

# Bertha Garlan

## Arthur Schnitzler

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BERTHA GARLAN

BY ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

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She was walking slowly down the hill; not by the broad high road which wound its way towards the town, but by the narrow footpath between the trellises of the vines. Her little boy was with her, hanging on to her hand and walking all the time a pace in front of her, because there was not room on the footpath for them to walk side by side.

The afternoon was well advanced, but the sun still poured down upon her with sufficient power to cause her to pull her dark straw hat a little further down over her forehead and to keep her eyes lowered. The slopes, at the foot of which the little town lay nestling, glimmered as though seen through a golden mist; the roofs of the houses below glistened, and the river, emerging yonder amongst the meadows outside the town, stretched, shimmering, into the distance. Not a quiver stirred the air, and it seemed as if the cool of the evening was yet far remote.

Bertha stooped for a moment and glanced about her. Save for her boy, she was all alone on the hillside, and around her brooded a curious stillness. At the cemetery, too, on the hilltop, she had not met anybody that day, not even the old woman who usually watered the flowers and kept the graves tidy, and with whom Bertha used often to have a chat. Bertha felt that somehow a considerable time had elapsed since she had started on her walk, and that it was long since she had spoken to anyone.

The church clock struck--six. So, then, scarcely an hour had passed since she had left the house, and an even shorter time since she had stopped in the street to chat with the beautiful Frau Rupius. Yet even the few minutes which had slipped away since she had stood by her husband's grave now seemed to be long past.

"Mamma!"

Suddenly she heard her boy call. He had slipped his hand out of hers and had run on ahead.

"I can walk quicker than you, mamma!"

"Wait, though! Wait, Fritz!" exclaimed Bertha. "You're not going to leave your mother alone, are you?"

She followed him and again took him by the hand.

"Are we going home already?" asked Fritz.

"Yes; we will sit by the open window until it grows quite dark."

Before long they had reached the foot of the hill and they began to walk towards the town in the shade of the chestnut trees which bordered the high-road, now white with dust. Here again they met but few people. Along the road a couple of wagons came towards them, the drivers, whip in hand, trudging along beside the horses. Then two cyclists rode by from the town towards the country, leaving clouds of dust behind them. Bertha stopped mechanically and gazed after them until they had almost

disappeared from view.

In the meantime Fritz had clambered up onto the bench beside the road.

"Look, mamma! See what I can do!"

He made ready to jump, but his mother took hold of him by the arms and lifted him carefully to the ground. Then she sat down on the bench.

"Are you tired?" asked Fritz.

"Yes," she answered, surprised to find that she was indeed feeling fatigued.

It was only then that she realized that the sultry air had wearied her to the point of sleepiness. She could not, moreover, remember having experienced such warm weather in the middle of May.

From the bench on which she was sitting she could trace back the course of the path down which she had come. In the sunlight it ran between the vine-trellises, up and up, until it reached the brightly gleaming wall of the cemetery. She was in the habit of taking a walk along that path two or three times a week. She had long since ceased to regard such visits to the cemetery as anything other than a mere walk. When she wandered about the well-kept gravel paths amongst the crosses and the tombstones, or stood offering up a silent prayer beside her husband's grave, or, maybe, laying upon it a few wild flowers which she had plucked on her way up, her heart was scarcely any longer stirred by the slightest throb of pain. Three years had, indeed, passed since her husband had died, which was just as long as their married life had lasted.

Her eyes closed and her mind went back to the time when she had first come to the town, only a few days after their marriage--which had taken place in Vienna. They had only indulged in a modest honeymoon trip, such as a man in humble circumstances, who had married a woman without any dowry, could treat himself to. They had taken the boat from Vienna, up the river, to a little village in Wachau, not far from their future home, and had spent a few days there. Bertha could still remember clearly the little inn at which they had stayed, the riverside garden in which they used to sit after sunset, and those quiet, rather tedious, evenings which were so completely different from those her girlish imagination had previously pictured to her as the evenings which a newly-married couple would spend. Of course, she had had to be content.

She was twenty-six years old and quite alone in the world when Victor Mathias Garlan had proposed to her. Her parents had recently died. A long time before, one of her brothers had gone to America to seek his fortune as a merchant. Her younger brother was on the stage; he had married an actress, and was playing comedy parts in third-rate German theatres. She was almost out of touch with her relations and the only one whom she visited occasionally was a cousin who had married a lawyer. But even that friendship had grown cool as years had passed, because the cousin had become wrapped up in her husband and children exclusively, and had almost ceased to take any interest in the doings of her unmarried friend.

Herr Garlan was a distant relation of Bertha's mother. When Bertha was quite a young girl he had often visited the house and made love to her in a rather awkward way. In those days she had no reasons to encourage him, because it was in another guise that her fancy pictured life and

happiness to her. She was young and pretty; her parents, though not actually wealthy people, were comfortably off, and her hope was rather to wander about the world as a great pianiste, perhaps, as the wife of an artist, than to lead a modest existence in the placid routine of the home circle. But that hope soon faded. One day her father, in a transport of domestic fervour, forbade her further attendance at the conservatoire of music, which put an end to her prospects of an artistic career and at the same time to her friendship with the young violinist who had since made such a name for himself.

The next few years were singularly dull. At first, it is true, she felt some slight disappointment, or even pain, but these emotions were certainly of short duration. Later on she had received offers of marriage from a young doctor and a merchant. She refused both of them; the doctor because he was too ugly, and the merchant because he lived in a country town. Her parents, too, were by no means enthusiastic about either suitor.

When, however, Bertha's twenty-sixth birthday passed and her father lost his modest competency through a bankruptcy, it had been her lot to put up with belated reproaches on the score of all sorts of things which she herself had begun to forget--her youthful artistic ambitions, her love affair of long ago with the violinist, which had seemed likely to lead to nothing, and the lack of encouragement which the ugly doctor and the merchant from the country received at her hands.

At that time Victor Mathias Garlan was no longer resident in Vienna. Two years before, the insurance company, in which he had been employed since he had reached the age of twenty, had, at his own request, transferred him, in the capacity of manager, to the recently-established branch in the little town on the Danube where his married brother carried on business as a wine merchant. In the course of a somewhat lengthy conversation which took place on the occasion of his farewell visit to Bertha's parents, and which created a certain impression upon her, he had mentioned that the principal reasons for his asking to be transferred to the little town were that he felt himself to be getting on in years, that he had no longer any idea of seeking a wife, and that he desired to have some sort of a home amongst people who were closely connected with him. At that time Bertha's parents had made fun of his notion, which seemed to them somewhat hypochondriacal, for Garlan was then scarcely forty years old. Bertha herself, however, had found a good deal of common sense in Garlan's reason, inasmuch as he had never appeared to her as, properly speaking, a young man.

In the course of the following years Garlan used often to come to Vienna on business, and never omitted to visit Bertha's family on such occasions. After supper it was Bertha's custom to play the piano for Garlan's entertainment, and he used to listen to her with an almost reverent attention, and would, perhaps, go on to talk of his little nephew and niece--who were both very musical--and to whom he would often speak of Fraulein Bertha as the finest pianiste he had ever heard.

It seemed strange, and Bertha's mother could not refrain from commenting now and again upon it, that, since his diffident wooing in the old days, Herr Garlan had not once ventured so much as to make the slightest further allusion to the past, or even to a possible future. And thus Bertha, in addition to the other reproaches to which she had to listen, incurred the blame for treating Herr Garlan with too great indifference, if not, indeed, with actual coldness. Bertha, however, only shook her

head, for at that time she had not so much as contemplated the possibility of marrying this somewhat awkward man, who had grown old before his time.

After the sudden death of her mother, which happened at a time when her father had been lying ill for many months, Garlan reappeared upon the scene with the announcement that he had obtained a month's holiday--the only one for which he had ever applied. It was clearly evident to Bertha that his sole purpose in coming to Vienna was to be of help to her in that time of trouble and distress. And when Bertha's father died a week after the funeral of her mother, Garlan proved himself to be a true friend, and one, moreover, blessed with an amount of energy for which she had never given him credit. He prevailed on his sister-in-law to come to Vienna, so that she could help Bertha to tide over the first few weeks of her bereavement, besides, in some slight degree, distracting her thoughts. He settled the business affairs capably and quickly. His kindness of heart did much to cheer Bertha during those sad days, and when, on the expiration of his leave, he asked her whether she would be his wife she acquiesced with a feeling of the most profound gratitude. She was, of course, aware of the fact that if she did not marry him she would in a few months' time have to earn her own living, probably as a teacher, and, besides, she had come to appreciate Garlan and had become so used to his company that she was able, in all sincerity, to answer "Yes," both when he led her to the altar and subsequently when, as they set off for their honeymoon, he asked her, for the first time, if she loved him.

It was true that at the very outset of their married life she discovered that she felt no love for him. She just let him love her and put up with the fact, at first with a certain surprise at her own disillusionment and afterwards with indifference. It was not until she found that she was about to become a mother that she could bring herself to reciprocate his affection. She very soon grew accustomed to the quiet life of the little town, all the more easily because even in Vienna she had led a somewhat secluded existence. With her husband's family she felt quite happy and comfortable; her brother-in-law appeared to be a most genial and amiable person, if not altogether innocent of an occasional display of coarseness; his wife was good-natured, and inclined at times to be melancholy. Garlan's nephew, who was thirteen years old at the time of Bertha's arrival at the little town, was a pert, good-looking boy; and his niece, a very sedate child of nine, with large, astonished eyes, conceived a strong attachment for Bertha from the very first moment that they met.

When Bertha's child was born, he was hailed by the children as a welcome plaything, and, for the next two years, Bertha felt completely happy. She even believed at times that it was impossible that her fate could have taken a more favourable shape. The noise and bustle of the great city came back to her memory as something unpleasant, almost hazardous; and on one occasion when she had accompanied her husband to Vienna, in order to make a few purchases and it so chanced, to her annoyance, that the streets were wet and muddy with the rain, she vowed never again to undertake that tedious and wholly unnecessary journey of three hours' duration. Her husband died suddenly one spring morning three years after their marriage. Bertha's consternation was extreme. She felt that she had never taken into consideration the mere possibility of such an event. She was left in very straitened circumstances. Soon, however, her sister-in-law, with thoughtful kindness, devised a means by which the widow could support herself without appearing to accept anything in the

nature of charity. She asked Bertha to take over the musical education of her children, and also procured for her an engagement as music teacher to other families in the town. It was tacitly understood amongst the ladies who engaged her that they should always make it appear as if Bertha had undertaken these lessons only for the sake of a little distraction, and that they paid her for them only because they could not possibly allow her to devote so much time and trouble in that way without some return. What she earned from this source was quite sufficient to supplement her income to an amount adequate to meet the demands of her mode of living, and so, when time had deadened the first keen pangs and the subsequent sorrow occasioned by her husband's death, she was again quite contented and cheerful. Her life up to then had not been spent in such a way as to cause her now to feel the lack of anything. Such thoughts as she gave to the future were occupied by scarcely any other theme than her son in the successive stages of his growth, and it was only on rare occasions that the likelihood of marrying a second time crossed her mind, and then the idea was always a mere fleeting fancy, for as yet she had met no one whom she was able seriously to regard in the light of a possible second husband. The stirrings of youthful desires, which she sometimes felt within her in her waking morning hours, always vanished as the day pursued its even course. It was only since the advent of the spring that she had felt a certain disturbance of her previous sensation of well-being; no longer were her nights passed in the tranquil and dreamless sleep of heretofore, and at times she was oppressed by a sensation of tedium, such as she had never experienced before. Strangest of all, however, was the sudden access of lassitude which would often come over her even in the daytime, under the influence of which she fancied that she could trace the course of her blood as it circled through her body. She remembered that she had experienced a similar sensation in the days when she was emerging from childhood. At first this feeling, in spite of its familiarity, was yet so strange to her that it seemed as though one of her friends must have told her about it. It was only when it recurred with ever-increasing frequency that she realized that she herself had experienced it before.

She shuddered, with a feeling as though she were waking from sleep. She opened her eyes.

It seemed to her that the air was all a-whirl; the shadows had crept halfway across the road; away up on the hilltop the cemetery wall no longer gleamed in the sunlight. Bertha rapidly shook her head to and fro a few times as though to waken herself thoroughly. It seemed to her as if a whole day and a whole night had elapsed since she had sat down on the bench. How was it, then, that in her consciousness time passed in so disjointed a fashion? She looked around her. Where could Fritz have gone to? Oh, there he was behind her, playing with Doctor Friedrich's children. The nursemaid was on her knees beside them, helping them to build a castle with the sand.

The avenue was now less deserted than it had been earlier in the evening. Bertha knew almost all the people who passed; she saw them every day. As, however, most of them were not people to whom she was in the habit of talking, they flitted by like shadows. Yonder came the saddler, Peter Nowak, and his wife; Doctor Rellinger drove by in his little country trap and bowed to her as he passed; he was followed by the two daughters of Herr Wendelein, the landowner; presently Lieutenant Baier and his \_fiancee\_ cycled slowly down the road on their way to the country. Then, again, there seemed to be a short lull in the movement before her and Bertha heard nothing but the laughter of the children as they played.

Then, again, she saw that some one was slowly approaching from the town, and she recognized who it was while he was still a long way off. It was Herr Klingemann, to whom of late she had been in the habit of talking more frequently than had previously been her custom. Some twelve years ago or more he had moved from Vienna to the little town. Gossip had it that he had at one time been a doctor, and had been obliged to give up his practice on account of some professional error, or even of some more serious lapse. Some, however, asserted that he had never qualified as a doctor at all, but, failing to pass his examinations, had finally given up the study of medicine. Herr Klingemann, for his own part, gave himself out to be a philosopher, who had grown weary of life in the great city after having enjoyed it to satiety, and for that reason had moved to the little town, where he could live comfortably on what remained of his fortune.

He was now but little more than five-and-forty. There were still times when he was of a genial enough aspect, but, for the most part, he had an extremely dilapidated and disagreeable appearance.

While yet some distance away he smiled at the young widow, but did not hasten his steps. Finally he stopped before her and gave her an ironical nod, which was his habitual manner of greeting people.

"Good evening, my pretty lady!" he said.

Bertha returned his salutation. It was one of those days on which Herr Klingemann appeared to make some claim to elegance and youthfulness. He was attired in a dark grey frock coat, so tightly fitting that he might almost have been wearing stays. On his head was a narrow brimmed brown straw hat with a black band. About his throat, moreover, there was a very tiny red cravat, set rather askew.

For a time he remained silent, tugging his slightly grizzled fair moustache upwards and downwards.

"I presume you have come from up there, my dear lady?" he said.

Without turning his head or even his eyes, he pointed his finger over his shoulder, in a somewhat contemptuous manner, in the direction of the cemetery behind him.

Throughout the town Herr Klingemann was known as a man to whom nothing was sacred, and as he stood before her, Bertha could not help thinking of the various bits of gossip that she had heard about him. It was well known that his relations with his cook, whom he always referred to as his housekeeper, were of a somewhat more intimate nature than that merely of master and servant, and his name was also mentioned in connexion with the wife of a tobacconist, who, as he had himself told Bertha with proud regret, deceived him with a captain of the regiment stationed in the town. Moreover, there were several eligible girls in the neighbourhood who cherished a certain tender interest in him.

Whenever these things were hinted at Herr Klingemann always made some sneering remark on the subject of marriage in general, which shocked the susceptibilities of many, but, on the whole, actually increased the amount of respect in which he was held.

"I have been out for a short walk," said Bertha.



"Alone?"

"Oh, no; with my boy."

"Yes--yes--of course, there he is! Good evening, my little mortal!"--he gazed away over Fritz's head as he said this--"may I sit down for a moment beside you, Frau Bertha?"

He pronounced her name with an ironic inflection and, without waiting for her to reply, he sat down on the bench.

"I heard you playing the piano this morning," he continued. "Do you know what kind of an impression it made upon me? This: that with you music must take the place of everything."

He repeated the word "everything" and, at the same time, looked at Bertha in a manner which caused her to blush.

"What a pity I so seldom have the opportunity of hearing you play!" he went on. "If I don't happen to be passing your open window when you are at the piano--"

Bertha noticed that he kept on edging nearer to her, and that his arm was touching hers. Involuntarily she moved away. Suddenly she felt herself seized from behind, her head pulled back over the bench and a hand clasped over her eyes.

For a moment she thought that it was Klingemann's hand, which she felt upon her lids.

"Why, you must be mad, sir," she cried.

"How funny it is to hear you call me 'Sir,' Aunt Bertha!" replied the laughing voice of a boy at her back.

"Well, do let me at least open my eyes, Richard," said Bertha, trying to remove the boy's hands from her face. "Have you come from home!" she added, turning round towards him.

"Yes, Aunt, and here's the newspaper which I have brought you."

Bertha took the paper which he handed to her and began to read it.

Klingemann, meanwhile, rose to his feet and turned to Richard.

"Have you done your exercises already?" he asked.

"We have no exercises at all now, Herr Klingemann, because our final examination is to take place in July."

"So you will actually be a student by this time next year?"

"This time next year! It'll be in the autumn!"

As he said this Richard drummed his fingers along the newspaper.

"What do you want, then, you ill-mannered fellow?" asked Bertha.

"I say, Aunt, will you come and visit me when I am in Vienna?"

"Yes, I should like to catch myself! I shall be glad to be rid of you!"

"Here comes Herr Rupius!" said Richard.

Bertha lowered the paper and looked in the direction indicated by her nephew's glance. Along the avenue leading from the town a maidservant came, pushing an invalid's chair, in which a man was sitting. His head was uncovered and his soft felt hat was lying upon his knees, from which a plaid rug reached down to his feet. His forehead was lofty; his hair smooth and fair and slightly grizzled at the temples; his feet were peculiarly large. As he passed the bench on which Bertha was seated he only inclined his head slightly, without smiling. Bertha knew that, had she been alone, he would certainly have stopped; moreover, he looked only at her as he passed by, and his greeting seemed to apply to her alone. It seemed to Bertha that she had never before seen such a grave look in his eyes as on this occasion, and she was exceedingly sorry, for she felt a profound compassion for the paralysed man.

When Herr Rupius had passed by, Klingemann said:

"Poor devil! And wifie is away as usual on one of her visits to Vienna, eh?"

"No," answered Bertha, almost angrily. "I was speaking to her only an hour ago."

Klingemann was silent, for he felt that further remarks on the subject of the mysterious visits of Frau Rupius to Vienna might not have been in keeping with his own reputation as a freethinker.

"Won't he really ever be able to walk again?" asked Richard.

"No," said Bertha.

She knew this for a fact because Herr Rupius had told her so himself on one occasion when she had called on him and his wife was in Vienna.

At that moment Herr Rupius seemed to her to be a particularly pitiful figure, for, as he was being wheeled past her in his invalid's chair, she had, in reading the paper, lighted upon the name of one whom she regarded as a happy man.

Mechanically she read the paragraph again.

"Our celebrated compatriot Emil Lindbach returned to Vienna a few days ago after his professional tour through France and Spain, in the course of which he met with many a triumphant reception. In Madrid this distinguished artist had the honour of playing before the Queen of Spain. On the 24th of this month Herr Lindbach will take part in the charity concert which has been organized for the relief of the inhabitants of Vorarlberg, who have suffered such severe losses as a result of the recent floods. A keen interest in the concert is being shown by the public in spite of the fact that the season is so far advanced."

Emil Lindbach! It required a certain effort on Bertha's part to realize that this was the same man whom she had loved--how many?--twelve years ago. Twelve years! She could feel the hot blood mount up into her brow.

It seemed to her as though she ought to be ashamed of having gradually grown older.

The sun had set. Bertha took Fritz by the hand, bade the others good evening, and walked slowly homewards.

She lived on the first floor of a house in a new street. From her windows she had a view of the hill, and opposite were only vacant sites.

Bertha handed Fritz over to the care of the maid, sat down by the window, took up the paper and began to read again. She had kept the custom of glancing through the art news first of all. This habit had been formed in the days of her early childhood, when she and her brother, who was now an actor, used to go to the top gallery of the Burg-Theater together. Her interest in art naturally grew when she attended the conservatoire of music; in those days she had been acquainted with the names of even the minor actors, singers and pianists. Later on, when her frequent visits to the theatres, the studies at the conservatoire and her own artistic aspirations came to an end, there still lingered within her a kind of sympathy, which was not free from the touch of homesickness, towards that joyous world of art. But during the latter portion of her life in Vienna all these things had retained scarcely any of their former significance for her; just as little, indeed, as they had possessed since she had come to reside in the little town, where occasional amateur concerts were the best that was offered in the way of artistic enjoyment. One evening during the first year of her married life, she had taken part in one of these concerts at the "Red Apple" Hotel. She had played two marches by Schubert as a duet with another young lady in the town. On that occasion her agitation had been so great that she had vowed to herself never again to appear in public, and was more than glad that she had given up her hopes of an artistic career.

For such a career a very different temperament from hers was necessary--for example, one like Emil Lindbach's. Yes, he was born to it! She had recognized that by his demeanour the very moment when she had first seen him step on to the dais at a school concert. He had smoothed back his hair in an unaffected manner, gazed at the people below with sardonic superiority, and had acknowledged the first applause which he had ever received in the calm, indifferent manner of one long accustomed to such things.

It was strange, but whenever she thought of Emil Lindbach she still saw him in her mind's eye as youthful, even boyish, just as he had been in the days when they had known and loved each other. Yet not so long before, when she had spent the evening with her brother-in-law and his wife in a restaurant, she had seen a photograph of him in an illustrated paper, and he appeared to have changed greatly. He no longer wore his hair long; his black moustache was curled downwards; his collar was conspicuously tall, and his cravat twisted in accordance with the fashion of the day. Her sister-in-law had given her opinion that he looked like a Polish count.

Bertha took up the newspaper again and was about to read on, but by that time it was too dark. She rose to her feet and called the maid. The lamp was brought in and the table laid for supper. Bertha ate her meal with Fritz, the window remaining open. That evening she felt an even greater tenderness for her child than usual; she recalled once more to memory the times when her husband was still alive, and all manner of reminiscences passed rapidly through her mind. While she was putting Fritz to bed, her

glance lingered for quite a long time on her husband's portrait, which hung over the bed in an oval frame of dark brown wood. It was a full-length portrait; he was wearing a morning coat and a white cravat, and was holding his tall hat in his hand. It was all in memory of their wedding day.

Bertha knew for a certainty, at that moment, that Herr Klingemann would have smiled sarcastically had he seen that portrait.

Later in the evening she sat down at the piano, as was a not infrequent custom of hers before going to bed, not so much because of her enthusiasm for music, but because she did not want to retire to rest too early. On such occasions she played, for the most part, the few pieces which she still knew by heart--mazurkas by Chopin, some passages from one of Beethoven's sonatas, or the Kreisleriana. Sometimes she improvised as well, but never pursued the theme beyond a succession of chords, which, indeed, were always the same.

On that evening she began at once by striking those chords, somewhat more softly than usual; then she essayed various modulations and, as she made the last triad resound for a long time by means of the pedal--her hands were now lying in her lap--she felt a gentle joy in the melodies which were hovering, as it were, about her. Then Klingemann's observation recurred to her.

"With you music must take the place of everything!"

Indeed he had not been far from the truth. Music certainly had to take the place of much.

But everything--? Oh, no!

What was that? Footsteps over the way....

Well, there was nothing remarkable in that. But they were slow, regular footsteps, as though somebody was passing up and down. She stood up and went to the window. It was quite dark, and at first she could not recognize the man who was walking outside. But she knew that it was Klingemann. How absurd! Was he going to haunt the vicinity like a love-sick swain?

"Good evening, Frau Bertha," he said from across the road, and she could see in the darkness that he raised his hat.

"Good evening," she answered, almost confusedly.

"You were playing most beautifully."

Her only answer was to murmur "really?" and that perhaps did not reach his ears.

He remained standing for a moment, then said:

"Good night, sleep soundly, Frau Bertha."

He pronounced the word "sleep" with an emphasis which was almost insolent.

"Now he is going home to his cook!" thought Bertha to herself.

Then suddenly she called to mind something which she had known for quite a long time, but to which she had not given a thought since it had come to her knowledge. It was rumoured that in his room there hung a picture which was always covered with a little curtain because its subject was of a somewhat questionable nature.

Who was it had told her about that picture? Oh, yes, Frau Rupius had told her when they were taking a walk along the bank of the Danube one day last autumn, and she in her turn had heard of it from some one else--Bertha could not remember from whom.

What an odious man! Bertha felt that somehow she was guilty of a slight depravity in thinking of him and all these things. She continued to stand by the window. It seemed to her as though it had been an unpleasant day. She went over the actual events in her mind, and was astonished to find that, after all, the day had just been like many hundreds before it and many, many more that were yet to come.

## II

They stood up from the table. It had been one of those little Sunday dinner parties which the wine merchant Garlan was in the habit of occasionally giving his acquaintances. The host came up to his sister-in-law and caught her round the waist, which was one of his customs on an afternoon.

She knew beforehand what he wanted. Whenever he had company Bertha had to play the piano after dinner, and often duets with Richard. The music served as a pleasant introduction to a game of cards, or, indeed, chimed in pleasantly with the game.

She sat down at the piano. In the meantime the door of the smoking-room was opened; Garlan, Doctor Friedrich and Herr Martin took their seats at a small baize-covered table and began to play. The wives of the three gentlemen remained in the drawing-room, and Frau Martin lit a cigarette, sat down on the sofa and crossed her legs--on Sundays she always wore dress shoes and black silk stockings. Doctor Friedrich's wife looked at Frau Martin's feet as though fixed to the spot by enchantment. Richard had followed the gentlemen--he already took an interest in a game of taroc. Elly stood with her elbows leaning on the piano waiting for Bertha to begin to play. The hostess went in and out of the room; she was perpetually giving orders in the kitchen, and rattling the bunch of keys which she carried in her hand. Once as she came into the room Doctor Friedrich's wife threw her a glance which seemed to say: "Just look how Frau Martin is sitting there!"

Bertha noticed all those things that day more clearly, as it were, than usual, somewhat after the manner in which things are seen by a person suffering from fever. She had not as yet struck a note. Then her brother-in-law turned towards her and threw her a glance, which was intended to remind her of her duty. She began to play a march by Schubert, with a very heavy touch.

"Softer," said her brother-in-law, turning round again.

"Taroc with a musical accompaniment is a speciality of this house," said Doctor Friedrich.

"Songs without words, so to speak," added Herr Martin.

The others laughed. Garlan turned round towards Bertha again, for she had suddenly left off playing.

"I have a slight headache," she said, as if it were necessary to make some excuse; immediately, however, she felt as though it were beneath her dignity to say that, and she added: "I don't feel any inclination to play."

Everybody looked at her, feeling that something rather out of the common was happening.

"Won't you come and sit by us, Bertha?" said Frau Garlan.

Elly had a vague idea that she ought to show her affection for her aunt, and hung on her arm; and the two of them stood side by side, leaning against the piano.

"Are you going with us to the 'Red Apple' this evening?" Frau Martin asked of her hostess.

"No, I don't think so."

"Ah," broke in Herr Garlan, "if we must forgo our concert this afternoon we will have one in the evening instead--your lead, Doctor."

"The military concert?" asked Doctor Friedrich's wife.

Frau Garlan rose to her feet.

"Do you really mean to go to the 'Red Apple' this evening?" she asked her husband.

"Certainly."

"Very well," she answered, somewhat flustered, and at once went off to the kitchen again to make fresh arrangements.

"Richard," said Garlan to his son; "you might make haste and run over and tell the manager to have a table reserved for us in the garden."

Richard hurried off, colliding in the doorway with his mother, who was just coming into the room. She sank down on the sofa as though exhausted.

"You can't believe," she said to Doctor Friedrich's wife; "how difficult it is to make Brigitta understand the simplest thing."

Frau Martin had gone and sat down beside her husband, at the same time throwing a glance towards Bertha, who was still standing silently with Elly beside the piano. Frau Martin stroked her husband's hair, laid her hand on his knee and seemed to feel that she was under the necessity of showing the company how happy she was.

"I'll tell you what. Aunt," said Elly suddenly to Bertha; "let's go into

the garden for a while. The fresh air will drive your headache away."

They went down the steps into the courtyard, in the centre of which a small lawn had been laid out. At the back, it was shut off by a wall, against which stood a few shrubs and a couple of young trees, which still had to be propped up by stakes. Away over the wall only the blue sky was to be seen; in boisterous weather the rush of the river which flowed close by could be heard. Two wicker garden chairs stood with their backs against the wall, and in front of them was a small table. Bertha and Elly sat down, Elly still keeping her arm linked in her aunt's.

"Tell you what, Elly?"

"See, I am quite a big girl now; do tell me about him."

Bertha was somewhat alarmed, for it struck her at once that her niece's question did not refer to her dead husband, but to some one else. And suddenly she saw before her mind's eye the picture of Emil Lindbach, just as she had seen it in the illustrated paper; but immediately both the vision and her slight alarm vanished, and she felt a kind of emotion at the shy question of the young girl who believed that she still grieved for her dead husband, and that it would comfort her to have an opportunity for talking about him.

"May I come down and join you, or are you telling each other secrets?"

Richard's voice came at that moment from a window overlooking the courtyard. For the first time Bertha was struck by the resemblance he bore to Emil Lindbach. She realized, however, that it might perhaps only be the youthfulness of his manner and his rather long hair that put her in mind of Emil. Richard was now nearly as old as Emil had been in the days of her studies at the conservatoire.

"I've reserved a table," he said as he came into the courtyard. "Are you coming with us, Aunt Bertha?"

He sat down on the back of her chair, stroked her cheeks, and said in his fresh, yet rather affected, way:

"You will come, won't you, pretty Aunt, for my sake?"

Mechanically Bertha closed her eyes. A feeling of comfort stole over her, as if some childish hand, as if the little fingers of her own Fritz, were caressing her cheeks. Soon, however, she felt that some other memory as well rose up in her mind. She could not help thinking of a walk in the town park which she had taken one evening with Emil after her lesson at the conservatoire. On that occasion he had sat down to rest beside her on a seat, and had touched her cheeks with tender fingers. Was it only once that that had happened? No--much oftener! Indeed, they had sat on that seat ten or twenty times, and he had stroked her cheeks. How strange it was that all these things should come back to her thoughts now!

She would certainly never have thought of those walks again had not Richard by chance--but how long was she going to put up with his stroking her cheek?

"Richard!" she exclaimed, opening her eyes.

She saw that he was smiling in such a way that she thought that he must

have divined what was passing through her mind. Of course, it was quite impossible, because, as a matter of fact, scarcely anybody in the town was aware that she was acquainted with Emil Lindbach, the great violinist. If it came to that, was she really acquainted with him still? It was indeed a very different person from Emil as he must now be that she had in mind--a handsome youth whom she had loved in the days of her early girlhood.

Thus her thoughts strayed further and further back into the past, and it seemed altogether impossible for her to return to the present and chatter with the two children.

She bade them good-bye and went away.

The afternoon sun lay brooding heavily upon the streets of the little town. The shops were shut, the pavements almost deserted. A few officers were sitting at a little table in front of the restaurant in the market square. Bertha glanced up at the windows of the first story of the house in which Herr and Frau Rupius lived. It was quite a long time since she had been to see them. She clearly remembered the last occasion--it was the day after Christmas. It was then that she had found Herr Rupius alone and that he had told her that his affliction was incurable. She also remembered distinctly why she had not called upon him since that day: although she did not admit it to herself, she had a kind of fear of entering that house which she had then left with her mind in a state of violent agitation.

On the present occasion, however, she felt that she must go up; it seemed as though in the course of the last few days a kind of bond had been established between her and the paralysed man, and as though even the glance with which he had silently greeted her on the previous day, when she was out walking, had had some significance.

When she entered the room her eyes had, first of all, to become accustomed to the dimness of the light; the blinds were drawn and a sunbeam poured in only through the chink at the top, and fell in front of the white stove. Herr Rupius was sitting in an armchair at the table in the centre of the room. Before him lay stacks of prints, and he was just in the act of picking up one in order to look at the one beneath it. Bertha could see that they were engravings.

"Thank you for coming to see me once again," he said, stretching out his hand to her. "You see what it is I am busy on just now? Well, it is a collection of engravings after the old Dutch masters. Believe me, my dear lady, it is a great pleasure to examine old engravings."

"Oh, it is, indeed."

"See, there are six volumes, or rather six portfolios, each containing twenty prints. It will probably take me the whole summer to become thoroughly acquainted with them."

Bertha stood by his side and looked at the engraving immediately before him. It was a market scene by Teniers.

"The whole summer," she said absent-mindedly.

Rupius turned towards her.



"Yes, indeed," he said, his jaw slightly set, as though it was a matter of vindicating his point of view; "what I call being thoroughly acquainted with a picture. By that I mean: being able, so to speak, to reproduce it in my mind, line for line. This one here is a Teniers--the original is in one of the galleries at The Hague. Why don't you go to The Hague, where so many splendid examples of the art of Teniers and so many other styles of painting are to be seen, my dear lady?"

Bertha smiled.

"How can I think of making such a journey as that?"

"Yes, yes, of course, that's so," said Herr Rupius; "The Hague is a very beautiful town. I was there fourteen years ago. At that time I was twenty-eight, I am now forty-two--or, I might say, eighty-four"--he picked up the print and laid it aside--"here we have an Ostade--'The Pipe Smoker.' Quite so, you can see easily enough that he is smoking a pipe. 'Original in Vienna.'"

"I think I remember that picture."

"Won't you come and sit opposite to me, Frau Bertha, or here beside me, if you would care to look at the pictures with me? Now we come to a Falkenborg--wonderful, isn't it? In the extreme foreground, though, it seems so void, so cramped. Yes, nothing but a peasant lad dancing with a girl, and there's an old woman who is cross about it, and here is a house out of the door of which someone is coming with a pail of water. Yes, that is all--a mere nothing of course, but there in the background you see, is the whole world, blue mountains, green towns, the clouded sky above, and near it a tourney--ha! ha!--in a certain sense perhaps it is out of place, but, on the other hand, in a certain sense it may be said to be appropriate. Since everything has a background and it is therefore perfectly right that here, directly behind the peasant's house, the world should begin with its tourneys, and its mountains, its rivers, its fortresses, its vineyards and its forests."

He pointed out the various parts of the picture to which he was referring with a little ivory paper-knife.

"Do you like it?" he continued. "The original also hangs in the Gallery in Vienna. You must have seen it."

"Oh, but it is now six years since I lived in Vienna, and for many years before that I had not paid a visit to the museum."

"Indeed? I have often walked round the galleries there, and stood before this picture, too. Yes, in those earlier days I \_walked\_."

He was almost laughing as he looked at her, and; her embarrassment was such that she could not make any reply.

"I fear I am boring you with the pictures," Herr Rupius went on abruptly. "Wait a little; my wife will be home soon. You know, I suppose, that she always goes for a two hours walk after dinner now. She is afraid of becoming too stout."

"Your wife looks as young and slender as ... well, I don't think she has altered in the very least since I have come to live here."

Bertha felt as though Rupius' countenance had grown quite rigid. Then suddenly he said, in a gentle tone of voice which was not by any means in keeping with the expression of his face:

"A quiet life in a little town such as this keeps me young, of course. It was a clever idea of mine and hers, for it occurred simultaneously to both of us, to move here. Who can say whether, had we stayed in Vienna, it might not have been all over already?"

Bertha could not guess what he meant by the expression "all over"; whether he was referring to his own life, to his wife's youthfulness, or to something else. In any case, she was sorry that she had called that day; a feeling of shame at being so strong and well herself came over her.

"Did I tell you," continued Rupius, "that it was Anna who got these portfolios for me? It was a chance bargain, for the work is usually very expensive. A bookseller had advertised it and Anna telegraphed at once to her brother to procure it for us. You know, of course, that we have many relations in Vienna, both Anna and myself. Sometimes, too, she goes there to visit them. Soon after they pay us a return visit. I should be very glad indeed to see them again, especially Anna's brother and his wife, I owe them a great deal of gratitude. When Anna is in Vienna, she dines and sleeps at their house--but, of course, you already know all that, Frau Bertha."

He spoke rapidly and, at the same time, in a cool, businesslike tone. It sounded as though he had made up his mind to tell the same things to every one who should enter the room that day. It was the first time that he had as much as spoken to Bertha of the journeys of his wife to Vienna.

"She is going again to-morrow," he continued; "I believe the matter in hand this time is her summer costume."

"I think that is a very clever notion of your wife," said Bertha, glad to have found an opening for conversation.

"It is cheaper, at the same time," added Herr Rupius. "Yes, I assure you it is cheaper even if you throw in the cost of the journey. Why don't you follow my wife's example?"

"In that way, Herr Rupius?"

"Why, in regard to your frocks and hats! You are young and pretty, too!"

"Heavens above! On whose account should I dress smartly?"

"On whose account! On whose account is it that my wife dresses so smartly?"

The door opened and Frau Rupius entered in a bright spring costume, a red sunshade in her hand and a white straw hat, trimmed with red ribbon, on her dark hair, which was dressed high. A pleasant smile was hovering around her lips, as usual, and she greeted Bertha with a quiet cheerfulness.

"Are you making an appearance in our house once more?" she said, handing her sunshade and hat to the maid, who had followed her into the room.

"Are you also interested in pictures, Frau Garlan?"

She went up close behind her husband and softly passed her hand over his forehead and hair.

"I was just telling Frau Garlan," said Rupius, "how surprised I am that she never goes to Vienna."

"Indeed," Frau Rupius put in; "why don't you do so? Moreover, you must certainly have some acquaintances there, too. Come with me one day--to-morrow, for example. Yes, to-morrow."

Rupius gazed straight before him while his wife said this, as though he did not dare to look at her.

"You are really very kind, Frau Rupius," said Bertha, feeling as though a perfect stream of joy was coursing through her being.

She wondered, too, how it was that all this time the possibility of making such a journey had not once entered her mind, the more so as it could be accomplished with so little trouble. It appeared to her at that moment that such a journey might be a remedy for the strange sense of dissatisfaction under which she had been suffering during the past few days.

"Well, do you agree, Frau Garlan?"

"I don't really know--I daresay I could spare the time, for I have only one lesson to give tomorrow at my sister-in-law's, and she, of course, won't be too exacting; but wouldn't I be putting you to some inconvenience?"

A slight shadow flitted across Frau Rupius' brow.

"Putting me to inconvenience! Whatever are you dreaming of! I shall be very glad to have pleasant company during the few hours of the journey there and back. And in Vienna--oh, we shall be sure to have much to do together in Vienna."

"Your husband," said Bertha, blushing like a girl who is speaking of her first ball, "has told me ... has advised me ..."

"Surely, he has been raving to you about my dressmaker," said Frau Rupius, laughing.

Rupius still sat motionless in his chair and looked at neither of them.

"Yes, I should really like to ask you about her, Frau Rupius. When I see you I feel as if I should like to be well dressed again, just as you are."

"That is easily arranged," said Frau Rupius. "I will take you to my dressmaker, and by so doing I hope also to have the pleasure of your company on my subsequent visits. I am glad for your sake as well," she said to her husband, touching his hand which was lying on the table. Then she turned to Bertha and added: "and for yours. You will see how much good it will do you. Wandering about the streets without being known to a soul has a wonderful effect on one's spirits. I do it from time to time, and I always come back quite refreshed and--" in saying this she threw a

sidelong glance, full of anxiety and tenderness, in the direction of her husband--"and then I am as happy here as ever it is possible to be; happier, I believe, than any other woman in the world."

She drew near her husband and kissed him on the temple. Bertha heard her say in a soft voice, as she did so:

"Dearest!"

Rupius, however, continued to stare before him as though he shrank from meeting his wife's glance.

Both were silent and seemed to be absorbed in themselves, as though Bertha was not in the room. Bertha comprehended vaguely that there was some mysterious factor in the relations of these two people, but what that factor was she was not clever, or not experienced, or not good enough to understand. For a whole minute the silence continued, and Bertha was so embarrassed that she would gladly have gone away had it not been necessary to arrange with Frau Rupius the details of the morrow's journey.

Anna was the first to speak.

"So then it is agreed that we are to meet at the railway station in time for the morning train--isn't it? And I will arrange matters so that we return home by the seven o'clock train in the evening. In eight hours, you see, it is possible to get through a good deal."

"Certainly," said Bertha; "provided, of course, that you are not inconveniencing yourself on my account in the slightest degree."

Anna interrupted her, almost angrily.

"I have already told you how glad I am that you will be travelling with me, the more so as there is not a woman in the town so congenial to me as you."

"Yes," said Herr Rupius, "I can corroborate that. You know, of course, that my wife is on visiting terms with hardly anybody here--and as it has been such a long time since you came to see us I was beginning to fear that she was going to lose you as well."

"However could you have thought such a thing? My dear Herr Rupius! And you, Frau Rupius, surely you haven't believed--"

At that moment Bertha felt an overwhelming love for both of them. Her emotion was such that she detected her voice to be assuming an almost tearful tone.

Frau Rupius smiled, a strange, deliberate smile.

"I haven't believed anything. As a matter of fact there are some things over which I do not generally ponder for long. I have no great need of friends, but you, Frau Bertha, I really and truly love."

She stretched out her hand to her. Bertha cast a glance at Rupius. It seemed to her that an expression of contentment should now be observable on his features. To her amazement, however, she saw that he was gazing into the corner of the room with an almost terrified look in his eyes.

The parlourmaid came in with some coffee. Further particulars as to their plans for the morrow were discussed, and finally they drew up a tolerably exact time-table which, to Frau Rupius' slight amusement, Bertha entered in a little notebook.

When Bertha reached the street again, the sky had become overcast, and the increasing sultriness foretold the approach of a thunderstorm. The first large drops were falling before she reached home, and she was somewhat alarmed when, on going upstairs, she failed to find the servant and little Fritz. As she went up to the window, however, in order to shut it, she saw the two come running along. The first thunderclap crashed out, and she started back in terror. Then immediately came a brilliant flash of lightning.

The storm was brief, but unusually violent. Bertha went and sat on her bed, held Fritz on her lap, and told him a story, so that he should not be frightened. But, at the same time, she felt as though there was a certain connexion between her experiences of the past two days and the thunderstorm.

In half an hour all was over. Bertha opened the window; the air was now fresh, the darkening sky was clear and distant. Bertha drew a deep breath, and a feeling of peace and hope seemed to permeate her being.

It was time to get ready for the concert in the gardens. On her arrival she found her friends already gathered at a large table beneath a tree. It was Bertha's intention to tell her sister-in-law at once about her proposed visit to Vienna on the morrow, but a sense of shyness, as though there was something underhand in the journey, caused her to refrain.

Herr Klingemann went by with his housekeeper towards their table. The housekeeper was getting on towards middle-age; she was a very voluptuous looking woman, taller than Klingemann, and, when she walked, always appeared to be asleep. Klingemann bowed towards them with exaggerated politeness. The gentlemen scarcely acknowledged the salutation, and the ladies pretended not to have noticed it. Only Bertha nodded slightly and gazed after the couple.

"That is his sweetheart--yes, I know it for a positive fact," whispered Richard, who was sitting near his aunt.

Herr Garlan's party ate, drank and applauded. At times various acquaintances came over from other tables, sat down with them for awhile, and then went away again to their places. The music murmured around Bertha without making any impression on her. Her mind was continuously occupied with the question as to how to inform them of her project.

Suddenly, while the music was playing very loudly, she said to Richard:

"I say, I won't be able to give you a music lesson to-morrow. I am going to Vienna."

"To Vienna!" exclaimed Richard; then he called across to his mother; "I say, Aunt Bertha is going to Vienna to-morrow!"

"Who's going to Vienna?" asked Garlan, who was sitting furthest away.

"I am," answered Bertha.

"What's this! What's this!" said Garlan, playfully threatening her with his finger.

So, then, it was accomplished. Bertha was glad. Richard made jokes about the people who were sitting in the garden, also about the fat bandmaster who was always skipping about while he was conducting, and then about the trumpet-player whose cheeks bulged out and who seemed to be shedding tears when he blew into his instrument. Bertha could not help laughing very heartily. Jests were bandied about her high spirits and Doctor Friedrich remarked that she must surely be going to some rendezvous at Vienna.

"I should like to put a stop to that, though!" exclaimed Richard, so angrily that the hilarity became general.

Only Elly remained serious, and gazed at her aunt in downright astonishment.

### III

Bertha looked out through the open carriage window upon the landscape: Frau Rupius read a book, which she had taken out of her little traveling-bag very soon after the train had started. It almost appeared as though she wished to avoid any lengthy conversation with Bertha, and the latter felt somewhat hurt. For a long time past she had been cherishing a wish to be a friend of Frau Rupius, but since the previous day this desire of hers had become almost a yearning, which recalled to her mind the whole-hearted devotion of the friendships of the days of her childhood.

At first, therefore, she had felt quite unhappy, and had a sensation of having been abandoned, but soon the changing panorama to be seen through the window began to distract her thoughts in an agreeable manner. As she looked at the rails which seemed to run to meet her, at the hedges and telegraph poles which glided and leaped past her, she recalled to mind the few short journeys to the Salzkammergut, where she had been taken, when a child, by her parents, and the indescribable pleasure of having been allowed to occupy a corner seat on those occasions. Then she looked into the distance and exulted in the gleaming of the river, in the pleasant windings of the hills and meadows, in the azure of the sky and in the white clouds.

After a time Anna laid down the book, and began to chat to Bertha and smiled at her, as though at a child.

"Who would have foretold this of us?" said Frau Rupius.

"That we should be going to Vienna together?"

"No, no, I mean that we shall both--how shall I express it?--pass or end our lives yonder"--she gave a slight nod in the direction of the place from which they came.

"Very true, indeed!" answered Bertha, who had not yet considered whether there was anything really strange in the fact or not.

"Well, you, of course, knew it the moment you were married, but I--"

Frau Rupius gazed straight before her.

"So then your move to the little town," said Bertha, "did not take place until--until--"

She broke off in confusion.

"Yes, you know that, of course."

In saying this Frau Rupius looked Bertha full in the face as if reproaching her for her question. But when she continued to speak she smiled gently, as though her thoughts were not occupied by anything so sad.

"Yes, I never imagined that I should leave Vienna; my husband had his position as a government official, and indeed he would certainly have been able to remain longer there, in spite of his infirmity, had he not wanted to go away at once."

"He thought, perhaps, that the fresh air, the quiet--" began Bertha, and she at once perceived that she was not saying anything very sensible.

Nevertheless Anna answered her quite affably.

"Oh, no, neither rest nor climate could do him any good, but he thought that it would be better for both of us in every way. He was right, too--what should we have been able to do if we had remained in the city?"

Bertha felt that Anna was not telling her the whole story and she would have liked to beg her not to hesitate, but to open her whole heart to her. She knew, however, that she was not clever enough to express such a request in the right words. Then, as though Frau Rupius had guessed that Bertha was anxious to learn more, she quickly changed the subject of their conversation. She asked Bertha about her brother-in-law, the musical talent of her pupils, and her method of teaching; then she took up the novel again and left Bertha to herself.

Once she looked up from the book and said:

"You haven't brought anything with you to read, then?"

"Oh, yes," answered Bertha.

She suddenly remembered that she had bought a newspaper; she took it up and turned over the pages assiduously. The train drew near to Vienna. Frau Rupius closed her book and put it in the travelling-bag. She looked at Bertha with a certain tenderness, as at a child who must soon be sent away alone to meet an uncertain destiny.

"Another quarter of an hour," she remarked; "and we shall be--well, I very nearly said, home."

Before them lay the town. On the far side of the river chimneys towered up aloft, rows of tall yellow painted houses stretched away into the

distance, and steeples ascended skywards. Everything lay basking in the gentle sunlight of May.

Bertha's heart throbbed. She experienced a sensation such as might come over a traveller returning after a long absence to a longed-for home, which had probably altered greatly in the meantime, and where surprises and mysteries of all kinds awaited him. At the moment when the train rolled into the station she seemed almost courageous in her own eyes.

Frau Rupius took a carriage, and they drove into the town. As they passed the Ring, Bertha suddenly leaned out of the window and gazed after a young man whose figure and walk reminded her of Emil Lindbach. She wished that the young man would turn round, but she lost sight of him without his having done so.

The carriage stopped before a house in the Kohlmarkt. The two ladies got out and made their way to the third floor, where the dressmaker's workroom was situated. While Frau Rupius tried on her new costume, Bertha had various materials displayed to her from which she made a choice. The assistant took her measure, and it was arranged that Bertha should call in a week's time to be fitted. Frau Rupius came out from the adjoining room and recommended that particular care should be given to her friend's order.

It seemed to Bertha that everybody was looking at her in a rather disparaging, almost compassionate manner, and, on looking at herself in the large pier glass she suddenly perceived that she was very tastelessly dressed. What on earth had put it into her head to attire herself on this occasion in the provincial Sunday-best, instead of in one of the simple plain dresses she usually wore? She grew crimson with shame. She had on a black and white striped foulard costume, which was three years out of date, so far as its cut was concerned, and a bright-coloured hat, trimmed with roses and turned up at an extravagant angle in front, which seemed to weigh heavily upon her dainty figure and made her appear almost ridiculous.

Then, as if her own conviction needed further confirmation by some word of consolation, Frau Rupius said, as they went down the stairs:

"You are looking lovely!"

They stood in the doorway.

"What shall be done now?" asked Frau Rupius. "What do you propose?"

"Will you then ... I ... I mean ..."

Bertha was quite frightened; she felt as though she was being turned adrift.

Frau Rupius looked at her with kindly commiseration.

"I think," she said, "that you are going to pay a visit to your cousin now, are you not? I suppose that you will be asked to stay to dinner."

"Agatha will be sure to invite me to dine with her."

"I will accompany you as far as your cousin's, if you would like me to; then I will go to my brother and, if possible, I will call for you at



three in the afternoon."

Together they walked through the most crowded streets of the central part of the town and looked at the shop windows. At first Bertha found the din somewhat confusing; afterwards, however, she found it more pleasant than otherwise. She gazed at the passers-by and took great pleasure in watching the well-groomed men and smartly-attired ladies. Almost all the people seemed to be wearing new clothes, and it seemed to her they all looked much happier than the people at home.

Presently she stopped before the window of a picture-dealer's shop and immediately her eyes fell on a familiar portrait; it was the same one of Emil Lindbach as had appeared in the illustrated paper, Bertha was as delighted as if she had met an acquaintance.

"I know that man," she said to Frau Rupius.

"Whom?"

"That man there"--she pointed with her finger at the photograph--"what do you think? I used to attend the conservatoire at the same time he did!"

"Really?" said Frau Rupius.

Bertha looked at her and observed that she had not paid the slightest attention to the portrait, but was thinking of something else. Bertha, however, was glad of that, for it seemed to her that there had been too much warmth lurking in her voice.

All at once a gentle thrill of pride stirred within her at the thought that the man whose portrait hung there in the shop window had been in love with her in the days of his youth, and had kissed her. She walked on with a sensation of inward contentment. After a short time they reached her cousin's house on the Riemerstrasse.

"So it's settled then," she said; "you will call for me at three o'clock, won't you?"

"Yes," replied Frau Rupius; "that is to say--but if I should be a little late, do not on any account wait for me at your cousin's any longer than you want to. In any case, this much is settled: we will both be at the railway station at seven o'clock this evening. Good-bye for the present."

She shook hands with Bertha and hurried away.

Bertha gazed after her in surprise. Once more she felt forlorn, just as she had done in the train when Frau Rupius had read the novel.

Then she went up the two flights of stairs. She had not sent her cousin word as to her visit, and she was a little afraid that her arrival might be somewhat inopportune. She had not seen Agatha for many years, and they had exchanged letters only at very rare intervals.

Agatha received her without either surprise or cordiality, as though it was only the day before that they had seen each other for the last time. A smile had been playing around Bertha's lips--the smile of those who think that they are about to give some one else a surprise--she repressed it immediately.

"Well, you are not a very frequent visitor, I must say!" said Agatha, "and you never let us have a word from you."

"But, Agatha, you know it was your turn to write; you have been owing me a letter these last three months."

"Really!" replied Agatha. "Well, you'll have to excuse me; you can imagine what a lot of work three children mean. Did I write and tell you that Georg goes to school now?"

Agatha took her cousin into the nursery, where Georg and his two little sisters were just having their dinner given them by the nursery-governess. Bertha asked them a few questions, but the children were very shy, and the younger girl actually began to cry.

"Do beg Aunt Bertha to bring Fritz with her next time she comes," said Agatha to Georg at length.

It struck Bertha how greatly her cousin had aged during the last few years. Indeed, when she bent down to the children Agatha appeared almost like an old woman; and yet she was only a year older than Bertha, as the latter knew.

By the time they had returned to the dining-room they had already told each other all that they had to say, and when Agatha invited Bertha to stay to dinner, it seemed that she spoke only for the mere sake of making some remark. Bertha accepted the invitation, nevertheless, and her cousin went into the kitchen to give some orders.

Bertha gazed around the room, which was furnished economically and in bad taste. It was very dark, for the street was extremely narrow. She took up an album which was lying on the table. She found hardly any but familiar faces in it. At the very beginning were the portraits of Agatha's parents, who had died long ago; then came those of her own parents and of her brothers, of whom she scarcely ever heard; portraits of friends whom they both had known in earlier days, and of whom she now knew hardly anything; and, finally, there was a photograph, the existence of which she had long forgotten. It was one of herself and Agatha together, and had been taken when they were quite young girls. In those days they had been very much alike in appearance, and had been great friends. Bertha could remember many of the confidential chats which they had had together in the days of their girlhood.

And that lovely creature there with the looped plaits was now almost an old woman! And what of herself? What reason had she, then, for still looking upon herself as a young woman? Did she not, perhaps, appear to others as old as Agatha had seemed to her? She resolved that, in the afternoon, she would take notice of the glances which passers-by bestowed upon her. It would be terrible if she really did look as old as her cousin! No, the idea was utterly ridiculous! She called to mind how her nephew, Richard always called her his "pretty aunt," how Klingemann had walked to and fro outside her window the other evening--and even the recollection of her brother-in-law's attentions reassured her. And, when she looked in the mirror which was hanging opposite to her, she saw two bright eyes gazing at her from a smooth, fresh face--they were her face and her eyes.

When Agatha came into the room again Bertha began to talk of the far-away years of their childhood, but it seemed that Agatha had forgotten all

about those early days, as though marriage, motherhood and week-day cares had obliterated both youth and its memories. When Bertha went on to speak of a students' dance they had both attended, of the young men who had courted Agatha, and of a bouquet which some unknown lover had once sent her, Agatha at first smiled rather absent-mindedly, then she looked at Bertha and said:

"Just fancy you still remembering all those foolish things!"

Agatha's husband came home from his Government office. He had grown very grey since Bertha had last seen him. At first sight he did not appear to recognize Bertha, then he mistook her for another lady, and excused himself by remarking that he had a very bad memory for faces. At dinner he affected to be smart, he inquired in a certain superior way about the affairs of the little town, and wondered, jestingly, whether Bertha was not thinking of marrying again. Agatha also took part in this bantering, although, at the same time, she occasionally glanced reprovingly at her husband, who was trying to give the conversation a frivolous turn.

Bertha felt ill at ease. Later on she gathered from some words of Agatha's husband that they were expecting another addition to their family. Usually Bertha felt sympathy for women in such circumstances, but in this case the news created an almost unpleasant impression upon her. Moreover there was not a trace of love to be discerned in the tone of the husband's voice when he referred to it, but rather a kind of foolish pride on the score of an accomplished duty. He spoke of the matter as though it was a special act of kindness on his part that, in spite of the fact that he was a busy man, and Agatha was no longer beautiful, he condescended to spend his time at home. Bertha had an impression that she was being mixed up in some sordid affair which did not concern her in the least. She was glad when, as soon as he had finished his dinner, the husband went off--it was his custom, "his only vice," as he said with a smile, to play billiards at the restaurant for an hour after dinner.

Bertha and Agatha were left together.

"Yes," said Agatha, "I've got that to look forward to again."

Thereupon she began, in a cold, businesslike way, to talk about her previous confinements, with a candour and lack of modesty which seemed all the more remarkable because they had become such strangers. While Agatha was continuing the relation of her experiences, however, the thought suddenly passed through Bertha's mind that it must be glorious to have a child by a husband whom one loved.

She ceased to pay attention to her cousin's unpleasant talk; and her thoughts were only occupied by the infinite yearning for motherhood which had often come over her when she was quite a young girl, and she called to mind an occasion when that yearning had been more keen than it had ever been, either before or after. This had happened one evening when Emil Lindbach had accompanied her home from the conservatoire, her hand clasped in his. She still remembered how her head had begun to swim, and that at one moment she had understood what the phrase meant which she had sometimes read in novels: "He could have done with her just as he liked."

Then she noticed that it had grown quite silent in the room, and that Agatha was leaning back in the corner of the sofa, apparently asleep. It was three by the clock. How tiresome it was that Frau Rupius had not yet

arrived! Bertha went to the window and looked out into the street. Then she turned towards Agatha, who had again opened her eyes. Bertha quickly tried to begin a fresh conversation, and told her about the new costume which she had ordered in the forenoon, but Agatha was too sleepy even to answer. Bertha had no wish to put her cousin out, and took her departure. She decided to wait for Frau Rupius in the street. Agatha seemed very pleased when Bertha got ready to go. She became more cordial than she had been at any time during her cousin's visit, and said at the door, as if struck by some brilliant idea:

"How the time does pass! I do hope you'll come and see us again soon."

Bertha, as she stood before the door of the house, realized that she was waiting for Frau Rupius in vain. There was no doubt that it had been the latter's intention from the beginning to spend the afternoon without her. Of course, it did not necessarily follow that there was anything wicked in it; as a matter of fact there was nothing wicked in it, but it hurt Bertha to think that Anna had so little trust in her.

She walked along with no fixed purpose. She had still more than three hours to while away before she was to be at the station. At first, she took a walk in the inner town, which she had passed through in the morning. It was really a pleasant thing to wander about unobserved like this, as a stranger in the crowd. It was long since she had experienced that pleasure. Some of the men who passed her glanced at her with interest, and more than one, indeed, stopped to gaze after her. She regretted that she was dressed to so little advantage, and rejoiced at the prospect of obtaining soon the beautiful costume she had ordered from the Viennese dressmaker. She would have liked to find some one following her.

Suddenly the thought passed through her mind: would Emil Lindbach recognize her if she were to meet him? What a question! Such things never happened, of course. No, she was quite sure that she could wander about Vienna the whole day long without ever meeting him. How long was it since she had seen him? Seven--eight years.... Yes, the last time she had met him was two years before her marriage. She had been with her parents one warm summer evening in the Schweitzerhaus on the Prater; he had gone by with a friend and had stopped a few minutes at their table. Ah, and now she remembered also that amongst the company at their table there had been the young doctor who was courting her. She had forgotten what Emil had said on that occasion, but she remembered that he had held his hat in his hand during the whole time he was standing before her, which had afforded her inexpressible delight. Would he do the same now, she thought to herself, if she were to meet him?

Where was he living now, she wondered. In the old days he had a room on the Weiden, near St. Paul's Church.... Yes, he had pointed out the window as they passed one day, and had ventured, as they did so, to make a certain remark--she had forgotten the exact words, but there was no doubt that they had been to the effect that he and she ought to be in that room together. She had rebuked him very severely for saying such a thing; she had even gone the length of telling him that if that was the sort of girl he thought she was, all was over between them. And, in fact, he had never spoken another word on the subject.

Would she recognize the window again? Would she find it? It was all the same to her, of course, whether she went for a walk in this direction or that. She hurried towards the Weiden as though she had suddenly found an

object for her walk. She was amazed at the complete change which had come over the neighbourhood. When she looked down from the Elizabeth Bridge she saw walls that rose from the bed of the Wien, half finished tracks, little trucks moving to and fro, and busy workmen. Soon she reached St. Paul's Church by the same road as she had so often followed in the old days. But then she came to a standstill; she was absolutely at a loss to remember where Emil had lived--whether she had to turn to the right or to the left. It was strange how completely it had escaped her memory. She walked slowly back as far as the Conservatoire, then she stood still. Above her were the windows from which she had so often gazed upon the dome of St. Charles' Church, and longingly awaited the end of the lesson so that she might meet Emil. How great had been her love for him, indeed; and how strange it was that it should have died so completely!

And now, when she had returned to these scenes, she was a widow, had been so for years, and had a child at home who was growing up. If she had died, Emil would never have heard of it, or perhaps not until years afterwards. Her eyes fell on a large placard fixed on the entrance, gates of the Conservatoire. It was an announcement of the concert at which he was going to play, and there was his name appearing among a number of other great ones, many of which she had long since admired with gentle awe.

"BRAHMS VIOLIN CONCERTO--EMIL LINDBACH, VIOLINIST TO THE COURT OF BAVARIA."

"Violinist to the Court of Bavaria!"--she had never heard anything about that before.

Gazing up at his name, which stood out in glittering letters, it seemed to her as though the next moment Emil himself might come out through the gate, his violin case in his hand, a cigarette between his lips. Of a sudden it all seemed so near, and nearer still when all at once from the windows above came floating down the long-drawn notes of a violin, just as she had so often heard in the old days.

She thought she would like to come to Vienna for that concert--yes, even if she should be obliged to spend the night at an hotel! And she would take a seat right in front and see him quite close at hand. She wondered whether he, in his turn, would see her, and, if so, whether he would recognize her. She remained standing before the yellow placard, wholly absorbed in thought, until she felt that some young people coming out of the Conservatoire were staring at her and then she realized that she had been smiling to herself the whole time, as if lost in a pleasant dream.

She proceeded to walk on. The district around the town-park had also changed, and, when she sought the places where she and Emil had often been for walks together, she found that they had quite disappeared. Trees had been felled, boardings barred the way, the ground had been dug up, and in vain she tried to find the seat where she and Emil had exchanged words of love, the tone of which she remembered so well without being able to recall the actual phrases.

Presently she reached the trim well-kept part of the park, which was full of people. But she had a sensation that many were looking at her, and that some ladies were laughing at her. And once more she felt that she was looking very countrified. She was vexed at being embarrassed, and thought of the time when, as a pretty young girl, she had walked, proud and unconcerned, along these very avenues. It seemed to her that she had

fallen off so much since then, and become so pitiable. Her idea of sitting in the front row of the concert hall appeared presumptuous, almost unfeasible. It seemed also highly improbable now that Emil Lindbach would recognize her; indeed, it struck her as almost impossible that he should remember her existence. What a number of experiences he must have had! How many women and girls might well have loved him--and in a manner quite different from her own!

And whilst she continued her way, walking, now along the less frequented avenues and at length out of the park upon the Ringstrasse again, she drew a mental picture of the beloved of her youth figuring in all manner of adventures, in which confused recollections of events depicted in the novels she had read and indistinctly formed ideas of his professional tours were strangely intermingled. She imagined him in Venice with a Russian princess in a gondola; then in her mind's eye she saw him at the court of the King of Bavaria, where duchesses listened to his playing, and fell in love with him; then in the boudoir of an opera singer; then at a fancy-dress ball in Spain, with crowds of alluring masqueraders about him. The further he seemed to soar away, unapproachable and enviable, the more miserable she felt herself to be, and all at once it seemed utterly inconceivable that she had so lightly surrendered her own hopes of an artistic career and given up her lover, in order to lead a sunless existence, and to be lost in the crowd. A shudder seemed to seize her as she recalled that she was nothing but the widow of an insignificant man, that she lived in a provincial town, that she earned her living by means of music lessons, and that she saw old age slowly approaching. Never had there fallen upon her way so much as a single ray of the brilliance which shone upon the road his footsteps would tread so long as he lived. And again the same shudder ran through her at the thought that she had always been content with her lot, and that, without hope and indeed, without yearning, she had passed her whole existence in a gloom, which, at that moment, seemed inexplicable.

She reached the Aspernbrueke without in the least giving heed to where her footsteps were taking her. She wished to cross the street at this point, but had to wait while a great number of carriages drove by. Most of them were occupied by gentlemen, many of whom carried field-glasses. She knew that they were returning from the races at the Prater.

There came an elegant equipage in which were seated a young man and a girl, the latter dressed in a white spring costume. Immediately behind was a carriage containing two strikingly dressed ladies. Bertha gazed long after them, and noticed that one of the ladies turned round, and that the object of her attention was the carriage which followed immediately behind, and in which sat a young and very handsome man in a long grey overcoat. Bertha was conscious of something very painful--uneasiness and annoyance at one and the same time. She would have liked to be the lady whom the young man followed; she would have liked to be beautiful, young, independent, and, Heaven knows, she would have liked to be any woman who could do as she wanted, and could turn round after men who pleased her.

And at that moment she realized, quite distinctly, that Frau Rupius was now in the company of somebody whom she loved. Indeed why shouldn't she? Of course, so long as she stayed in Vienna, she was free and mistress of her own time--besides, she was a very pretty woman, and was wearing a fragrant violet costume. On her lips there hovered a smile such as only comes to those who are happy--and Frau Rupius was unhappy at home. All at once, Bertha had a vision of Herr Rupius sitting in his room, looking at

the engravings. But on that day, surely, he was not doing so; no, he was trembling for his wife, consumed with an immense fear that some one yonder in the great city would take her away from him, that she would never return, and that he would be left all alone with his sorrow. And Bertha suddenly felt a thrill of compassion for him, such as she had never experienced before. Indeed, she would have liked to be with him, to comfort and to reassure him.

She felt a touch on her arm. She started and looked up. A young man was standing beside her and gazing at her with an impudent leer. She stared at him, full in the face, still quite absentmindedly; then he said with a laugh:

"Well?"

She was frightened, and almost ran across the street, quickly passing in front of a carriage. She was ashamed of her previous desire to be the lady in the carriage she had seen coming from the Prater. It seemed as though the man's insolence had been her punishment. No, no, she was a respectable woman; in the depth of her soul she had an aversion to everything that savoured of the insolent.... No, she could no longer stay in Vienna, where women were exposed to such things! A longing for the peace of her home came over her, and she rejoiced in the prospect of meeting her little boy again, as in something extraordinarily beautiful.

What time was it, though? Heavens, a quarter of seven! She would have to take a carriage; there was no question about that now, indeed! Frau Rupius had, of course, paid for the carriage in the morning, and so the one which she was now going to take would only cost her half, so to speak. She took her seat in an open cab, leaned back in the corner, in almost the same aristocratic manner as that of the lady she had seen in the white frock. People gazed after her. She knew that she was now looking young and pretty. Moreover, she was feeling quite safe, nothing could happen to her. She took an indescribable pleasure in the swift motion of the cab with its rubber-tyred wheels. She thought how splendid it would be if on the occasion of her next visit she were to drive through the town, wearing her new costume and the small straw hat which made her look so young.

She was glad that Frau Rupius was standing in the entrance to the station and saw her arrive. But she betrayed no sign of pride, and acted as though it was quite the usual thing for her to drive up to the station in a cab.

"We have still ten minutes to spare," said Frau Rupius. "Are you very angry with me for having kept you waiting? Just fancy, my brother was giving a grand children's party to-day, and the little ones simply wouldn't let me go. It occurred to me too late that I might really have called for you; the children would have amused you so much. I have told my brother that, next time, I will bring you and your boy with me."

Bertha felt heartily ashamed of herself. How she had wronged this woman again! She could only press her hand and say:

"Thank you, you are very kind!"

They went on to the platform and entered an empty compartment. Frau Rupius had a small bag of cherries in her hand, and she ate them slowly, one after another, throwing the stones out of the window. When the train

began to move out of the station she leaned back and closed her eyes. Bertha looked out of the window; she felt very tired after so much walking, and a slight uneasiness arose within her; she might have spent the day differently, more quietly and enjoyably. Her chilly reception and the tedious dinner at her cousin's came to her mind. After all, it was a great pity that she no longer had any acquaintances in Vienna. She had wandered like a stranger about the town in which she had lived twenty-six years. Why? And why had she not made the carriage pull up in the morning, when she saw the figure that seemed to have a resemblance to Emil Lindbach? True, she would not have been able to run or call after him--but if it had been really he, if he had recognized her and been pleased to see her again? They might have walked about together, might have told each other all that had happened during the long time that had passed since they had last known anything about one another; they might have gone to a fashionable restaurant and had dinner; some would naturally have recognized him, and she would have heard quite distinctly people discussing the question as to who "she" might really be. She was looking beautiful, too; the new costume was already finished; and the waiters served her with great politeness, especially a small youth who brought the wine--but he was really her nephew, who had, of course, become a waiter in that restaurant instead of a student. Suddenly Herr and Frau Martin entered the dining-hall; they were holding one another in such a tender embrace as if they were the only people there. Then Emil rose to his feet, took up the violin bow which was lying beside him, and raised it with a commanding gesture, whereupon the waiter turned Herr and Frau Martin out of the room. Bertha could not help laughing at the incident, laughing much too loudly indeed, for by this time she had quite forgotten how to behave in a fashionable restaurant. But then it was not a fashionable restaurant at all; it was only the coffee room at the "Red Apple," and the military band was playing somewhere out of sight. That, be it known, was a clever invention on the part of Herr Rupius, that military bands could play without being seen. Now, however, it was her turn that was immediately to follow. Yonder was the piano--but, of course, she had long since completely forgotten how to play; she would run away rather than be forced to play. And all at once she was at the railway station, where Frau Rupius was already waiting for her. "It is high time you came," she said. She placed in Bertha's hand a large book, which, by the way, was her ticket. Frau Rupius, however, was not going to take the train; she sat down, ate cherries and spat out the stones at the stationmaster, who took a huge delight in the proceedings. Bertha entered the compartment. Thank God, Herr Klingemann was already there! He made a sign to her with his screwed-up eyes, and asked her if she knew whose funeral it was. She saw that a hearse was standing on the other line. Then she remembered that the captain with whom the tobacconist's wife had deceived Herr Klingemann was dead--of course, it was the day of the concert at the "Red Apple." Suddenly Herr Klingemann blew on her eyes, and laughed in a rumbling way.

Bertha opened her eyes--at that moment a train was rushing past the window. She shook herself. What a confused dream! And hadn't it begun quite nicely? She tried to remember. Yes, Emil played a part in it ... but she could not recollect what part.

The dusk of evening slowly fell. The train sped on its way along by the Danube. Frau Rupius slept and smiled. Perhaps she was only pretending to be asleep. Bertha was again seized with a slight suspicion, and she felt rising within her a sensation of envy at the unknown and mysterious experiences which Frau Rupius had had. She, too, would gladly have experienced something. She wished that someone was sitting beside her



now, his arm pressed against hers--she would fain have felt once more that sensation that had thrilled her on that occasion when she had stood with Emil on the bank of the Wien, and when she had almost been on the point of losing her senses and had yearned for a child.... Ah, why was she so poor, so lonely, so much in obscurity? Gladly would she have implored the lover of her youth:

"Kiss me but once again just as you used to do, I want to be happy!"

It was dark; Bertha looked out into the night.

She determined that very night before she went to bed to fetch from the attic the little case in which she kept the letters of her parents and of Emil. She longed to be home again. She felt as though a question had been awakened within her soul, and that the answer awaited her at home.

#### IV

When, late in the evening, Bertha entered her room, the idea which she had taken into her head of going up to the attic at once and fetching down the case with the letters seemed to her to be almost venturesome. She was afraid that some one in the house might observe her on her nocturnal pilgrimage, and might take her for mad. She could, of course, go up the next morning quite conveniently and without causing any stir; and so she fell asleep, feeling like a child who has been promised an outing into the country on the following day.

She had much to do the next forenoon; her domestic duties and piano lessons occupied the whole of the time. She had to give her sister-in-law an account of her visit to Vienna. Her story was that in the afternoon she had gone for a walk with her cousin, and the impression was conveyed that she had made an excuse to Frau Rupius at the request of Agatha.

It was not until the afternoon that she went up to the attic and brought down the dusty travelling-case, which was lying beside a trunk and a couple of boxes--the whole collection covered with an old and torn piece of red-flowered coffee-cloth. She remembered that her object on the last occasion on which she had opened the case had been to put away the papers which her parents had left behind. On her return to her room she opened the case and perceived lying on top of the other contents a number of letters from her brothers and other letters, with the handwriting of which she was not familiar; then she found a neat little bundle containing the few letters which her parents had addressed to her: these were followed by two books of her mother's household accounts, a little copybook dating back to her own schooldays and containing entries of timetables and exercises, a few programmes of the dances which she had attended when a young girl, and, finally, Emil Lindbach's letters, which were wrapped up in blue tissue paper, torn here and there. And now she was able to fix the very day on which she had last held those letters in her hand, although she had not read them on that occasion. It was when her father had been lying ill for some time and, for whole days, she had not once gone outside the door.

She laid the bundle aside. She wanted, first of all, to see all the other things which had been stored in the case, and concerning which she was

consumed with curiosity. A number of letters lay in a loose heap at the bottom of the case, some with their envelopes and others without. She cast her eye over them at random. There were letters from old friends, a few from her cousin, and here was one from the doctor who had courted her in the old days. In it he asked her to reserve for him the first waltz at the medical students' dance. Here--what was it? Why, it was that anonymous letter which some one had addressed to her at the Conservatoire. She picked it up and read:

"My Dear Fraulein,

"Yesterday I again had the good fortune to have an opportunity of admiring you on your daily walk; I do not know whether I had also the good fortune to be observed by you."

No, he had not had that good fortune. Then followed three pages of enthusiastic admiration, and not a single wish, not a single bold word. She had, moreover, never heard anything more of the writer.

Here was a letter signed by two initials, "M.G." That was the impudent fellow who had once spoken to her in the street, and who in this letter made proposals--wait a minute, what were they? Ah, here was the passage which had sent the hot blood mounting to her brow when she had first read it:

"Since I have seen you, and since you have looked on me with a glance so stern and yet seemingly so full of promise, I have had but one dream, but one yearning--that I might kiss those eyes!"

Of course, she had not answered the letter; she was in love with Emil at the time. Indeed, she had even thought of showing him the letter, but was restrained by the fear of rousing his jealousy. Emil had never learned anything of "M. G."

And that piece of soft ribbon that now fell into her hands?... A cravat ... but she had quite forgotten whose it was, and why she had kept it.

Here again was a little dance album in which she had written the names of her partners. She tried to call the young men to mind, but in vain. Though, by the way, it was at that very dance that she had met that man who had said such passionate words to her as she had never heard from any other. It seemed as though he suddenly emerged a victor from among the many shadows that hovered around her. It must have happened during the time when she and Emil had been meeting each other less frequently. How strange it was ... or had it only been a dream? This passionate admirer had clasped her closely in his arms during the dance--and she had not offered the slightest resistance. She had felt his lips in her hair, and it had been incredibly pleasant ... Well, and then?--she had never seen him again.

It suddenly seemed to her that, after all, in those days she had had many and strange experiences, and she was lost in amazement at the way in which all these memories had slumbered so long in the travelling case and in her soul.... But no, they had not slumbered; she had thought of all these things many a time: of the men who had courted her, of the anonymous letter, of her passionate partner at the dance, of the walks with Emil--but only as if they had been merely such things as go to constitute the past, the youth which is allotted to every young girl,

and from which she emerges to lead the placid life of a woman. On the present occasion, however, it seemed to Bertha as if these recollections were, so to speak, unredeemed promises, as if in those experiences of distant days there lay destinies which had not been fulfilled; nay, more, as if a kind of deception had long been practised upon her, from the very day on which she had been married until the present moment; as if she had discovered it all too late; and here she was, unable to lift a finger to alter her destiny.

Yet why should it seem so?... She thought of all these futile things, and there beside her, wrapped up in tissue paper, still lay the treasure, for the sake of which alone she had rummaged in the case--the letters of the only man she had loved, the letters written in the days when she had been happy. How many women might there be now who envied her because that very man had once loved her--loved her with a different, better, chaster love than that which he had given any of the women who had followed her in his affections. She felt herself most bitterly deceived that she, who could have been his wife if ... if ... her thoughts broke off.

Hurriedly, as though seeking to rid her mind of doubt, or rather, indeed, of fear, she tore off the tissue paper and seized the letters. And she read--read them one after another. Long letters, short letters; brief, hasty notes, like: "To-morrow evening, darling, at seven o'clock!" or "Dearest, just one kiss ere I go to sleep!" letters that covered many pages, written during the walking tours which he and his fellow students had taken in the summer; letters written in the evening, in which he had felt constrained to impart to her his impressions of a concert immediately on returning home; endless pages in which he unfolded his plans for the future; how they would travel together through Spain and America, famous and happy ... she read them all, one after another, as though tortured by a quenchless thirst. She read from the very first, which had accompanied a few pieces of music, to the last, which was dated two and a half years later, and contained nothing more than a greeting from Salzburg.

When she came to an end she let her hands fall into her lap and gazed fixedly at the sheets lying about. Why had that been the last letter? How had their friendship come to an end? How could it have come to an end? How had it been possible that that great love had died away? There had never been any actual rupture between Emil and herself; they had never come to any definite understanding that all was over between them, and yet their acquaintanceship had ended at some time or other--when?... She could not tell, because at the time when he had written that card to her from Salzburg she had still been in love with him. She had, as a matter of fact, met him in the autumn--indeed, during the winter of the same year everything had seemed once more to blossom forth. She remembered certain walks they had taken over the crunching snow, arm in arm, beside St. Charles' Church--but when was it that they had taken the last of these walks? They had, to be sure, never taken farewell of each other.... She could not understand it.

How was it that she had been able so easily to renounce a happiness which it might yet have been within her power to retain? How had it come about that she had ceased to love him? Had the dullness of the daily routine of her home life, which weighed so heavily upon her spirits ever since she had left the Conservatoire, lulled her feelings to sleep just as it had blunted the edge of her ambitions? Had the querulous remarks of her parents on the subject of her friendship with the youthful violinist--which had seemed likely to lead to nothing--acted on her with

such sobering effect?

Then she recalled to mind that even at a later date, when some months had elapsed since she had last seen him, he had called at her parents' house, and had kissed her in the back room. Yes, that had been the last time of all. And then she remembered further that on that occasion she had noticed that his relation towards women had changed; that he must have had experiences of which she could know nothing--but the discovery had not caused her any pain.

She asked herself how it all would have turned out if in those days she had not been so virtuous, if she had taken life as easily as some of the other girls? She called to mind a girl at the Conservatoire with whom she had ceased to associate on finding that her friend had an intrigue with a dramatic student. She remembered again the suggestive words which Emil had spoken as they were walking together past his window, and the yearning that had come over her as they stood by the bank of the Wien. It seemed inconceivable that those words had not affected her more keenly at the moment, that that yearning had been awakened within her only once, and then only for so short a time. With a kind of perplexed amazement she thought of that period of placid purity and then, with a sudden agonized feeling of shame which drove the blood to her temples, of the cold readiness with which she had given herself afterwards to a man whom she had never loved. The consciousness that whatever happiness she had tasted in the course of her married life had been gained in the arms of the husband she had not loved made her shudder with horror, for the first time, in its utter wretchedness. Had that, then, been life such as her thoughts had depicted to her, had that been the mystic happiness such as she had yearned for?... And a dull feeling of resentment against everything and everybody, against the living and the dead, began to smoulder within her bosom. She was angry with her dead husband and with her dead father and mother; she was indignant with the people amongst whom she was now living, whose eyes were always upon her so that she dared not allow herself any freedom; she was hurt with Frau Rupius, who had not turned out to be such a friend that Bertha could rely on her for support; she hated Klingemann because, ugly and repulsive as he was, he desired to make her his wife; and finally she was violently enraged with the man she had loved in the days of her girlhood, because he had not been bolder, because he had withheld from her the ultimate happiness, and because he had bequeathed her nothing but memories full of fragrance, yet full of torment. And there she was, sitting in her lonely room amongst the faded mementoes of a youth that had passed unprofitably and friendlessly; there she was, on the verge of the time when there would be no more hopes and no more desires--life had slipped through her fingers, and she was thirty and poor.

She wrapped up the letters and the other things, and threw them, all crumpled as they were, into the case. Then she closed it and went over to the window.

Evening was at hand. A gentle breeze was blowing over from the direction of the vine-trellises. Her eyes swam with unwept tears, not of grief, but of exasperation. What was she to do? She, who had, without fear and without hope, seen the days, nights, months, years extending into the future, shuddered at the prospect of the emptiness of the evening which lay before her.

It was the hour at which she usually returned home from her walk. On that day she had sent the nursemaid out with Fritz--not so much as once did

she yearn for her boy. Indeed, for one moment there even fell on her child a ray of the anger which she felt against all mankind and against her fate. And, in her vast discontent, she was seized with a feeling of envy against many people who, at ordinary times, seemed to her anything but enviable. She envied Frau Martin because of the tender affection of her husband; the tobacconist's wife because she was loved by Herr Klingemann and the captain; her sister-in-law, because she was already old; Elly, because she was still young; she envied the servant, who was sitting on a plank over there with a soldier, and whom she heard laughing. She could not endure being at home any longer; She took up her straw hat and sunshade and hurried into the street. There she felt somewhat better. In her room she had been unhappy; in the street she was no more than out of humour.

In the main thoroughfare she met Herr and Frau Mahlmann, to whose children she gave music lessons. Frau Mahlmann was already aware that Bertha had ordered a costume from a dressmaker in Vienna on the previous day, and she began to discuss the matter with great weightiness. Later on, Bertha met her brother-in-law, who came towards her from the chestnut avenue.

"Well," he said, "so you were in Vienna yesterday! Tell me, what did you do with yourself there? Did you have any adventures?"

"What do you mean?" asked Bertha, looking at him in great alarm, as though she had done something she ought not, and had been found out.

"What? You had no adventures? But you were with Frau Rupius; all the men must surely have run after you?"

"What on earth has come into your head? Frau Rupius' conduct is irreproachable! She is one of the most well-bred ladies I know."

"Quite so, quite so! I am not saying a word against Frau Rupius or you."

She looked him in the face. His eyes were gleaming, as they often did when he had had a little too much to drink. She could not help recalling that somebody had once foretold that Herr Garlan would die of an apoplectic stroke.

"I must pay another visit to Vienna myself one of these days," he said. "Why, I haven't been there since Ash Wednesday. I should like to see some of my acquaintances once again. The next time you and Frau Rupius go, you might just take me with you."

"With pleasure," answered Bertha. "I shall have to go again, of course, before long, to have my costume tried on."

Garlan laughed.

"Yes, and you can take me with you, too, when you try it on."

He sidled up closer to her than was necessary. It was a way he had always to squeeze up against her, and, moreover, she was accustomed to his jokes, but on the present occasion she thought him particularly objectionable. She was very much annoyed that he, of all men, always spoke of Frau Rupius in such a suspicious way.

"Let us sit down," said Herr Garlan; "if you don't mind."

They both sat down on a seat. Garlan took the newspaper from his pocket.

"Ah!" said Bertha involuntarily.

"Will you have it?" asked Garlan.

"Has your wife read it yet?"

"Tut, tut!" said Garlan disdainfully. "Will you have it?"

"If you can spare it."

"For you--with pleasure. But we might just as well read it together."

He edged closer to Bertha and opened the paper.

Herr and Frau Martin came along, arm in arm, and stopped before them.

"Well, so you are back again from the momentous journey," said Herr Martin.

"Ah, yes, you were in Vienna," said Frau Martin, nestling against her husband. "And with Frau Rupius, too," she added, as though that implied an aggravation of the offence.

Once more Bertha had to give an account of her new costume. She told them all about it in a somewhat mechanical manner, indeed; but she felt, none the less, that it was long since she had been such an interesting personage as she was now.

Klingemann went by, bowed with ironical politeness, and turned round to Bertha with a look which seemed to express his sympathy for her in having to be friendly with such people.

It seemed to Bertha as though she were gifted that day with the ability to read men's glances.

It began to grow dark. They set off together towards the town. Bertha suddenly grew uneasy at not having met her boy. She walked on in front with Frau Martin, who turned the conversation on to the subject of Frau Rupius. She badly wanted to find out whether Bertha had observed anything.

"But what do you mean, Frau Martin? I accompanied Frau Rupius to her brother's house, and called for her there on my way back."

"And are you convinced that she was with her brother the whole time?"

"I really don't know what you expect Frau Rupius to do! Where would she have been then?"

"Well," said Frau Martin; "really, you are an artless creature. I must say--or are you only putting on? Do you quite forget then ..."

Then she whispered something into Bertha's ear, at which the latter grew very red. She had never heard such an expression from a woman. She was indignant.

"Frau Martin," she said, "I am not so old myself either and, as you see, it is quite possible to live a decent life in such circumstances."

Frau Martin was a little taken aback.

"Yes, of course!" she said. "Yes, of course! You must, I dare say, think that I am a little over-nice in such matters."

Bertha was afraid that Frau Martin might be about to give her some further and more intimate disclosures, and she was very glad to find that, at that moment, they had reached the street corner where she could say good-bye.

"Bertha, here's your paper!" her brother-in-law called after her.

She turned round quickly and took the paper. Then she hastened home. Fritz had returned and was waiting for her at the window. She hurried up to him. She embraced and kissed him as though she had not seen him for weeks. She felt that she was completely engrossed with love for her boy, a fact which, at the time, filled her with pride. She listened to his account of how he had spent the afternoon, where he had been, and with whom he had played. She cut up his supper for him, undressed him, put him to bed, and was satisfied with herself. Her state of mind of the afternoon, when she had rummaged among the old letters, had cursed her fate and had even envied the tobacconist's wife, seemed to her, at the thought of it, as an attack of fever. She ate a hearty supper and went to bed early. Before falling to sleep, however, it occurred to her that she would like to read the paper. She stretched her limbs, shook up the soft bolster so that her head should be higher, and held the paper as near the candle as possible.

As her custom was, she first of all skimmed through the theatrical and art news. Even the short announcements, as well as the local reports, had acquired a new interest for her, since her trip to Vienna. Her eyelids were beginning to grow heavy when all at once she observed the name of Emil Lindbach amongst the personal news. She opened her eyes wide, sat up in bed and read the paragraph.

"Emil Lindbach, violinist to the Court of Bavaria, whose great success at the Spanish Court we were recently in a position to announce, has been honoured by the Queen of Spain, who has invested him with the Order of the Redeemer."

A smile flitted across her lips. She was glad, Emil Lindbach had obtained the Order of the Redeemer.... Yes ... the man whose letters she had been reading that very day ... the man who had kissed her--the man who had once written to her that he would never adore any other woman.... Yes, Emil--the only man in all the world in whom she really had still any interest--except her boy, of course. She felt as though this notice in the paper was intended only for her, as though, indeed, Emil himself had selected that expedient, so as to establish some means of communication with her. Had it not been he, after all, whose back she had seen in the distance on the previous day? All at once she seemed to be quite near to him; still smiling, she whispered to herself: "Herr Emil Lindbach, violinist to the Court of Bavaria, ... I congratulate you...."

Her lips remained half open. An idea had suddenly come to her. She got up quickly, donned her dressing-gown, took up the light and went into the adjoining room. She sat down at the table and wrote the following letter

as fluently as though some one were standing beside her and dictating it, word for word:

"DEAR EMIL,

"I have just read in the newspaper that the Queen of Spain has honoured you by investing you with the Order of the Redeemer. I do not know whether you still remember me"--she smiled as she wrote these words--"but, all the same, I will not let this opportunity slip without congratulating you upon your many successes, of which I so often have the pleasure of reading. I am living most contentedly in the little town where fate has cast me; I am getting on very well!

"A few lines in reply would make me very happy.

"Your old friend,

"BERTHA.

"P.S.--Kind regards also from my little Fritz (five years old)."

She had finished the letter. For a moment she asked herself whether she should mention that she was a widow; but even if he had not known it before, it was quite obvious from her letter. She read it over and nodded contentedly. She wrote the address.

"Herr Emil Lindbach, violinist to the Court of Bavaria, Holder of the Order of the Redeemer ..." Should she write all that? He was certain to have many other Orders also ... "Vienna ..."

But where was he living at present? That, however, was of no consequence with such a celebrated name. Moreover the inaccuracy in the address would also show that she did not attach so very much importance to it all; if the letter reached him--well, so much the better. It was also a way of putting fate to the test.... Ah, but how was she to know for a certainty that the letter had arrived or not? The answer might, of course, quite easily fail to reach her if.... No, no, certainly not! He would be sure to thank her. And so, to bed.

She held the letter in her hand. No, she could not go to bed now, she was wide awake again. And, moreover, if she did not post the letter until next morning it would not go before the midday train, and would not reach Emil before the day after. That was an interminably long time. She had just spoken to him, and were thirty-six hours to be allowed to elapse before her words reached his ears?... Supposing she did not wait, but went to the post now?... no, to the station? Then he would have the letter at ten o'clock the next morning. He was certain to be late in rising--the letter would be brought into his room with his breakfast.... Yes, she must post the letter at once!

Quickly she dressed again. She hurried down the stairs--it was not yet late--she hastened along the main street to the station, put the letter in the yellow box, and was home again.

As she stood in her room, beside the tumbled bed, and she saw the paper lying on the floor and the candle flickering, it seemed as though she had returned from a strange adventure. For a long time she remained sitting on the edge of the bed, gazing through the window into the bright,



starlit night, and her soul was filled with vague and pleasurable expectations.

V

"My Dear Bertha!

"I am wholly unable to tell you how glad I was to receive your letter. Do you really still think of me, then? How curious it is that it should have been an Order, of all things, that was the cause of my hearing from you again! Well, at all events, an Order has at least had some significance for once in a way! Therefore, I heartily thank you for your congratulations. But, apart from all that, don't you come to Vienna sometimes? It is not so very far, after all. I should be immensely pleased to see you again. So come soon!

"With all my heart,

"Your old

"Emil."

Bertha was sitting at breakfast, Fritz beside her. He was chatting, but she was not listening to him. The letter lay before her on the table.

It seemed miraculous. Two nights and a day ago she had posted her letter, and here was his reply already. Emil had not allowed a day to pass, not even an hour! He had written to her as cordially as if they had only parted the previous day.

She looked out of the window. What a splendid morning it was! Outside the birds were singing, and from the hills came floating down the fragrance of the early summer-tide.

Bertha read the letter again and again. Then she took Fritz, lifted him up and kissed him to her heart's content. It was long since she had been so happy.

While she was dressing she turned things over in her mind. It was Thursday; on Monday she had to go to Vienna again to try on the costume. That was four long days, just the same space of time as had elapsed since she had dined at her brother-in-law's--what a long time it seemed to have to wait. No, she must see Emil sooner than that. She could, of course, go the very next morning and remain in Vienna a few days. But what excuse could she make to the people at home?... Oh, she would be sure to find some pretext. It was more important to decide in what way she should answer his letter and tell him where she would meet him.... She could not write and say: "I am coming, please let me know where I can see you...." Perhaps he would answer: "Come to my rooms...." No, no, no! It would be best to let him have a definite statement of fact. She would write to the effect that she was going to Vienna on such and such a day and was to be found at such and such a place....

Oh, if she only had someone with whom she could talk the whole thing over!... She thought of Frau Rupius--she had a genuine yearning to tell

her everything. At the same time she had an idea that, by so doing, she might become more intimate with her and might win her esteem. She felt that she had become much more important since the receipt of Emil's letter. Now she remarked, too, that she had been very much afraid that Emil might quite possibly have changed and become conceited, affected and spoiled--just as was the case with so many celebrated men. But there was not the slightest trace of such things in the letter; there was the same quick, heavy writing, the same warmth of tone, as in those earlier letters. What a number of experiences he might well have had since she had last seen him--well, had not she also had many experiences, and were they not all seemingly obliterated?

Before going out she read Emil's letter again. It grew more like a living voice; she heard the cadence of the words, and that final "Come soon" seemed to call her with tender yearning. She stuck the letter into her bodice and remembered how, as a girl, she had often done the same with his notes, and how the gentle touch had sent a pleasant thrill coursing through her.

First of all, she went to the Mahlmanns', where she gave the twins their music lesson. Very often the finger exercises, to which she had to listen there, were positively painful to her, and she would rap the children on the knuckles when they struck a false note. On the present occasion, however, she was not in the least strict. When Frau Mahlmann, fat and friendly as ever, came into the room and inquired whether Bertha was satisfied, the latter praised the children and added, as though suddenly inspired:

"Now, I shall be able to give them a few days' holiday."

"Holiday! How will that be, then, dear Frau Garlan?"

"You see, Frau Mahlmann, I have no choice in the matter. What do you think, when I was in Vienna lately my cousin begged me so pressingly to be sure to come and spend a few days with her--"

"Quite so, quite so," said Frau Mahlmann.

Bertha's courage kept rising, and she continued to add falsehood to falsehood, taking a kind of pleasure in her own boldness:

"I really wanted to put it off till June. But this very morning I had a letter from her, saying that her husband is going away for a time, and she is so lonely, and just now"--she felt the letter crackle, and had an indescribable desire to take it out; but yet restrained herself--"and I, think I shall perhaps take advantage of the opportunity...."

"Well, to tell the truth," said Frau Mahlmann, taking Bertha by both hands, "if I had a cousin in Vienna, I would like to stay with her a week every fortnight!"

Bertha beamed. She felt as though an invisible hand was clearing away the obstacles which lay in her path; everything was going so well. And, indeed, to whom, after all, was she accountable for her actions? Suddenly, however, the fear flashed through her mind that her brother-in-law really intended to go with her to Vienna. Everything became entangled again; dangers cropped up and suspicion lurked even under the good-natured smile of Frau Mahlmann....

Ah, she must on no account fail to take Frau Rupius into her confidence. Directly the lesson was over she went to call upon her.

It was not until she had found Frau Rupius in a white morning gown, sitting on the sofa, and had observed the surprised glance with which the latter received her, that it struck Bertha that there was anything strange in her early visit, and she said with affected cheerfulness:

"Good morning! I'm early to-day, am I not?"

Frau Rupius remained serious. She had not the usual smile on her lips.

"I am very glad to see you. The hour makes no difference to me."

Then she threw her a questioning glance, and Bertha did not know what to say. She was annoyed, too, at the childish embarrassment, of which she could not rid herself in the presence of Frau Rupius.

"I wanted," she said, at length, "to ask you how you felt after our trip."

"Quite well," answered Frau Rupius, rather stiffly. But all at once her features changed, and she added with excessive friendliness:

"Really, it was my place to have asked you. I am accustomed to those trips, you know."

As she said this she looked through the window and Bertha mechanically followed her gaze, which wandered over to the other side of the market square to an open window with flowers on the sill. It was quite calm, and the repose of a summer day shrouded the slumbering town. Bertha would have dearly liked to sit beside Frau Rupius and be kissed upon the brow by her, and blessed; but at the same time she had a feeling of compassion towards her. All this puzzled her. For what reason, indeed, had she really come? And what should she say to her?... "I'm going to-morrow to Vienna to see the man who used to be in love with me when I was a girl?"... In what way did all that concern Frau Rupius? Would it really interest her in the very slightest degree? There she sat as if surrounded by something impenetrable; it was impossible to approach her. She could not approach her, that was the trouble. Of course, there was a word by means of which it was possible to find the way to her heart, only Bertha did not know it.

"Well, how is your little boy?" asked Frau Rupius, without taking her eyes off the flowers in the opposite window.

"He is going on as well as ever. He is very well-behaved, and is a marvellously good child!"

The last word she uttered with an intentional tenderness as though Frau Rupius was to be won over by that means.

"Yes, yes," answered the latter, her tone implying that she knew he was good, and had not asked about that. "Have you a reliable nursemaid?" she added.

Bertha was somewhat astonished at the question.

"My maid has, of course, many other things to attend to besides her nurse's duties," she replied; "but I cannot complain of her. She is also

a very good cook."

"It must be a great happiness to have such a boy," said Frau Rupius very drily, after a short interval of silence.

"It is, indeed, my only happiness," said Bertha, more loudly than was necessary.

It was an answer which she had often made before, but she knew that, on that day, she was not speaking with entire sincerity. She felt the sheet of paper touch her skin, and, almost with alarm, she realized that she had also deemed it a happiness to have received that letter. At the same time it occurred to her that the woman sitting opposite her had neither a child nor even the prospect of having one, and Bertha would have been glad to take back what she had said. Indeed, she was on the point of seeking some qualifying word. But, as if Frau Rupius was able to see into her soul, and as if in her presence a lie was impossible, she said at once:

"Your only happiness? Say, rather, 'a great happiness,' and that is no small thing! I often envy you on that score, although I really think that, apart from such considerations, life in itself is a joy to you."

"Indeed, my life is so lonely, so...."

Anna smiled.

"Quite so, but I did not mean that. What I meant was that the fact that the sun is shining and the weather is now so fine also makes you glad."

"Oh yes, very glad!" replied Bertha assiduously. "My frame of mind is generally dependent on the weather. During that thunderstorm a few days ago I was utterly depressed, and then, when the storm was over--"

Frau Rupius interrupted her.

"That is the case with every one, you know."

Bertha grew low-spirited. She felt that she was not clever enough for Frau Rupius; she could never do any more than follow the ordinary lines of conversation, like the other women of her acquaintance. It seemed as though Frau Rupius had arranged an examination for her, which she had not passed, and, all at once, she was seized with a great apprehension at the prospect of meeting Emil again. What sort of a figure would she cut in his presence? How shy and helpless she had become during the six years of her narrow existence in the little town!

Frau Rupius rose to her feet. The white morning gown streamed around her; she looked taller and more beautiful than usual, and Bertha was involuntarily reminded of an actress she had seen on the stage a very long time ago, and to whom at that moment Frau Rupius bore a remarkable resemblance. Bertha said to herself: If I were only like Frau Rupius I am sure I would not be so timid. At the same time it struck her that this exquisitely lovely woman was married to an invalid--might not the gossips be right then, after all? But here, again, she was unable to pursue further her train of thought; she could not imagine in what way the gossips could be right. And at that moment it dawned upon her mind how bitter was the fate to which Frau Rupius was condemned, no matter whether she now bore it or resisted it.

But, as if Anna had again read Bertha's thoughts, and could not tolerate that the latter should thus insinuate herself into her confidence, the uncanny gravity of her face relaxed suddenly, and she said in an innocent tone:

"Just fancy, my husband is still asleep. He has acquired the habit of remaining awake until late at night, reading and looking at engravings, and then he sleeps on until midday. As for that, it is quite a matter of habit; when I used to live in Vienna I was incredibly lazy about getting up."

And thereupon she began to chat about her girlhood, cheerfully, and with a confiding manner such as Bertha had never before noticed in her. She told about her father, who had been an officer on the Staff, about her mother, who had died when she was quite a young woman; and about the little house in the garden of which she had played as a child. It was only now that Bertha learned that Frau Rupius had first become acquainted with her husband when he was just a boy; he had lived with his parents in the adjoining house, and had fallen in love with Anna and she with him, while they were both children. To Bertha the whole period of Frau Rupius' youth appeared as if radiant with bright sunbeams, a youth replete with happiness, replete with hope; and it seemed to her, moreover, that Frau Rupius' voice assumed a fresher tone when she went on to relate about the travels which she and her husband had undertaken in the early days of their married life.

Bertha let her talk and hesitated to interrupt her with a word, as though she were a somnambulist wandering on the ridge of a roof. But while Frau Rupius was speaking of her past, a period through which the blessedness of being loved ever beamed brightly as its chiefest glory, Bertha's soul began to thrill with the hope of a happiness for herself such as she had not yet experienced. And while Frau Rupius was telling of the walking tours through Switzerland and the Tyrol, which she had once undertaken with her husband, Bertha pictured herself wandering by Emil's side on similar paths, and she was filled with such an immense yearning that she would dearly have liked at once to get up, go to Vienna, seek him out, fall into his arms, and at last, at last to taste those delights which had hitherto been denied her.

Her thoughts wandered so far that she did not notice that Frau Rupius had long since fallen silent, and was sitting on the sofa, staring at the flowers in the window of the house over the way. The utter stillness brought Bertha back to reality; the whole room seemed to her to be filled with some mysterious atmosphere, in which the past and the future were strangely intermingled. She felt that there existed an incomprehensible connexion between herself and Frau Rupius. She rose to her feet, stretched out her hand, and, as if it were quite a matter of course, the two ladies kissed each other good-bye like a couple of old friends.

On reaching the door Bertha remarked:

"I am going to Vienna again to-morrow for a few days."

She smiled as she spoke, like a girl about to be married.

After leaving Frau Rupius, Bertha went to her sister-in-law. Her nephew was already sitting at the piano, improvising in a very wild manner. He pretended not to have noticed her enter, and proceeded to practise his

finger exercises, which he played in an attitude of stiffness, assumed for the occasion.

"We will play a duet to-day," said Bertha, endeavouring to find the volume of Schubert's marches.

She paid not the least attention to her own playing, and hardly noticed how, in using the pedals, her nephew touched her feet.

In the meantime Elly came into the room and kissed her aunt.

"Ah, just so, I had quite forgotten that!" said Richard, and, whilst continuing to play, he placed his lips close to Bertha's cheek.

Her sister-in-law came in with her bunch of keys rattling and a deep dejection on her pale and indistinct features.

"I have given Brigitta notice," she said in a feeble tone. "I couldn't endure it any longer."

"Shall I get you a maid in Vienna?" asked Bertha with a facility which even surprised her.

And now for the second time she told the fiction which she had invented about her cousin's invitation, with even greater assurance than before, and, moreover, with a little amplification this time. Along with the secret joy which she found in the telling, she felt her courage increasing at the same time. Even the possibility of being joined by her brother-in-law no longer alarmed her. She felt, too, that she had an advantage over him, because of the way in which he was in the habit of sidling up to her.

"How long are you thinking of staying in the town, then?" asked her sister-in-law.

"Two or three days; certainly no longer. And in any case, of course, I should have had to go on Monday--to the dressmaker."

Richard strummed on the keys, but Elly stood with both arms resting on the piano, gazing at her aunt with a look almost of terror.

"Whatever is the matter with you?" asked Bertha involuntarily.

"Why do you ask that?" said Elly.

"You are looking at me," said Bertha, "as queerly as though--well, as though you did not like the idea of missing your music lessons for a couple of days."

"No, it is not that," replied Elly, smiling. "But ... no, I can't tell you."

"What is it, though?" asked Bertha.

"No, please, I really can't tell you."

She hugged her aunt, almost imploringly.

"Elly," said her mother, "I cannot permit you to have any secrets."

She sat down as though most deeply grieved and very tired.

"Well, Elly," said Bertha, filled with a vague fear, "if I were to beg you--"

"But you mustn't laugh at me, Aunt."

"Certainly not."

"Well, you see, Aunt, I was so frightened when you were away in Vienna that last time--I know very well it is silly--but it is because ... because of the number of carriages in the streets."

Bertha drew a deep breath as of relief, and stroked Elly's cheeks.

"I will be sure to take great care. You can be quite easy in your mind."

Her sister-in-law shook her head.

"I am afraid that Elly will turn out a most eccentric girl."

Before Bertha left the house she arranged with her sister-in-law that she would come back to supper, and that she would hand over Fritz to the care of her relations while she was away in Vienna.

After dinner, Bertha sat down at the writing table, read over Emil's letter a few more times, and made a rough draft of her reply.

"My Dear Emil,

"It was very good of you to answer me so soon. I was very happy"--she crossed out "very happy" and substituted "very glad"--"when I received your dear note. How much has changed since we last saw each other! You have become a famous virtuoso since then, which I, for my part, was always quite sure that you would be"--she stopped and struck out the whole sentence--"I also share your desire to see me soon again"--no, that was mere nonsense! This was better: "I should be immensely delighted to have an opportunity of talking to you once more."--Then an excellent idea occurred to her, and she wrote with great zest: "It is really strange that we have not met for so long, for I come to Vienna quite often; for instance, I shall be there this week-end...." Then she allowed her pen to drop and fell into thought. She was determined to go to Vienna the next afternoon, to put up at an hotel, and to sleep there, so as to be quite fresh the following day, and to breathe the air of Vienna for a few hours before meeting him. The next question was to fix a meeting place. That was easily done. "In accordance with your kind wish I am writing to let you know that on Saturday morning at eleven o'clock...." No, that was not the right thing! It was so businesslike, and yet again too eager--"if," she wrote, "you would really care to take the opportunity of seeing your old friend again, then perhaps you will not consider it too much trouble to go to the Art and History Museum on Saturday morning at eleven o'clock. I will be in the gallery of the Dutch School"--as she wrote that she seemed to herself rather impressive and, at the same time, everything of a suspicious nature seemed to be removed.

\* \* \* \* \*

She read over the draft. It appeared to her rather dry, but, after all,

it contained all that was necessary, and did not compromise her in any way. Whatever else was to happen would take place in the Museum, in the Dutch gallery.

She neatly copied out the draft, signed it, placed it in an envelope, and hurried down the sunny street to post the letter in the nearest box. On arriving home again she slipped off her dress, donned a dressing-gown, sat down on the sofa, and turned over the leaves of a novel by Gerstacker, which she had read half a score of times already. But she was unable to take in a word. At first, she attempted to dismiss from her mind the thoughts which beset her, but her efforts met with no success.

She felt ashamed of herself, but all the time she kept dreaming that she was in Emil's arms. Why ever did such dreams come to her? She had never, even for a moment, thought of such a thing! No, ... she would not think of it, either ... she was not that sort of woman.... No, she could not be anyone's mistress--and even on this occasion.... Yes, perhaps if she were to go to Vienna once more and again ... and again ... yes, much later--perhaps. And besides, he would not even so much as dare to speak of such a thing, or even to hint at it.... It was, however, useless to reason like this; she could no longer think of anything else. Ever more importunate came her dreams and, in the end, she gave up the struggle. She lolled indolently in the corner of the sofa, allowed the book to slip from her fingers and lie on the floor, and closed her eyes.

When she rose to her feet an hour later a whole night seemed to have passed, and the visit to Frau Rupius seemed, in particular, to be far distant. Again she wondered at this confusion of time--in truth, the hours appeared to be longer or shorter just as they chose.

She dressed in order to take Fritz for a walk. She was in the tired, indifferent mood which usually came over her after an unaccustomed afternoon nap. It was that mood in which it is scarcely possible to collect one's thoughts with any degree of completeness, and in which the usual appears strange, but as though it refers to some one else. For the first time, it seemed strange to Bertha that the boy, whom she was now helping into his coat, was her own child, whose father had long been buried, and for whom she had endured the pangs of motherhood.

Something within her urged her to go to the cemetery again that day. She had not, however, the feeling that she had a wrong to make reparation for, but that she must again politely visit some one to whom she had become a stranger for no valid reason. She chose the way through the chestnut avenue. There the heat was particularly oppressive that day. When she passed out into the sun again a gentle breeze was blowing and the foliage of the trees in the cemetery seemed to greet her with a slight bow. As she passed through the cemetery gates with Fritz the breeze came towards her, cool, even refreshing. With a feeling of gentle, almost sweet, weariness, she walked through the broad centre avenue, allowed Fritz to run on in front, and did not mind when he disappeared from her sight for a few seconds behind a tombstone, though at other times she would not have allowed such behaviour. She remained standing before her husband's grave. She did not, however, look down at the flower-bed, as was her general custom, but gazed past the tombstone and away over the wall into the blue sky. She felt no tears in her eyes; she felt no emotion, no dread; she did not even realize that she had walked over the dead, and that there beneath her feet he, who had once held her in his arms, had crumbled into dust.



Suddenly she heard behind her hurried footsteps on the gravel, such as she was not generally accustomed to hear in the cemetery. Almost shocked, she turned round. Klingemann was standing before her, in an attitude of greeting, holding in his hand his straw hat, which was fixed by a ribbon to his coat button. He bowed deeply to Bertha.

"What a strange thing to see you here!" she said.

"Not at all, my dear lady, not at all! I saw you from the street; I recognized you by your walk."

He spoke in a very loud tone, and Bertha almost involuntarily murmured:

"Hush!"

A mocking smile at once made its appearance on Klingemann's face.

"He won't wake up," he muttered, between his clenched teeth.

Bertha was so indignant at this remark that she did not attempt to find an answer, but called Fritz, and was about to depart.

Klingemann, however, seized her by the hand.

"Stop," he whispered, gazing at the ground.

Bertha opened her eyes wide; she could not understand.

Suddenly Klingemann looked up from the ground and fixed his eyes on Bertha's.

"I love you, you see," he said.

Bertha uttered a low cry.

Klingemann let go her hand, and added in quite an easy conversational tone:

"Perhaps that strikes you as rather odd."

"It is unheard of!--unheard of!"

Once more she sought to go, and she called Fritz.

"Stop! If you leave me alone now, Bertha...." said Klingemann, now in a suppliant tone.

Bertha had recovered her senses again.

"Don't call me Bertha!" she said, vehemently. "Who gave you the right to do so? I have no wish to say anything further to you ... and here, of all places!" she added, with a downward glance, which, as it were, besought the pardon of the dead.

Meanwhile Fritz had come back. Klingemann seemed very disappointed.

"My dear lady," he said, following Bertha, who, holding Fritz by the hand, was slowly walking away: "I recognize my mistake. I should have

begun differently and not said that which seems now to have frightened you, until I had come to the end of a well-turned speech."

Bertha did not look at him, but said, as though she were speaking to herself:

"I would not have considered it possible; I thought you were a gentleman...."

They were at the cemetery gate. Klingemann looked back again, and in his glance there was something of regret at not having been able to play out his scene at the graveside to a finish. Hat in hand, and twisting the ribbon, by which it was fastened, round his finger, and still keeping by Bertha's side, he went on to say:

"All I can do now is to repeat that I love you, that you pursue me in my dreams--in a word, you must be mine!"

Bertha came to a standstill again, as if she were terrified.

"You will, perhaps, consider my remarks insolent, but let us take things as they are. You"--he made a long pause--"are alone in the world. So am I--"

Bertha stared him full in the face.

"I know what you are thinking of," said Klingemann. "That is all of no consequence; that is all done with the moment you give the word. I have a dim presentiment that we two suit each other very well. Yes, unless I am very much deceived, the blood should be flowing in your veins, my dear lady, as warm...."

The glance which Bertha now gave him was so full of anger and loathing that Klingemann was unable to complete the sentence. He therefore began another.

"Ah, when you come to think of it, what sort of a life is it that I am now leading? It is even a long, long time since I was loved by a noble woman such as you are. I understand, of course, your hesitation, or rather, your refusal. Deuce take it, of course it needs a bit of courage--with such a disreputable fellow as I am, too ... although, perhaps, things are not quite so bad. Ah, if I could only find a human soul, a kind, womanly soul!"--He emphasized the "womanly soul"--"Yes, my dear lady, it was as little meant to be my fate as it was yours to pine away and grow crabbed in such a hole of a town as this. You must not be offended if I ... if I--"

The words began to fail him when he approached the truth. Bertha looked at him. He seemed to her at that moment to be rather ridiculous, almost pitiable, and very old, and she wondered how it was that he still had the courage, not so much as to propose to her, as even simply to court her favour.

And yet, to her own amazement and shame, there overflowed from these unseemly words of a man who appeared absurd to her, the surge, so to speak, of desire. And when his words had died away she heard them again in her mind--but as though from the lips of another who was waiting for her in Vienna--and she felt that she would not be able to withstand this other speaker. Klingemann continued to talk; he spoke of his life as

being a failure, but yet a life worth saving. He said that women were to be blamed for bringing him so low, and that a woman could raise him up again. Away back in his student days he had run away with a woman, and that had been the beginning of his misfortunes. He talked of his unbridled passions, and Bertha could not restrain a smile. At the same time she was ashamed of the knowledge which seemed to her to be implied by the smile....

"I will walk up and down in front of your window this evening," said Klingemann, when they reached the gate. "Will you play the piano?"

"I don't know."

"I will take it as a sign."

With that he went away.

In the evening she supped, as she had so often done, at her brother-in-law's house. At the table she sat between Elly and Richard. Mention was made of her approaching journey to Vienna as though it was really nothing more than a matter of paying a visit to her cousin, trying on the new costume at the dressmaker's, and executing a few commissions in the way of household necessities, which she had promised to undertake for her sister-in-law. Towards the end of supper, her brother-in-law smoked his pipe, Richard read the paper to him, her sister-in-law knitted, and Elly, who had nestled up close beside Bertha, leaned her childish head upon her aunt's breast. And Bertha, as her glance took in the whole scene, felt herself to be a crafty liar. She, the widow of a good husband, was sitting there in a family circle which interested itself in her welfare so loyally; by her side was a young girl who looked up at her as on an older friend. Hitherto she had been a good woman, honest and industrious, living only for her son. And now, was she not about to cast aside all these things, to deceive and lie to these excellent people, and to plunge into an adventure, the end of which she could foresee? What was it, then, that had come over her these last few days, by what dreams was she pursued, how was it that her whole existence seemed only to aspire towards the one moment when she would again feel the arms of a man about her? She had but to think of it and she was seized with an indescribable sensation of horror, during which she seemed devoid of will, as if she had fallen under the influence of some strange power.

And while the words that Richard was reading beat monotonously upon her ear, and her fingers played wi

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