed, one will find it to be a delicately anesthetizing way to achieve calmness and composure, which can pass over to a state in which the Turk enjoys his "kèf"—this is not a complete, brute slumber, but a kind of soaring twilight in which the soul hovers adrift with no hint of torpor; in fact, it is a state easily capable of setting free the creative powers, or more precisely, of cautiously bringing conscious and unconscious into proximity until a spark leaps between them.

This is how the cultivated Near Easterner will take his afternoon rest during the hottest time of day, during the hour when "great Pan is asleep," as the ancients put it. Meltzer, too, tried it again today, seeking refuge in his "kèf." But he didn't quite make it all the way. A constant refrain kept coming in from outside, as it were, echoing from sunlit Porzellan Gasse, an obstinate little triviality that

kept forcing its way, over and over again, into Meltzer's head. "Looks to me like you're not in your most chipper mood," the dragoon captain had said. Those words reminded Meltzer very vividly and very deeply of something. But something else was standing in the way and creating interference—it was an odor, and it seemed to be coming out of a completely different set of associations; Meltzer sniffed around until he could smell the slight, clean scent of naphtha that was clinging to the bearskin from its many summers of being stored in mothballs and that was now cutting across the aromas of tobacco and coffee. The major sat up straight, filled his tiny coffee cup, breathed in the strong aroma, and took a small sip. From the street below there came the clattering and the clanging of a streetcar driving by very fast and just now whizzing over the pinnacle of its own noise. The sun had cut a triangular section out of the top story of the house across the street and lay glistening on the white plaster. For the moment, Meltzer was incapable of grasping how any of this was supposed to be connected with the Café Pucher—he hadn't gone there for the longest time—but right now it was the Café Pucher he was thinking about. Then finally it came to him. Thirteen years before, Baron von Lindner had said roughly the same thing to him at Pucher's, or rather, had asked him roughly the same thing as what the dragoon captain had said to him half an hour before, in the car, right outside his own house, only in a different language, so to speak. But that wasn't all. That was merely the innocuous outermost edge of what was weighing on Meltzer, a man who had never learned how to think, after all, not even as a major.

For now, though, it was enough for him to feel while this brief, small closing of the circuit between past and present took place. And the two proved to be identical. Either of those voices, whether Herr von Lindner's or the dragoon captain's, was calling into an imprisonment of some kind, one inside which he, Meltzer, had been locked then and still was locked now; calling into a lack of independence, into a state of being handed off from one situation to another, from the military to the tobacco administration; calling into a torpor that had held him at Zauner's in Ischl or wherever else, it made no difference, rather than allowing him, for example, to take a ride out to the Stangelers' villa. "Asta didn't marry Marchetti any more than she did me, either, and now he's starting to get fatter than a suckling pig." And as far as the war was concerned, Meltzer began to see his independence and his responsibility as a company commander now hedged in, as it were, by the general lack of independence in his life overall, during which he had never gone *to* any given place but had done no more than report for duty *at* this or that place instead. Even on the Treskavica. He'd been swept up and taken along, just like this afternoon in the automobile. This all frightened the major very much. And so he then had to suffer through some of those moments that are not spared to anyone who has truly lived—the deep fear, that is, of not having truly lived. It could be said that going through this fear means, in any event, taking an important new step into life.

In order to keep forging ahead toward the truth about Meltzer's relations with Eulendorf, it seems to us that we will now have to find some way of capturing in words the natures of these two men (always a chancy proposition when it comes to the relative indecisiveness and wishy-washiness of people like this) and then of attempting to compare and contrast them. It isn't exactly their characters as such, however, with attendant psychological particulars, that call for interpretation, but rather the mechanical functionings of their spirits (to the extent that this latter can be spoken of at all), meaning the physiognomically based predisposition which will then express itself in the materials of the character. One could say that in this respect Meltzer was made up of two basic elements, one faster and one slower, but that for the present he needed to draw on only the faster one to meet life's challenges and was therefore incomplete, to a degree; on the other hand, Eulendorf was made up of nothing but the faster element, and hence he presented himself to one and all, right from the start, as a finished and fully developed person. Nonetheless, it may be possible to imagine that Meltzer, over time, might be conducting that slower substance all the way out to the outer ramparts of his life so as to unite the two elements there and in that way close and heal the small rift that cut through his personhood. That state of being closed and healed was what he had obviously always wanted, but because he misunderstood how things were, he chose the dragoon captain as his ideal and model of how to achieve it.

This error was further countenanced by a precedent from his own life—without even knowing he was doing it, Meltzer was forever transferring his own emotions and appraisals from the very vivid images of Major Laska that he

retained in his memory over to Eulendorf. To a certain extent, this was the premise on which his relationship with the dragoon captain was founded, and he accordingly had no way of anticipating any effects other than supportive and encouraging ones from that quarter. (The reader must have noted long ago that he always needed somebody to lean on in any case; surely that emerged in some way with regard to Mary Allern, and I'm just reminding you in passing about this general trait of Meltzer's disposition.) For his part, though, Major (later Colonel) Laska—may he rest in peace—had carried both of Meltzer's basic elements inside himself, albeit intermingled throughout and totally blended without any rifts.

In the further course of his dealings with the dragoon captain, Meltzer admittedly could not help growing aware, little by little, that something wasn't adding up "*au fond du fond*," meaning in the premise. But the brain of our erstwhile lieutenant and bear hunter wasn't analytical. He just felt burdened. Precisely that, however, precisely that more or less frequent sense of being burdened, was what never once emerged in his memories of Laska, and by that token they gradually began to diverge ever farther from Eulendorf, together with whom they'd been prone, for a good while now, to blend here and there in Meltzer's mind. A few other less essential matters came in as well. Eulendorf was a heavy drinker, for example, and Meltzer, once he began inclining toward Eulendorf—or rather, let's say once fascinated (the word is none too strong) by his style of living—practically forced himself to become one too, because there simply wasn't any other way to keep up with the dragoon captain. Besides, he liked the way Eulendorf drank, cognac bottle wrapped in a white paper napkin on the back seat of the car, and the dragoon captain's habit of smoking through a long cigarette holder when he drank; and could Meltzer, that big baby, perhaps also have been hoping for a kind of loosening up if he drank, a stimulus to move him in the direction he was striving to reach? As it was, though, the young years of our friend the major hadn't given him any experience whatever in the practice of how to master quantities of alcohol on a regularly recurring basis. In the Austrian army, such a thing wasn't common to quite the same degree as in the German. It didn't always do him good.

The differences now, as opposed to the images his memory held of the time when he and Laska had shared so much of their lives, were gradually becoming more distinct in his mind.

Starting from the bear hunt in the autumn of 1910, we really can almost call it a sharing of lives, to which situation the circumstances and exigencies of duty in the service contributed; Meltzer had at one time even been given orders to Bani Luka as deputy battalion adjutant. The two hunting trips with the major, the one to Dobropolje and the one to the Treskavica, had been only the first in a whole series of similar undertakings. And yet the bear hunt stood out for Meltzer in a way that could never be surpassed, and not just because of the magnificent trophy, but also inwardly, as a signpost marking the onset of a new time in his life. That was the moment at which he started to carry his severance from Mary more gracefully than before, rather like someone who has at last found the right position for lugging a heavy suitcase. And that was exactly the

moment from which he began to grow ever more brightly illumined on the inside by his resolve to spend his leave time through the coming year, 1911, partly in Vienna but also partly in the country, around the Rax district, a thought which had already overtaken him, we will perhaps recall, on his journey to Trnovo, while he traveled, half-asleep, through the Semmering pass.

Three days after the ride in the red sports car, Meltzer was reminded very keenly of that year 1911, during which he had in fact spent his summertime leave the way he'd made up his mind to the year before, during the whooshing and hollow-sounding passage through the Semmering tunnels, meaning that he'd spent a fair portion of it at the Stangelers' villa.

He ran into Editha Schlinger-Pastré unexpectedly on the Graben. It was about five o'clock. He had some business to take care of in the city after he finished for the day at the office.

This chance meeting would not in itself have been likely to point him back to the year in question—after all, it lay in a past quite far distant by now—and much less so as the present was offering the loveliest of allurements in her person. Two incidents greatly facilitated that glance backward, however. One of them had occurred that morning, an almost purely inner event, and the other befell Meltzer on the street, in the company of Editha, a thing that made its approach from outside.

At eight o'clock, just as Meltzer was setting out for his office and was walking down the hallway of his building, he saw a door, one he had never noticed before, standing open next to the concierge's apartment. From behind that door was emanating an odor—it had already reached him on the bottom stair step—totally foreign to the stairway here, with its immaculate, white-washed atmosphere. Decaying leaves? Mold? But there was somesomething heavier about it, too, like rubber. Walking past, Meltzer looked into this combination tool room and storage room—that's what it was—and saw a bicycle, or maybe two bicycles, in there.

During the most routine gaps in his routine activities, this voice, coming out of some space that had newly broken through the boundary wall holding his consciousness immured, as it were, kept persistently speaking to him all morning long; that space had certainly been there earlier—a very long time earlier, at that—but Meltzer had never taken notice of it. And yet the whole thing stood its ground, blocking all efforts at remembering or explaining (though these were being undertaken only during gaps a few seconds long, to be sure, and so were not truly serious), the way a brick wall blocks one's path.

When he spotted Editha on the Graben now (he caught up with her before they reached St. Peter's), there sounded in him again here a bit of the past—but it could be named and explained this time—even though it at once quickly retreated, as if it were a little shadow slipping around a corner, from the gladness he was feeling so immediately in the present. The way she said hello to him, incidentally, may not have been downright cold, but it was quite uninvolved, exactly as her manner had been three days before in the car, despite their not having seen one another for twelve years; it was now 1923, after all,

and that was how far back in the past the garden party at the Schmellers' place in Grinzing lay, the one that had cost Herr von Semski a part of his happiness in life (at the time, of course, he thought he'd lost all of it). Meltzer had been at that party, asked along somehow as one of the crowd that went around with Asta Stangeler and hence with Ingrid Schmeller as well. That was the last occasion, at any rate, in August of 1911, on which he'd seen Editha, which in turn, though, had been after getting to see her almost every day for the previous two weeks, at the Stangelers' villa, where she'd likewise been invited as a special favor to her girlfriend Ingrid Schmeller.

He walked along the Graben with Editha. Had he known that counting from that very day he would not see her again for almost two more years, there is no question but that he would have felt a measure of pain, an empty place opening up, a loss.

But he didn't know it.

Besides, her behavior underwent a change—sudden, startling, spasmodic. After about only twenty paces she began talking to him in a very animated way, turning toward him and asking him all sorts of questions (whether he knew, for example, where Edouard von Langl was keeping himself these days, and the same about a certain Konietzki, a man who looked, as the mother of the Stangeler family always remarked, like a dethroned king of Poland—"Oh, yes, I do quite a lot of foreign traveling," she would toss in. Then she asked Meltzer with obvious concern and interest about his present job and the duties involved—apparently having been filled in by the dragoon captain in the meanwhile—and how everything was going for him now that he was "in civvies" all the time.)

Still, their conversation didn't progress very far.

Right before they got to the corner of the square at St. Stephen's, by the bookstore, they saw Ingrid von Budau, née Schmeller, walking straight towards them, arm in arm with her husband.

Meltzer lifted his hat. And because they passed one another at very close range, he bowed slightly as he walked by and said, "Good afternoon." Ingrid, although this was hardly the first time he had seen her and greeted her on the street here in the city center, gave no acknowledgment of any kind, but just stared off to the right, past Meltzer, as though her eyes were made of glass. Herr von Budau's preference was to look at the display in a store window. They were gone.

The major felt somewhat taken aback and disconcerted (never mind that concerted planning was his job!), not by any means only because of the inexplicable and novel behavior of Frau von Budau; no, it was far more because those bicycles from early that morning popped into his head all of a sudden, or rather just plain forced themselves in (which clearly makes no sense at all, however), and because he now imagined, after the fact, that he had actually been expecting some encounter along these lines even before it happened (and this in its turn struck him as altogether weird).

Meanwhile, they had come to the square at St. Stephen's, and there Editha let loose, not holding back in the least.

"Did you ever see such nerve? That stupid nitwit! That was the exact same place—strange, come to think of it—where she cut me no more than a couple of weeks ago; all right, I admit I did the same thing to her. We never speak. Not since 1911. You remember, don't you? I'm sure you must have heard all about it from Asta Stangeler back then."

"Yes, I did," Meltzer said, "but can't we learn later on to get over these foolish little squabbles from our youth? Forgive me for saying that to you, but that's my honest opinion."

"Not mine," she retorted, decisively and snappishly, as they went walking along slowly and the alternating stench and noise of the buses—which at that time used to set up a ground-shaking carousel ride going around and around the cathedral night and day—covered what they were saying so well that they had no particular need to lower their voices.

"Not mine," Editha repeated, and continued, vehement all of a sudden, not to say almost uncontrolled in the way she lashed out. "But don't worry, this is just between me and that doughbrained moron, that total nitwit, that decked-out organ grinder's monkey—she really looks like that today. But to ignore a nice hello from a gentleman for the simple reason that he happens to be in my company, just to make sure that it could never look—oh no, perish the thought!—as if she were bidding me good day as well? That's the height of imbecilic, brazen-faced rudeness. What happens when I'm not around? This can't be the first time you've met up with this Ingrid woman on the street and said hello. Does she acknowledge you then?"

"Yes," said Meltzer.

"Well, there you have it!" Editha cried, turning away from him at the bus stop near the Café de l'Europe and peering out as she stood there. "Her husband, that Budau, you know, he's one of the most perfect specimens of the mentally defective you'll find around Vienna. Of course he's going to play along with something like this; ever the doting hubby, that ninny. *Quant à moi, je m'embêterais à mourir avec un dandin de cette sorte.* The dragoon captain saw him playing tennis once at the Park Club and said he runs like a spavined horse."

"Herr von Budau probably didn't have any choice but to play along with his wife, as you put it," the major suggested.

"Whatever," said Editha. And with this one word, the tone came back that she'd started off with, when they'd met on the other side of St. Peter's—uninvolved and offhanded, if not cold. She walked a few steps over toward a bus that towered high above her as it pulled up; it was probably the one she'd been keeping an eye out for. Then she turned back to Meltzer and shook hands with him quickly. He looked at her, taking in her whole appearance at once, but this abrupt leave-taking plunged him into something like helplessness. Only now, as if it weren't too late, did it dawn on him how beautifully she was dressed, how wonderfully becoming to her this dove gray suit was, how fetchingly her little hat perched on her head. "Good-bye," she said and climbed up the narrow stairs to the roof (these vehicles had such a thing at the time in Vienna). She seemed to have found a seat on the other side of the bus, toward the cathedral, removed

from his range of vision. The bus had pulled up and driven off with noise and stench.

Meltzer stepped away from the curb and kept standing there in front of the Café de l'Europe. Oddly enough, that one sentence in French, spoken so hurriedly by Editha amidst all the rest, now seemed to him like a key to her nature, like the explanation and, as such, virtually the resolution of a dissonance which had all the while been penetrating from her words into his ears as if with a smooth file. The actual content of the sentence in French was totally insignificant ("As for myself, I'd be bored to death with a smacked ass like that"). Even so, it gave audible evidence, and in the most concise form, that Editha spoke from, as it were, a wellspring closer to her than Viennese German, the language which, perhaps on a whim, she had gone out of her way to use just now, drawing on vulgar words while she was at it, but not violating its inner grammatical essence, which is just what a foreigner (and that doesn't necessarily mean geographical) would do. There are foreigners among the natives, among the Parisians as among the Viennese, among the Genevans as among the Athenians. At the moment, of course, Meltzer was far from busy thinking up dicta like these. What came flying at him all of a sudden, though, flying at him like an arrow that pierces, sticks, and comes to rest with its shaft trembling, was that he could now see, as if uncovered and laid bare, the place from which arose the appeal Editha had for him—it was this faint little hint of something foreign, this touch of the outsider looking in, somehow sweetly all thumbs; it was this language! He would have liked to hear her speaking some time in pure standard German—would she bring in that slight, even gentle breach there as well? Probably not. Too bad.

Look at the way, for example, she'd used the phrase "perish the thought!" right in the midst of her choice Viennese effusions or the expression "bidding good day" instead of "saying hello," things no Viennese would ever say!

An air wafted toward Major Meltzer as though from a far distant horizon of his own inner self, while at the same time this autumn day with waning sun but sky still radiant nursed from him and sent him segmented in all directions, just as the star shape of the city fanned out from here, along the streets, to the four winds, out to greenery and open country, all estranged from which one stood and walked here. Out to those curious lands far to the south, too, which had once been parts of a whole. It was five years now since these nerve paths had been severed. Editha's sweet concoction of a doctored language oozed its way into the wound. Doctored, but not decreased in force. Likewise, a tennis ball that's been cut doesn't undergo a decrease in its tactical value through this "doctoring," but an increase instead.

He drifted along for a few seconds with his thoughts just floating. They went their own way, unmoored from any anchor, as sometimes happens right before we fall asleep. And there was the tennis court at the Stangelers' villa, lying somewhat higher up than the house itself. Geyrenhoff. Ingrid Schmeller. Marchetti. The prep-school boy René. But no Editha Pastré, even though he'd been seeing her there, running all over the place, for two weeks. First and foremost—Asta. The others weren't standing right, their feet solid on the

ground, in the area, in the terrain; they were more like tin soldiers on a little supporting footboard cut out of the grass or the gravel.

Suddenly it occurred to him that neither of Editha's parents was originally from Vienna, but from French-speaking Switzerland, from Lausanne or Geneva or some such place around there. He knew that much about her family, anyway. Now at last Meltzer had come upon the real key—to everything, he thought! Still, it was less suited for opening something than for locking it, and so that was what Meltzer did as he started to walk away from the place where he'd been standing. He left it behind him and headed along Rotenturm Strasse, toward the Danube Pier.

On the twelfth of May—it was 1911, that year we've already conjured up repeatedly—at around five in the afternoon, René Stangeler, still a prep-school pupil, was sitting and waiting in a parlor at the Royal and Imperial Consular Academy.

The longish room, of medium size, contained a few pieces of furniture in the Empire style. The tall, narrow window, set in a deep niche painted glossy white with sparse ornamentation in gold, opened out onto the park. The quite presentable atmosphere of this room was decidedly akin to the one prevailing in similar reception rooms all around the Austrian ministries of that time. The same could be said by analogy about the doorman—a cross between tried-and-true civil servant and smooth-shaved butler—who had shown René to this room. Half a glimpse from underneath his weary eyelids had been enough for him to size up what bin or box the young fellow there before him had come out of.

In his pocket, Stangeler was carrying a note from his sister Etelka to one of the students, Stephan Grauermann (dubbed in the Consular Academy "*Prince Coucou*" out of sheer silliness).

It was very quiet here. Nothing was stirring in the wide corridors outside the door.

The schoolboy was sitting in a dainty armchair. He had stretched out his legs and crossed them and was looking out of his slanted eyes at the tips of his tan shoes. René's facial expression was overcast, at the very least, if not altogether dark. The whole appearance of the boy (almost completely grown by now), his long legs in brown woolen socks and the trousers of his gray sports suit very stylish, made him look extremely slender, even scrawny and emaciated.

The silence came alive all of a sudden, and it divided at the same time. A piano struck up, close by on the same floor as this parlor, perhaps right in the next room. René, not moving, listened with the greatest of attention, but the expression on his face did not brighten in any way; something all drawn together like a knot stayed there, even though he knew after a few bars what was being played. It was the prelude to the great piano sonata in F-sharp minor by Robert Schumann. Some seconds later he heard light footsteps echoing as they came rapidly along the corridor outside in his direction. It was this second perception that finally set his features in motion. The attentiveness he had brought to bear when listening to the piano stayed where it was, but obviously

cutting across it now was the awareness that Grauermann was just about to step into the room here; this twofold discordance caused a third entity to leap up, one which a person would have been able to detect instantly in René. What had rapidly emerged out of the gap between two emotions going off in opposite directions was an irritation of no slight degree. Between the boy's eyebrows appeared a totally unchecked, sharply etched wrinkle.

It had vanished as Grauermann was coming in. The deep bell sounds of the prelude were still resounding from the next room. René had stood up quickly, and he took out the letter as he went up toward Grauermann, who first held his hand out to René with a smile. The student's face made a smooth and youthful impression above the wine red collar and the dark green jacket of his uniform. "Many thanks to you," he said; they sat down, and Grauermann opened the note and read it through. He nodded happily while he read.

Meanwhile, the unknown pianist next door had reached the end of the prelude and gone into the first movement, the effect of which on René was altogether manifest while Grauermann was asking him in a friendly way how he was, if his studies were going well, and other questions like that. René's divided attention, the greater part of which had unmistakably tipped over to the side of the piano music already, made this little chitchat die away after it had scarcely begun, while the main theme, pulsing and undergoing its fugal treatment next door, filled the room more and more strongly.

"What is that? I just can't place it. . ." asked Grauermann at last with a nod of his head toward the neighboring room.

"Schumann, the F-sharp minor," Stangeler said. "Etelka's working on it now," he added.

"Oh, of course!" cried Grauermann and slapped his forehead lightly with the flat of his hand. "If you'd like to listen, let's go next door. It's Teddy Honnegger playing, you know him. We just have to be quiet." He stood up, and Stangeler followed him. They walked a few steps down the corridor, and Grauermann opened a tall double door painted in white enamel, exactly like the one that led into the parlor they'd just left. They made no noise at all in their movements. Stangeler looked into the room first, as it was one he'd never been in before; the green from the park came shining through three high windows, along with some beams from the evening sun, which was glowing in the white niches of the windows. Grauermann and René stayed near the door, now shut again, of the music room, and stood on the thick rug; the piano, a baby grand, was set up to face the last window on the right in such a way that the person playing had his back turned to them.

Unintentionally but strikingly, their noiseless entrance coincided with the beginning of the second theme, which even on its own would send a shock of melodious sound through any human being at all gifted with the power of hearing. At this point, it took the entire situation into its compass—the gold-burnished green of the park, the aloneness of the man playing, the inexplicable strife in the heart of a very youthful individual, the equally inexplicable antagonisms in the relationship between Grauermann and Etelka, along with everything else, including the seconds now swiftly dropping down against the

slower background of time's river—the composer's upward-striving and gently cascading second main idea now subsumed and tempered all that was existent here in the present moment, so that it could come streaming into this form, as it were, fill in that form and take it on completely, leaving nothing whatever off to the side or external to itself. Stangeler could not put a name to this inner state, but he could feel it very clearly and distinctly. The emotion broke through to his face this time. One might say that his face untangled its knots. To a certain extent, he saw the light (as people call it) for these few seconds. In Grauermann's features, however—he was able to observe his schoolboy friend from the side without being noticed himself—something entirely different was showing, and it was coming out of no less central a chamber of his life at that time. It was a spasm of deep-seated and, if one will, nerve-related pain. Looking at René's youthful physiognomy brought the strong family resemblance between him and Etelka to the forefront of his mind, as was perfectly natural in an outsider (although no one inside the family itself had ever noted any particular resemblance between brother and sister). And now, as René's features thawed, Grauermann saw revealed in his face an undeniable and, as it were, fierce authenticity of relationship to that world—not just the world of music, or the world of the "fine arts" (as he called it), or the world of the "intelligentsia" in general (as he felt obligated to call it), in which he was, after all, constantly struggling (his way) to secure an informed foothold—rather, what he saw was a method of growing closer to life itself, although that method was not for him, since all it was ever able to do in his case was to lead him farther away from life, imposing itself on him and turning him into a fraud the minute he came anywhere near Etelka, even though being near her was exactly what he sought for day and night. For a few seconds he stared, full of repugnance, at René's face, like a prisoner looking at the bars of his cell window.

Granting that even then he already possessed a high degree of awareness about his own life, especially in comparison with others of the same age, one still cannot argue that Grauermann would have been at all capable of giving a name to the experience he went through during those moments in the music room of the Royal and Imperial Consular Academy, not at the time, anyway. Otherwise, it might have been able to define him differently, been able to steer, to turn, to divert his actions. But of course that's not what happened.

Etelka Stangeler had been educated in Dresden, at a boarding school run by a Fräulein Brandt, an establishment ordinarily enrolled only by foreigners, preferably by young girls from England. Etelka returned home from school very much a changed person after several years. She brought back with her a standard of education which, to be sure, had kept itself confined within the framework of instruction usual for young ladies, but which was alien to her parents' household even so. We can't even say that it was better or worse—it was just different, and that was what mattered about it (it's possible, too, that Etelka had in fact become somewhat more differentiated and had come to know more about nuances than was the rule in the Stangeler family). At any rate, she had gained access to a point of support lying outside her family's biases and

predispositions, and she used it as an inner reference. This condition of hers lay at only a shallow depth, however, lodged no deeper than in the epidermis of circumstance and situation, so to speak, at a layer where there was still relatively little harm done. What had far greater significance and went much deeper for Etelka as a woman, meanwhile, was what lay at the level of the whole style of living, including all the inner and outer formulas and etiquette connected with it. This was the level on which she dissociated herself, perhaps more pointedly than would have been altogether necessary, from so many manifestations of that southern penchant for letting everything slide; this is where Etelka placed some emphasis, and so it was the point of departure for her negation of her family—an obligato voice accompanying individuals of talent, unfortunately. In back of it stood a forceful will, an inheritance from her father, who seems to have deposited it *en bloc* into Etelka's account, so to speak. One can easily picture how the rest of it goes. It's all very well that Herr von Stangler never failed to make a splendid appearance, that he charmed everybody in the world outside his home, whether in business dealings or on social occasions; but within his family jurisdiction—at least back then, in his younger years—he would let loose with almost no restraints whatever, picking fights, bellowing, trampling underfoot. In this respect, he and his third daughter turned out to be exactly alike, both of them real "street angels," as they say in Vienna, delightful people outside the house, unbearable in many ways at home. Etelka, however, was no patriarch with a father's plenipotentiary powers and absolute, crushing authority over the finances; like the rest of the children, moreover, she had been born into the world with her nerves already bad (this is one area in which the father seems to have made very free in spending the capital on deposit while yet being quite punctiliously thrifty in the others). Whenever he would walk into the spacious dining room, sweating a little, his shoulders twitching with "nervous energy," which is what Guy de Maupassant calls it, his handsome head lowered slightly like a bull getting ready to charge any second, then Etelka's will, no less intense than her father's, would be swept aside and sent scampering away by his forceful manner of entering the room. And when—it happened often—the aggressive opening attack would then ensue, she would be likely first to say something impudent in return and then pretty soon to change over to crying and pulling a woebegone face.

As time went by, this grew more and more predominantly to be the cast into which she would compose her features—at home, needless to say. There was a portrait of her dating from those years, a picture done up by one of those painters who had refined ideas about their art, albeit ones which would not have been too jarringly out of place in a photographer's studio, either (the father had had his children's portraits painted, one after the other, until it came to the two youngest, of whom pictorial representations cognate in kind already existed). Etelka's picture, a pastel drawing, was done completely in the spirit of the woebegone face; it's probable that the artist, who had never met Etelka before, did not get to see her in anything but this psychological costume, and it's more than probable that she in turn went out of her way to wear it to her sittings on purpose, as opposed to her usual practice outside the house. This isolated

rendering of just that one facet of her total personality had been done with outstanding fidelity, however, with the fidelity of an illustration in a book on natural history. Once it was finished, the picture gave the impression of being somehow veiled or blurred, as if clouded over by fog or mist or cigarette smoke, from behind which then emerged a face full of ennui and melancholy, far more ethereal than Etelka had ever been in real life, since at that time she was actually a strapping wench in the pink of health (although later in her life Frau Consul Grauermann suffered from insomnia to the point of suicide and did in fact end up literally committing suicide).

The outward features of Etelka Stangler's living situation after her return to her parents' home, in particular the spatial features, were extraordinarily conducive to her new separatism vis-à-vis her family. The dark town house, originally located at the tree-lined edge of the Prater, though soon to be blocked in on every side by nothing but new streets—though pleasant ones—of the growing city, was four stories high; the first one was occupied, until her passing, by the grandmother of the family, the widow of an architect. The second floor housed only company rooms and the father's office; the bedrooms were on the third floor. It will suffice to say of the fourth floor that a family of relatives, the father an architect, lived on it. Architects upon architects, as René's father had also been an architect originally, before he began his career as a construction engineer for the railroad. The husband of the family on the fourth floor was married to René's mother's sister and owned the house equally with Herr von Stangler, his brother-in-law. Quite a far-reaching amalgamation of genealogy and architecture, along with an elevated (at times even stratospherically elevated) level of self-assurance which was not without the most widespread possible consequences in the shape of stiff, starchy-looking Gothic churches and gigantic Renaissance nightmares that certain sections of the city had been almost entirely uglified by. But enough of that; our aim here, after all, is to investigate the outward conditions of Etelka's living on separate terms.

There were not enough bedrooms on the third floor. Etelka's father rented an apartment in the house that had since been built immediately adjoining, and he had a doorway broken through the thick fire wall, so they had several more rooms on the third floor. Three, to be exact; if one went to the last room (it was a breakfast room) belonging to the Stangler house proper and opened the communicating door, one first saw three steps going down, since the floors of the two buildings were not on the same level; these three steps were precisely fitted inside the door frame, whose depth needed to be adequate to fill the space of a strong, solid fire wall. Then came the three adjacent rooms, a small one first, then a moderately large one, and then another small one all the way at the end.

Earlier, the two oldest daughters had occupied these small rooms and had used the larger one in the middle, where there was a piano, among other things, as their common living room. After the two girls had married and moved abroad, Etelka and Asta succeeded them in the two rooms, now free; as the older, Etelka had the one in the back, where no one had to walk through, and so she lived in the very last room of the entire third floor altogether, with her back, so to speak,

to the very last wall of them all (a wall straight up which anybody would not infrequently be driven by such a volatile father).

Now this added-on apartment had some additional rooms besides, though—an unused kitchen, a servants' room (where two domestics employed in the Stangeler household slept), an entryway with a separate door to the apartment that opened out to another staircase entirely, down which one could go and step out onto a different street, since the building here was a corner house the main entrance of which was not on the same street as the Stangeler family's house.

No doubt our readers have already noticed where all this is leading, and the perspectives we're sighting now have long since opened up before them.

Still, those perspectives, if not totally obstructed, were at any rate cramped by an individual who called herself Frau Fuek and was the concierge in the corner house.

The rest, of course, just follows from there. Whether from the viewpoint of Etelka, of Asta, or of the two housemaids, who'd been in service here a good long time by now (they were all in the same boat concerning what we're about to say), everything depended essentially on their relations with Frau Fuek, relations which were carefully maintained, to be sure, but which were nevertheless kept within tight restraints by caution, and on Frau Fuek's side as well (given all the remunerative possibilities in these little arrangements), who had been explicitly forbidden to hand a house key over to anyone, something she really would never have had the nerve to do anyway, not even if she'd been asked outright for one (she might have made an exception here and there with the two domestics). But she was never once asked. No one wanted to be quite that open about it, and so they were all resigned to writing off that most remote and distant of escape hatches (which might have offered a way back down the wall Etelka had been driven up) as an unattainable goal after ten at night, or for that matter even earlier, since the eye of the Fuek ranged through a peephole over the comings and goings of every single person, and, as that Viennese philosopher Johann Nestroy puts it, "morals hold up until nine o'clock, but then, at quarter after, the hour of suspicion begins." All of this taken together provides us with an explanation for the rather strange set of circumstances whereby Etelka Stangeler, in whose favor the whole layout of the place seemed to be so well arranged, still used to make her way, when she would go out on her nocturnal jaunts back during those years, through the second floor, where her evening dress, along with a fur stole or a cape deposited there in advance, would be waiting in a huge, bowl-shaped copper container under the sideboard in the dining room. A spiral staircase led down from the third to the second floor. Innocently dressed in everyday clothes or perhaps even wearing her nightgown as she traveled the long route from her perch at the top of that farthest wall of them all, she would walk past the entryway when everyone had gone to bed and dart down the little staircase; if she should happen to run across anybody at any time, some slight excuse, such as a book of music she'd forgotten, or some such other thing she might need for her lesson the following morning, a note pad or her metronome, would easily see her through—she liked at times to practice on the concert grand on the second floor, because it was a

better instrument and stood in a room with better acoustics than the piano in her own living room upstairs. Just before changing clothes, before putting this one last dot on the *i* of her perfect preparations with make-up and hair, she had to look one more time before she leapt, like a seasoned old Alpine goat, and so she would stand in the large dining room, empty now but bright from her having turned on the chandelier, and listen once more as the seconds ticked away. Then she would rapidly complete her metamorphosis in front of the tall mirror by the pilaster arch. And now to get out of there, still listening the whole time, turning the lights out behind her. Then she was on the stairs; the house door clicked shut with almost no sound. And a key to her parents' house? She had one. Of course there was a concierge here as well, two, in fact, a married couple. But people of that sort go into a decline in the atmosphere of a private household, where a reign of terror is not possible and the keen powers of observation needed for them to stay on a firm footing are no longer a matter of life and death. The Richtereks behaved toward the Fueks the way a pampered lapdog behaves toward a wolf.

As we can see, Etelka was not tired of life, even if she did present herself at home in what we might call the *façon voilée*, subdued and veiled in melancholy (which of course brought on outbursts of rage from her father). At that time, her escapades by night were still completely harmless and innocent. They led her into circles that didn't exactly have any official acquaintance or connection with her parents' world, though everything stayed pretty much inside the same box or bin; on bright moonlit nights they would take rides through the Vienna Woods or the Wachau (there was even a car crash one time, and Etelka rushed to make a getaway by taxi, so that she wouldn't be summoned to appear as a witness in court, since one of the young fellows had almost broken his neck). She would occasionally spend half the night in some bar or *bodega*, though being careful to stay with her own crowd and to make sure there would be some other young women present, too. Asta was in on the whole thing and would faithfully wait up during Etelka's night flights. She wasn't always treated very kindly in return, by the way—markedly worse, in fact, ever since she'd made her own social debut and been through her first season of dances and parties. It even happened once that a new poppy red dress of Asta's, which may have set off her dark-skinned beauty only too well, came back to her all ripped and stained and made totally useless by her sister. But then again, they often showed great mutual affection, and Etelka had a sweet tooth, so Asta never failed to bring her, or to have waiting for her, a certain kind of chocolate éclair filled with marzipan from an Italian bakery in the neighborhood. After her sister's escapades, even the more taxing ones, Asta, right before going to sleep, would reach one of these bars of deliciousness through the crack in the door, so softly and secretly opened, whereupon a quick bite would instantly be taken out of it on the other side. That was just one of those things they did. Asta often stayed awake for hours on end when Etelka was out of the house at night. She seemed to sleep more calmly when she knew that Etelka had slipped back in safely and that everything was all right again this time.

Etelka's nocturnal expeditions had no connection whatever with Stephan Grauermann.

Their way of relating to one another was entirely different; it would have put one more in mind of the *façon voilée*. Grauermann was basically a healthy and sensible young fellow and, as we said before, he possessed no small degree of self-awareness for his age. He was wide awake, a quick-witted young man. His interest in becoming educated was partial evidence of that, surely, but it by no means constituted the basis of his being so alert, since it wasn't by this one means alone that he'd become so wide awake, so sharp. Still, the general need on the part of young people to discuss everything propelled him down that track for a while, and especially so after his path at the academy began to cross that of Teddy von Honnegger, who was two years older and therefore in a more advanced class. Incidentally, Etelka was also a bit older than Stephan (whom people mostly called by his Hungarian name of Istvan or Pista, and rightly so, as his father, chief physician and department head in Pressburg, was of Magyar extraction in spite of his German name). So between these two, Etelka and Teddy—who knew one another only slightly in those days—our boy Pista got trapped in a certain amount of crossfire. It hailed culture, and he took it as his model, but it was not actually what he understood that word to mean, for his mind never stopped picturing it as something polished and surveyed from a distance. Compared with Grauermann, though, the other two had something elemental—each in a different and individual way—about themselves, but of course in that relative sense only. We could also say that their culture did create a gear in the complete mechanism of their soul such that the mechanism would have been a totally different one without it; strictly speaking, then, we cannot maintain that they were geared up the wrong way or had a screw loose somewhere, however much they gave that impression from time to time.

Honnegger, who, to mention it in passing, was anything but what people call just simply a nice guy, had gained an accurate idea of the life of the mind insofar as he had taken to cognizance the pessimism inescapably concomitant with it. That was just about the only thing he had taken to cognizance at the time, however, and as for all the rest, he took refuge in his music (e t e~ m d d st ß —thinking doesn't make for the most pleasant of lives). On the other hand, his natural rapport (which unquestionably had its very solid foundation in his own life) with the writings of Doctor Schopenhauer soon found its correspondence in Grauermann in the form of a precise, comprehensive, and academically formal knowledge of that philosopher.

In Etelka, that same rapport underwent a wondrous transmogrification via discombobulation that reached the point of fruitful but eventually frightful misunderstanding. She soaked up this captivating language as dry ground soaks up rain, and it seemed to her to be, in fact, the very rain she needed. Her powers of comprehension were quick, alert, and shot through with lightning flashes of genuine emotion; her ability was undeniably adequate for her to take in what her chosen author was saying, but the aesthetic qualities of his writing kept on brilliantly camouflaging his conclusions from her sight. Gradually, her reading became a kind of interpretation of her own moods, and as much as this might

have been the wrong way of going about it, it was genuine, too; for her, all of the philosopher's writings turned out to be articulations of her own style of living. What came into being then was something like a more highly evolved and epistemologically grounded variety of the famous "*façon voilée*." For all the absurdity and addleheadedness, though, something completely genuine was set in motion inside Etelka, and it was in its effect on her that lay the power which these studies came, little by little, to exercise over Grauermann in a whole new way—it made no difference, either, how hard he kept trying to stage a rebellion just below the threshold of consciousness, proceeding in exactly the same way here as with music. And it was this kind of rebellion that was able to prevent him from even recognizing a piano sonata, never mind that he'd heard it a dozen times before.

Strange things for a pair of lovers to be studying! I think it's entirely possible that snobbishness alone was what kept relations between them from exceeding the permissible boundaries, as they're called—a pretty flimsy moral foundation, one may well object, but it held. Everything about young people is permeated by a yearning for form, and they make many sacrifices to it, even the most preposterous, without quite knowing they're doing it. And, in this instance, their form could undoubtedly have been crushed by the, the—oh let's just say it!—vitalism so plain to see between them.

They had enough opportunities, anyway. After all, their philosophical colloquies took place by that wall up which Etelka was driven. Asta was in connivance and at her post every time. Whenever the coast was clear—such as when Stangler *père* was off tramping around some mountain rail line under construction—Pista Grauermann would make his way straight to the wall in question, but without waiting at the front door while his social call was announced; that is, he chose the route leading past the Cyclops eye of Frau Fuek, convinced that his path was covered and that he wasn't attracting any attention. That was where he was wrong. His uniform, mistaken for an officer's, prompted an especially keen investigation, in fact, and one winter evening, after his sixth or seventh return visit, the eye of the Fuek went so far as to follow him around a turn in the staircase, from landing to landing the distance of a whole floor, her felt slippers as quiet as if they'd been a bat's wings, since she wanted to find out for sure which apartment he was slipping into, and naturally she was successful, even though, at almost the same moment, while she was making the sharp turn onto the next landing, the workings of centrifugal force caused one of her well-padded slippers to fly off and tap against the wall; when Grauermann, a boy with some experience, turned around again upon hearing the noise—he'd been just about to step through the door—and peered down over the banister, he saw a gray shadow darting back downstairs and realized what was going on. A while ago, we called him an alert young man, and now he's going to prove it so we won't be embarrassed in front of the reader. What he now did, in spite of Etelka's uneasiness, was to stay in her room past the Nestroyan hour of suspicion; for that matter, he didn't leave until some time after ten o'clock, his explicit purpose, all cool and calm, being to have the concierge unlock the street door of the house, whereupon he overtipped her for her trouble, but to a

moderate degree, slipping if not a gulden, at least a crown into the outstretched prehensile claw of the Fuek. From then on, this practice was repeated at reasonable and infrequent intervals. However, Grauermann was careful after then to avoid leaving the house too shortly before ten, for fear of causing commotion; and besides, he almost always came in the afternoon. In sum, peace was preserved.

It was a strange world that gathered and cooked up its pastimes at Etelka's upstairs, in the "*Quartier Latin*," as Herr von Stangeler jokingly used to call the apartment given over to his two daughters who were still at home. And if one were to take a closer look, one would begin to notice a good many ways of acting to which later on, in the last year of her life, it was very frightening to watch Etelka revert in the form of pronounced and even irreversibly deep-seated behaviors; this existence behind closed curtains, this *façon voilée* even in her interior self—no edges, no contours, no light, and no shadow—all of it sometimes punctuated by episodes frenzied in the intensity of their attack, such as renewed nocturnal outings with the evening dress in the copper bowl or escapades involving sports in wintertime. That was when skiing was getting to be all the rage, and Etelka was the first woman to travel with a downhill racing team, the only woman in this first-place group, and one who could always keep pace with men who were considered the top-ranking skiers of their time. But then it would come back—day in and day out, nothing but Turkish coffee and cigarettes, *façon voilée*.

Pista brought a Near Eastern flavor with him. The students at the academy had that air anyway, and it was constantly being reimported to Waisenhaus Gasse whenever the attachés from Turkey, from Arabia, from Persia, or from North Africa would come back for a visit to their alma mater. And indeed a path led straight from Doctor Schopenhauer over to Indian philosophy, or at least to that which Schopenhauer would have thought was Indian philosophy, in accordance with his sources, and which, as a result, Etelka and Pista likewise imagined it to be, only seventeen stories lower. A good thing that Carl Eugen Neumann's translations of the discourses of Gautama Buddha had not yet been published; who knows, but it doesn't seem as if they would have been able to get very far with them. "And the monk rejoices," as it says every time the meditation has reached a slightly higher stage—but because he has given way to rejoicing, poor fellow, the whole thing drops all the way back to the starting point every time! It's my guess that our two monks would have done overmuch rejoicing right at the start. Pista had given Etelka a Turkish coffee service of the same kind Meltzer owned; perhaps you still remember it. This was the way they did things on Waisenhaus Gasse; a Turkish coffee service was just part of it, as was the crescent moon with star that the academy's hockey team wore on their jerseys. Of course, hockey must have been getting to be something of a rarity at that time, for soccer had long since caught on and grown popular in Vienna.

So there were many quiet and veiled times together in the "*Quartier Latin*," and only if we were to view it at too close a distance would our pair of little snobs come to strike us as merely ridiculous. However, a glance backward from out of the formlessness of our own time, with all its life-driven hustle and bustle

(which in reality arises from a much more radical falling out with life), shifts the perspective to an angle from which we can make a judgment. To specify, these two young people were at least making up their own lies for themselves, whereas today we can't even begin to do that any more; instead, we have to go out and get this article store-bought, and quite naturally the goods aren't going to be anywhere nearly as fresh and pliable as if they were home-made. From their vantage point, one can, in the course of time, still gain access to a stepping stone that leads over to the truth, whereas the person used to just buying ready-made products has long since lost the ability to pick up the faintest scent of it with his technician's nose, now adapted to nothing but gasoline and lubricating oil.

And besides, what do we mean when we talk about a lie here? They were in love, or at least they were under a strong mutual attraction (which, given the most exact scrutiny, might very possibly have proven to be composed of a great many facets, like the eye of a housefly under the microscope—but does an analysis of a phenomenon ever make it go away?), and they had enough flair to give a nimbus, a style, an aura to their experience, to take charge, even if only slightly, of where it was going, which I still think of as a good quality compared to the short circuits, the short, shorter, and shortest contacts between two points of salience, which is how it is among our young people of today, who are honest and forthright all the way down to that same ground they end up trampling everything into. Shall we demand from a loving couple that their philosophy have the truth in it? Oh, I know, what we'd rather demand is a loving couple minus any and all philosophy. Me too. But we grow tolerant over time. Love turns everything into a mere decoration, and if we went ahead and let those people have their way, they would call in any ordinary old handyman, have him plane down the most priceless statues of all the saints to make them over into bedposts, and then feel ever so nicely elevated and completely unburdened up there on the bed that would result.

For our couple here, one of such decorative posts was made up of a certain Omar Khayyám, a poet from the Arabic cultural area who lived in India around the middle of the eleventh century and whose work spread out from that region in some obscure way. His epigrammatic poems, called "*rubaiyát*," were first translated into French and English and then achieved further dissemination through several other European languages. The edition Grauertmann had given to his Etelka was exceptionally beautiful, bound in dark green leather and bearing no decoration other than a pillared Arabian arch in gold, fine lines embossed into the leather, one of those Moorish gateways that reminds one of certain leaf shapes and that can be met with everywhere in Eastern architecture (someone once gave it the very catchy name of "the black-coffee style"). The epigrams stood alone, only one on each page of the book, which seemed like the most appropriate way to arrange the quatrains, with their compression of content, since it gave them enough room, so to speak, in which to explode, whereupon they did not just fill the thoughts of the reader but also went on to overrun the blank part of the page, as it were. These little poems, indeed, acted

like the overflowing contents of a strongbox crammed full and now having its lid pried off.

They worked a whole lot better than Doctor Schopenhauer. The two were alert enough readers, after all, especially Etelka.

So many strange things happen in a large city, a large, southern city the sky over which, already hot in May, sends its crackling bright blue, like a flag snapping in the wind, through the crowded and colorful streets. Omar Khayyám. Etelka smoked tiny little thin cigarettes that had a trumpet in gold stamped on them. Their brand name was "Figaro." This kind of large city, for all its blare and its glare, is also a place to envy for the caverns it holds inside itself, sweet-scented, well cared for, hidden away, like veiled, concealed chambers of its soul.

And the quiet coolness in the stairways. It can well be said that one did not merely step into them from the street; one took one's departure from the street instead.

Etelka was lying on a small chaise longue beside which Grauermann was sitting on the floor, and here too stood the embossed copper tray with the coffee service from Mostar (for an Austrian of that time, it was still a domestic product).

His face now seemed, as it so often seemed to Etelka, inexpressibly young and smooth, and that almost frightened her. It was an elegant face, too, with a perfectly straight turned-up nose from which, even at his age, two fine, sharp lines ran down to the corners of his mouth. His large gray-blue eyes beamed with decency and with a cheerful coolness that seemed able to lure Etelka into coming out from all her entanglements and into a proper degree of good humor. She leaned over, drew his head to herself, and kissed his fragrant-smelling hair. Grauermann stayed leaning on her breast, his eyes closed, and he let the book in his hands drop. After a while he stood up, leaned over Etelka, and carefully brushed back her hair. She didn't much like him to do that, really, since it revealed a flaw in her beauty; her forehead, which would then become visible, was high, steeply vertical, and at the same time wide (almost bovine because of this last-named feature—and why shouldn't we say so, considering that the very father of all novelists compares the eyes of the goddess Hera to those of a cow, apparently guided by Winckelmann's "noble simplicity and quiet grandeur"?!). This forehead, which looked as if a powerful will had given it a dome shape, was decidedly too large for a woman's face; released from its covering of hair, it pressed that face all together and gave it, in spite of a strong mouth and chin, an insignificant look, like a flimsy base for the steep cliff on top of it. Against it, we could say, Grauermann's love unceasingly beat in caring and wearing little waves. It was her father's forehead.

Pista, however, kept on scanning this forehead for something else, namely for some kind of remote affinity with his friend Teddy Honnegger, as though he were trying to fit them both, the girl he loved and his good friend, into the same category.

Etelka, her eyes meeting Grauermann's, smiled and then turned away slightly. She brushed her hair back down over her forehead.

While she was looking up at him, it passed through her mind that she really liked him even more out in the countryside (that was where they'd first come to know one another), where he'd be wearing his baggy farmer's coat and an open tennis shirt, than in the green jacket of his uniform, even though it became him very well. Out in the country, in that sunny world, half-rustic and yet well tended at the same time, of small summer pastimes, in a mountain village set far deep inside, away from the end of the valley and a three-hour walk from the nearest railroad station—that was where the first of her experiences connected with Grauermann had their roots, that was where, considering how little variety there was in one's social life, he'd been proffered to her on a serving tray, so to speak, as a singular attraction, and she'd had enough opportunities, in all the freedom of woodland and crag, to enjoy his romantic manner of paying court. Doctor Grauermann's stepparents also resided out there, and Pista's maternal grandfather, who bore a name very well known in the German publishing industry at that time, was famous—strange original that he was, legendary for his abusiveness—for taking solitary walks one summer after another, during which to meet him was not exactly pleasant, because whenever he felt like it, he would throw stones at any person who came within his range. Pista had taken Etelka along, tied to the same rope, whenever he went climbing the jagged and fissured limestone crags of the Rax Alps, and these hours of concentrated effort under the brilliant blue of the sky, amid the deep silence of the steep chasms, had made up the prelude to their love, a love which then, in surroundings just like these—on a wide band of rock over some dry runnels of scree that flowed away from one another in finger shapes—eventually came to the point of being openly declared.

For the time being, conditions were most inopportune for announcing an engagement publicly, since Etelka, much to the wrath of her father, had not long before broken off an engagement that he had keenly welcomed. And at the end of this summer Grauermann would be moving up into only his third year at the Consular Academy.

So the whole thing was kept secret for a while. That was Etelka's will.

Now she sat upright on the chaise longue, and Grauermann continued reading to her the "fourfold root of the law of sufficient reason."

He'd scarcely gotten off to a good start when Asta's footsteps were heard out in the piano room next door, followed by a faint scratching at the door of Etelka's room, a prearranged sign that the coast was clear and that there was no reason for alarm, just that Asta wanted to join them. "Come on in!" called Etelka, smiled in a somewhat disturbed way, and went with Grauermann, who had stood up quickly, to the door, since nothing else was happening. Only a narrow crack was noiselessly opened up. At about half the height of the door, a dark-colored, well-known object came reaching in toward Etelka, moving closer and closer to her, until the little tinfoil sleeve grew visible that wrapped the one end of this bar of deliciousness, made of chocolate and marzipan.

"And what is this?" cried Etelka in a low voice, stepping back, her hands raised, splendidly feigning surprise and shock.

"You ought to know," Asta now said, and opened the door all the way. Grauermann gave her a friendly greeting full of genuine and warm feeling. And Etelka had also put aside her veiled, world-spurning humor in the meantime and gone ahead and taken a hearty bite.

These were exactly the things Asta couldn't stand about her sister, though.

René Stangeler left the Consular Academy at quarter to six and turned left, walking a few slow steps uphill along Waisenhaus Gasse.

The prep-school pupil felt totally bowled over by the impression he'd just received of a sphere of living and a way of living compared with which his own world dropped to the ground like a withered leaf and lay in the dull dust. Even leaving out of consideration that at this time Stangeler couldn't so much as look at anybody or anything without immediately wanting to be it and to live in the manner and the milieu proper to it—everything had the same effect on him, too, an opera or a detective movie—what he had just experienced fit in with his taste the way a key fits into a lock, and it opened up a little door to the safe of his glimmering ideas.

He was not aware that it was mainly Herr von Honnegger to whom he owed so profound an impression, one produced within fifteen minutes and solely because Herr Teddy was much too grown up and long since too clever to allow his own superiority to manifest itself in front of a mere boy. (Yes, it was as a boy that he thought of this young man in the upper prep-school grades; René's progress had been delayed, and by more than a year and a day, for he'd originally been sent off to a technical school, which did not prove with such certainty to be a mistake until his second year there.)

It was the whole thing that was now carrying and enkindling René—the F-sharp minor sonata, the small waiting room, the silence in the building, the sunlight in the music salon, where the three of them had sat and had even had a nice talk. The content of that talk was the most unimportant thing about it, however. Already Stangeler had completely forgotten it. To a certain extent, he'd been forced into this conversation by the outward situation in which he'd found himself. As for the rest, everything seemed to him to have gone along easily and freely.

To be continued

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