

WONDERFUL, WONDERFUL TIMES

ELFRIEDE JELINEK

"That's brutal violence on a defenceless person, and quite unnecessary, declares Sophie, and she pulls with an audible tearing sound at the hair of the man lying in an untidy heap on the ground. What's unnecessary is best of all, says Rainer, who wants to go on fighting. We agreed on that."

It is the late 1950s. A man is out walking in a park in Vienna. He will be beaten up by four teenagers, not for his money, he has an average amount – nor for anything he might have done to them, but because the youths are arrogant and very pleased with themselves. This arrogance is their way of reacting to the maggot-ridden corpse that is Austria where everyone has a closet to hide their Nazi histories, their sexual perversions and their hatred of the foreigner. Elfriede Jelinek, who writes like an angel of all that is tawdry, shows in Wonderful, Wonderful Times how actions of the present are determined by thoughts of the past.

Translated by Michael Hulse

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Elfriede Jelinek was born in Mürzzuschlag, Austria in 1946 and grew up in Vienna, where she attended the famous Music Conservatory. In 1986, she was awarded the Heinrich Böll Prize for her contribution to German literature. Her fiction is translated into every major European language. The Piano Teacher, also published by Serpent's Tail, is currently being filmed. The translator, Michael Hulse, is an award-winning poet. He has also translated works by Goethe and Botho Strauss.



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WONDERFUL WONDERFUL TIMES

ONE NIGHT AT the end of the fifties an assault is committed in the Vienna municipal park. The following persons all grab hold of one solitary man out walking: Rainer Maria Witkowski and his twin sister Anna Witkowski, Sophie Pachhofen (formerly von Pachhofen), and Hans Sepp. Rainer Maria Witkowski was named after Rainer Maria Rilke. All of them are about eighteen, Hans Sepp is a year or so older than the others, though he too is without a trace of maturity. Of the two girls, Anna is the more ferocious, which can be seen in the fact that she pays most attention to the face of the subject. Particular courage is required if you are to scratch a man's face while he is looking full in your own (though he cannot see much since it is dark) or indeed try to scratch his eyes out. For the eyes are the mirror of the soul and ought to remain unscathed if at all possible. Otherwise people will suppose the soul is done for.

Anna (of all people) really ought to leave this fellow alone, because his character is better than hers. Because he is a victim. Anna is one of those who perpetrate wrongs. The victim is always better because he is innocent. At this time, of course, there are still a good many innocent perpetrators. With their wartime memories, their souvenirs, they stand gazing into the audience from windows bright with flowers, all friend-liness, waving, or else they are in high office. With geraniums. Forgive and forget the whole lot, is what they say, so a completely new start can be made.

Later (when everyone always knows better) it turns out that the victim was an attorney working for a medium-sized company. The victim was a man who felt totally at home in a household that was kept neat and orderly down to the very last detail, which is something Anna reserves a particular contempt

for. Cleanliness goes against her grain. By nature she is extremely unclean both within and without.

The youngsters appropriate the man's wallet. This notwithstanding, he is badly beaten up.

Anna bashes away regardless, thinking: How good to find somewhere to get rid of this powerful hatred of mine at last without having to turn it upon myself, which would be quite the wrong place for it. The money is useful too. I hope there's a lot in the wallet (it turned out to be on the average side). Hans also punches away with those fists of his, fists accustomed to manual work. As a man, he keeps to male ways of playing the game of violence: punches and treacherous, pile-driving headbutts. He leaves the universally notorious kick in the shins to Sophie, who avails herself of it time and again. Like two pistons of a complicated machine, thrusting alternately. It looked as if you just didn't want to get your fingers dirty and were leaving it to your feet, Rainer tells her later, taking her tenderly in his arms. Only to recoil promptly with a smothered, poisonous cry when she kicks him in the kneecap. She won't have that kind of thing.

Rainer, who sees himself as Sophie's one and only boyfriend (which was why he took her in his arms, after all), claws at the victim's clothing in quest of the wallet and cannot find it at first (but eventually does). Then he drives his knee into the belly of the man, who is hardly putting up any defence any more, and there is a gurgle and some slobber dribbles from the mouth. There was no blood to be seen because it was too dark.

That's brutal violence against a defenceless person, and quite unnecessary, declares Sophie, and she pulls with an audible tearing sound at the hair of the man lying in an untidy heap on the ground.

What's unnecessary is best of all, says Rainer, who wants to go on fighting. We agreed on that. What's unnecessary—that rather than anything else—is the principle at stake. But I think what's necessary is even

better, says Hans, who (oddly enough) loves money, and he eyes the wallet. Money is unimportant, snaps Rainer, spraying the wallet with spittle, what do you think, are those notes hundreds or thousands?

Money isn't our guiding principle, says Sophie in her shimmering fashion. Her parents have a great deal of it, and prosperity has made her wayward.

Hans, the sweat flying from him, is still pounding away at the victim like some mindless machine that destroys the spirit in others. That is how the brother and sister see him: as a machine. Anna has been feeling all along that it's a beautiful machine, and Sophie will soon be thinking so too. There may be a seed of discord in this. Hans's fists thump down like hammers and only draw for further blows. Ouch, groans the victim softly, but hardly has the strength to say even that. And then: Police! But no one's listening. Anna takes this as a reason to kick him in the balls, since she is against the police on principle, as anarchists always are. The man maintains a frightened silence, curls up, and rocks about a little till at last he lies motionless and stays that way. Anyway, they've already got the money.

Anna prises Hans (who is thrashing about wildly)

Anna prises Hans (who is thrashing about wildly) off the attorney and drags him away. It is time to make their getaway. People out for a walk can be heard approaching. What are they doing here at this late hour? The very same thing will happen to them one day.

The mouths of the grammar school kids and the worker are producing whistling sounds as they turn at a trot into Johannesgasse and hurry past the Vienna conservatoire, where a flurry of wind and string can be heard (and where Anna takes piano lessons). Orchestra rehearsals, which are always scheduled late so that people who work can take part are in progress. The Kärtnerstrasse will be best now, with its busy multitudes, pants Sophie, so we can hide amidst the crowd of nighttime people that one finds there. There isn't a crowd on earth that we can hide in (Anna), because we

stand out from the masses wherever we may be. The point isn't to hide but to do it openly, because that way we assert our principles of random violence to all comers (Rainer). Jerk (Hans).

Anna does not say anything else. Instead she thoughtfully licks salt from the victim's sweat and blood from the scratches scored by the victim in her right hand, the hand that was doing the hitting, and Rainer gives her an approving look, Sophie is mildly revolted, and Hans is impelled to slap her fingers. Scumbag.

There is so much pent-up rage in Anna (probably resulting from problems caused by the generation gap) that what she would like best of all would be to smash the bright windows along Vienna's shopping boulevard. She would absolutely adore having the things in those shop windows but her pocket money won't run to it. Which is why you have to earn a little extra in this way. She is invariably consumed with envy if one of the other girls at school turns up wearing a new two-piece outfit with a white blouse, or new heels. All she says, however, is: It makes me want to throw up when I see those bints tarted up like that. Look at them in their half-wit togs, superficial, not two thoughts to rub together. She herself only wears dirty jeans and outsize men's pullovers, to make a statement about her attitude. The psychiatrist she has to see on account of a recurring inability to speak (an inability which afflicts her out of the blue and then vanishes without trace) is forever asking: Tell me, my dear girl, why don't you get something nice to wear and have your hair in curls, basically you're a pretty lass and you ought to be taking dancing classes. Just look at you, you give a young lad the creeps.

As for Anna, everything gives her the creeps.

No matter. These four depraved young characters contrast sharply with the cheerful people out on the town, looking for a fun night out and

generally not finding it because this isn't the city for it. Of course fresh vitality is normally the hallmark of youth. But not of these four. And if youngsters deliberately reject freshness there is nothing to be done about it. These four are not looking for fun any more because they have already had theirs. Presently, so as not to be conspicuous, they stop running and change to an ostentatiously innocuous saunter. Rainer takes Sophie's arm. Sophie is trying to tidy her hair-do, using the dark window panes to their left and right. She gives the impression of being the most unmoved of the four, which is in fact the case, and indeed she always looks as though she were wearing white gloves. A man finds this provocative and tempting, but it never affords him any satisfaction. That is why you have to think up assaults like this. Because you don't get any satisfaction from Sophie. But there are a lot of other reasons as well. For instance: Rainer inclines to be the brain of the gang, Hans the hands, Sophie tends to be a kind of voyeuse, and Anna is angry at the whole of mankind, which is bad, since it clouds the vision and makes it difficult to get at anything. True, Anna finds it hard to get at the beautiful things you see around anyway, because you need money to buy them. Anna does not know that you cannot buy inner worth. The unfortunate drawback with inner worth is that it is hidden away where no one can see it. Anna wants things that are visible on the outside too, but she won't admit as much. People should not be beaten up for reasons of hatred but for no reason at all, it should be an end in itself, admonishes her brother Rainer. All that counts is beating them up, whether I hate them or not (Anna). You haven't understood a single thing, Rainer tells her in a superior tone.

Shit (Hans). What he means by this vulgar expression is that he has torn his shirt. There'll be hell to pay with the old woman again. We'll find some dark hallway and divvy up in a minute, says Anna, then you can buy a new one tomorrow.

12

Rainer hates his parents but is afraid of them too. They were his progenitors and now they provide his keep, while he keeps himself occupied with poetry. Fear is a component of hatred (thus Anna, who could write a doctoral thesis on the subject of hate), if one feared nothing there would be no point in hatred, and all that would remain would be empty indifference. It'd be better to be dead. Philistines are unacquainted with hatred of this kind. If we had no powerful feelings we'd be mere objects, or we'd be dead, which we will be soon enough in any case. I love most forms of art.

I hate nothing, says Sophie, because there is nothing in my life that's worth hating. But the one and only feeling you do have is your love of me, says Rainer. If both of us jab our fingers into a victim's eyes, the bond between us is firmer than marriage could ever be. We're against marriage.

I've got to go now, says Sophie, who always has to be going somewhere or other.

You can't leave me alone now because I need someone now to explain everything to, says Rainer. You've got two others anyway, says Sophie, unmoved by this outburst, you can explain it all to them. I have to go home now. What about your share? You can give it to me in school tomorrow. Hans is already reaching his claws out towards the money, a thread of saliva at the corner of his mouth discreetly suggesting greed. To which Rainer responds: Take it easy.

You look real good when you're beating someone up, Anna tells the young worker ingratiatingly, and strokes the muscles of his upper arms. His mother would never stroke his upper arms like that. It wouldn't occur to her to stroke his arms at all. There is a certain suggestiveness about Anna's stroking which makes the gesture mean more than it seems to.

I think you're great (Anna to Hans). Bye (Hans to Rainer and Anna). See you tomorrow.

With the tension ebbing away, the twins walk home to the eighth district, where many petits bourgeois live, mostly white-collar workers and pensioners. These two are themselves as much a part of the lower middle class as the core is a part of an apple, and they feel at home in it. This is their home, and they climb the stairs of the gloomy tenement building, without touching anything (to avoid being contaminated by the squalor). Soon they have reached the summit: that is to say, the fourth floor. They have arrived. And as their unfriendly home appears before them, so too does weariness, and reluctantly it opens the door to the tension, because that tension still has a thing or two planned for today, things it can't use the brother and sister for. The two re-enter their everyday life and lock the door behind them.

THERE IT IS. The apartment. And there are the parents too. A uniform tranquillity prevails before and after the assaults. Imperceptibly the children have slipped out of the child's role into the role of an adult with responsibilities. Neither of them fulfils those responsibilities.

All around the shabby old apartment tower the innumerable substandard dwellings of the old imperial city tower. Ugly and unprepossessing people, many of them old as well, slink about in these blocks, carrying chamber pots and pitchers to the toilets and water pipes in the corridors and back again. This produces a constant to-and-fro without any productive side to it.

From time to time a genius will flourish in their midst. The soil that nourishes this genius will frequently be filth, and madness will mark the bounds. The genius will want to escape the filth at all costs, but will not always succeed in eluding the madness. The Witkowskis have no notion that their oppressive fug has already brought forth a genius: Rainer. He has already got clear as far as his hips of his native mire and is now trying to haul one leg free and establish a tentative footing, though in the process he repeatedly sinks back in again, like a rhinoceros stuck in the mud. He saw that once on TV in *The Living Desert*. The head where the unlovely worm of his literary talent has taken up residence is up in the air, at any rate, gazing across a sea of fusty old underpants, battered furniture, tattered newspapers, dog-eared books, piledup detergent boxes, dishcloths with coffee grounds with a growth of mould, dishcloth with coffee grounds without the mould, tea-cups with some unidentifiable encrustation, breadcrumbs, pencil stubs, grubby eraser rubbings, filled-in crossword puzzles and sweaty socks, gazing involuntarily across into the realm of Art, the one

realm that is wide open to you as long as you have a little luck.

Today, though, Rainer and Anna are at school, the grammar school which unfortunately they have to go to every day till they take their school-leaving exams.

Herr Witkowski returned from the War with one leg,

but erect. In the War he was more of a man than now. that is to say, he was intact, two-legged, and in the SS. Nowadays he is as firm about his hobby as he was then about his choice of profession. There are no bounds to his hobby, which is art photography. His one-time enemies got away through the chimneys and crematoria of Auschwitz and Treblinka or littered Slavic earth. Nowadays Rainer's father crosses the petty frontiers of today's Germany anew whenever he takes his artistic photographs. Only a philistine recognises those frontiers in his private life. In photography, the bounds are fixed by clothing. And Witkowski senior bursts the narrow confines of clothing and morality. Mother knew right away who her son was taking after in his artistic leanings: Father. Father had the eye of the amateur artist. Get undressed, Margarethe, we'll take a nude picture or two! There you go again, get undressed, it always occurs to you when I'm busy doing the cleaning. Who's the breadwinner in this family anyway, demands Herr Witkowski, who draws an invalidity pension and works as a night porter. With this disability, all I have left is my hobby, porn photography. As far as mature people are concerned there is no such thing as pornography. Pornography is for people who need to be led and influenced. And even if my children won't follow me into hobbyland, at least you will, Gretl. Now get on with it, pronto, my camera's waiting to do its duty.

Can't you take photos of me with my clothes on like other people do? No, any amateur can take pictures of people with their clothes on. Anyway, it's a twofold pleasure for me, once when I take the pictures and

then secondly when I look at them and evaluate them critically. Between the two stages come the developing and enlarging. That is enjoyable too. Art is always a struggle for the desired result. Your willpower will show in the picture too, Gretl, when you've put your objections behind you. You can see an artist's talent in his eyes, partly, burning deep down within.

Right, let's go. A housewife who is being spied on by a stranger while she's washing in the kitchen tries to cover up but all she has for the purpose is (say) an inadequate ovencloth. Which doesn't even cover her vital parts, her privates, thank God. And the privates are what I want. The housewife, being clumsy into the bargain, covers the wrong part too, instead of the right part. Come on, Gretl, come on.

But now there's a shadow over the privates, you stupid cow. The cunt, I mean. But I'm doing it just the way I did it last time! Well, that's wrong, you have to do it different every time so that the effect is striking and artistic. You have to leave that to me, who's the photography expert anyway, you or me? You, Otto. See?

Mother, who has seen better days (days when SS officers' wives would meet), better days than these days as an artist's wife, tugs and adjusts but if anything she makes matters worse rather than improving things.

You have to look afraid. It's always a terrific feeling to smash down resistance, I smashed resistance quite often myself in the War and liquidated numerous persons all on my own. Nowadays I have this wretched leg to contend with, but back then the women couldn't get enough of me, it was the magical attraction of the uniform that did it. That smart uniform. I remember how we were often up to the ankles of our riding-boots in blood in Polish villages. Look, thrust your pelvis further forward, you slut, where's your pussy got to again? Ah, there it is.

Mother hums one of those melancholy songs by Koschat, which always have a birch seat in them. She is thinking of a field of wheat and a walk in the country, things that you're reluctant to expect a one-legged man to take on, it's hard to ask it of him, he'd only spoil the mood from the very start anyway. Father is thinking of a different field, the field of honour where he didn't fall. Now he keeps a careful watch on the field of family honour, by way of compensation. So his wife, the sow, doesn't have it off with men who are not disabled. You can't keep an eye on her all the time, and what does she do at the grocer's when she goes there?

Frau Witkowski says it's often necessary to have a break. Herr Witkowski says he'll break something of hers in a minute, and throws something hard that hits her shoulder and makes her start. She'll have a bruise there. Ready yet, you whore? Look, it's not too much to ask, now is it? Else I'll knock you down with my crutches. At one time I would have thrown myself on you but now it's out of the question, a man with one leg can't throw himself anywhere (or he'll have problems getting up again). It's like a fish. A fish hasn't got any legs at all but it can swim and dive gracefully. So I'm a perfect photographer. Now get your legs apart!

My hobby photographer's eye tells me that you've not washed your hair. Again. I ordered you to wash your hair. It's supposed to look silky and not like some straggly thornbush. You do nothing but get in the way of my personal fulfilment. I get my fulfilment from nude photography. Whenever you block off my forays into the realm of photography I could bash your skull in.

But I don't block off your forays into the realm of

photography, not at all, Otti.

NNA DESPISES TWO classes of people: first, those who own their own homes and have cars and families, and second, everybody else. Constantly she is on the verge of exploding. With rage. A pool of pure red. The pool is filled with speechlessness that talks away at her nonstop. In her there is nothing whatsoever of a lass with a perm or a bobbing pony-tail listening to a hit in a record store and restlessly tapping her foot because the rhythm gets to her. Everybody but her is on the ice, the smooth, endless ice, and Anna kicks and shoves them in turn as she goes along. Right out to the very edge, which you cannot see but which it's to be hoped is there so that they can all be swept into the deathly-cold water. What she talks about with her brother is of a philosophical or literary nature, but what speaks from within her alone is the language of the sounds produced by the piano.

On a school trip once, the girls in her class took a photo where they were all giving a double-page pic of Peter Kraus in *Bravo* magazine a kiss. Eight laughing faces, all going mmmm-mmmm with their lips pursed to kiss and smiling into the camera. Anna was the only one who wouldn't purse her lips, and they jeered at her. The real derision followed soon after, when one of the girls said to Anni: Hey, Anni, get in here quick, they've got Bach on the Wurlitzer, sounds like your kind of thing. And dimwit Anna, stupid with sun, blinded by her music studies and rendered a social defective by a crazy mother, dashed in as fast as she could go, wanting her own music that nobody but her would understand and which she could explain. But what was playing on the jukebox? A hit by Elvis, Tuttifrutti, which you have to reject for educational reasons, let alone anything else. The girls rolled about on the café floor, their stupid schoolmate Anna imagined

you'd get Bach on a Wurlitzer and not what youngsters love.

That is the kind of twisted schoolkid Anna is. Anna, who spends her spare time playing the piano.

In Anna's case it tends to be a sweeping-up job, like a street-cleaning machine. In Rainer's it is more like a flight of steps consisting of living human beings, with the young author standing on the topmost step, picked out by a light, reading out one of his own poems, a poem that embraces the whole of mankind and is mythic in character.

Apart from literature (which anyone who can speak is a master of, none more nor less than another, but which certain people have monopolised, people who can't afford a superior method to elevate them out of their surroundings), Rainer has unfortunately not managed to conquer anything else yet. But literature is well able to meet Rainer's demands.

Whenever (contrary to all expectation) the twins are invited to some wild party, they promptly say no, we don't associate with people like that, that kind of fun is stupid and pointless. But they only say it because they can't dance and can't stand not being better at something than other people. Renunciation is rarely easy for Youth, but Age finds it less of a problem since it has already been practising renunciation the whole time.

Rainer says you can take possession of a person. First of all you have to know more than he does, and then he will recognise your expert status. Hans, for instance, the young worker met at the jazz club. Rainer will explain everything to him, till he is nothing but a tool without a will of his own; this is more difficult than fashioning a literary text, since people are capable of putting up surprising resistance. Which is tiring. But it stretches you.

Art is flexible and tremendously forbearing. People are occasionally refractory, but they are receptive to explanations. Of course they think they know better anyway, but Rainer really does know better.

The kids who go to school with him are a grey flock of lambs, ignorant and immature. They say what they did with girls at the weekend, in the basements (converted for partying) of their parental homes, in their own rooms in comfortable apartments at Hietzing, in the woods while looking for mushrooms, or in a changing cubicle at the swimming baths. The girls say what they allowed to be done to them or how they refused to do it and how the boys begged. But they were adamant because they Want To Stay A Virgin. Everything that's said is a cue for something else. Rainer, have you never done it with a girl? At least when they're talking about intimate subjects like this they don't call him 'Professor' the way they usually do. Rainer promptly explains that lust is a species of ecstasy. (????) You see, in this state of ecstasy, consciousness is merely the consciousness of the body, and therefore a reflexive consciousness of physicality. As in the case of physical pain, in lust there is a kind of reflex which ensures that one is very intensely aware of one's lust. (Huh? I don't get

Anna states that for that reason lust is the death of desire, because it is not only the consummation of desire but also its goal and thus its end. People go in pursuit of lust, yet it remains totally meaningless.

The class desert the show, saying: These two professors don't know what they're talking about. They've never copped hold of a cunt or a prick in their lives.

Sophie Pachhofen goes gazelling about the rooms that pong of chalk, hunting in her purse for money to buy the notorious roll for break and a Coke. Envious, Anna hides her thick wedge of bread and dripping; Mummy spread it for her and put her whole heart into it because Anna is her favourite child (she is a woman, like herself), Rainer is more of a Daddy's boy. Love of Sophie hits Rainer like a karate chop in the neck,

and he says to this girl whom he secretly adores: The carnal presence of the other is increasingly lost from sight to the consciousness, which ingurgitates our own carnality instead, this being its ultimate objective. So now you know, Sophie. One must act accordingly.

Rainer digs a fingernail into the palm of his hand. He is so terribly keen to have Sophie. She herself wants it just as badly. She simply won't admit it to herself.

Rainer informs Sophie that he is the beast of prey and she is the prey. Sophie says, I don't get it, what's all this about. Do you fancy coming to play tennis some time? Rainer says he only ever plays on his own court. Sophie's gaze strays beyond him. Rainer says she should take it to heart: the desire to caress becomes the desire to be caressed. One wants to feel one's body blossoming, to the point of nausea. Has Sophie (he speculates) ever felt that? If not, he'll show her what's meant.

Sophie leaves.

Everything gives me the creeps, especially today, says Anna.

As soon as Sophie returns from the grocer's with the salami roll, Rainer will order her to hand it over to him. It will be a trial of wills. There she comes now. Experimentally, adopting a brutal expression, Rainer places a number of fingers on Sophie's jugular. Ouch, are you crazy, there's a whole lot of nerves in the neck that you can kill off unintentionally. Who said anything about unintentionally, says Rainer. I saw it in a French film.

You don't go killing people just because you saw it in a film.

Who knows what I'm capable of, says Rainer. All I know is that I'm capable of inconceivable cruelty and keep a firm grip on myself so that I don't really behave that way.

Anna is lurking in the background, lying in wait for half a roll that's going free. I brought you one too, says

Sophie, offering it. With fish and onions, how you like it. Great!

As soon as Anna has gobbled her half roll she goes out to the toilet and sticks a finger down her throat. Out they come again, the fish and onions, yurgh, only in reverse order. Anna contemplates what she has thrown up, then pulls the flush. She feels as if she consisted entirely of filth. No wonder. After all, she unceasingly brings the filth with her from home, like a magnet.

Once, when she was still a child, she watched Mummy in the bathtub. Contrary to her usual bathtime practice, Mother was wearing an old pair of white panties, which billowed out like a sail in the water. There were red stains on them. Revolting. A body such as that is simply an appendage to a person, and one that easily spoils. It isn't the main thing. Even though there is a lot you can buy to put inside the body or drape on it. Whenever Anna sees something white she promptly wants to stain it.

Anna's thoughts turn constantly and compulsively to unpleasant things that slip past the checkpoint in her brain. It's one-way traffic: the barrier's raised to let things in but doesn't let them out. That brain of hers is crammed with unpleasantness, and the emergency exit is nailed shut. Take (for instance) the humiliating memory of how a number of mothers complained about her to the teacher some years ago. Anna's sexuality had been issuing from her lips in the form of gross jokes (just as Rainer's sexuality too is only ever a matter for the mouth). Supposedly Anna's jokes had poisoned the childlike souls of various classmates. That was when Anna's difficulties in speaking first began. More and more often her tongue would say no, I'm not doing anything today.

Right now Anna is once again making stains. What she'd like best would be to see Sophie's surface area grubbied about like this. But it is made of the finest repellent material: the material repels dirt.

Another little example. Anna is fourteen years old. She is sitting naked on the floor, legs apart, trying to deflower herself with the aid of an old shaving mirror and a razor blade, to rid herself of a membrane that is supposedly down there. But she knows nothing about anatomy and cuts into her perinaeum by mistake. Which bleeds fearfully.

When Anna emerges into the open from the reeking school toilet, naturally it's snow-white Sophie who whirls past her first, burying her. Sophie the avalanche. Want to stop by at my place this afternoon? Okay.

Anna pumps away energetically and keeps it up for a long time, but there is no blood (as there was that time back then), no ink, no raspberry juice and no vomit.

Sophie slips nimbly past her and heads outside. Into the light. Where it is so light that Sophie no longer stands out, and disappears without trace.

ANS SEPP'S FATHER was in the labour movement, and was killed at Mauthausen concentration camp. As if it had never witnessed such things, the light of the setting sun breaks brightly upon the Kochgasse windows, burning with a greater intensity than it has on leaving the sun. You have to close your blinded eyes for protection against the violence of Nature. The people who live here have experience in turning a blind eye to things.

Across the road there is a little shop selling knitting and sewing equipment. Brightly-coloured yarns and wools on little crocheted doilies; the pointed needles are inside the store. Touched by the things of everyday life, Hans the natural creature enters the council block where he lives with his mother. Obdurately he looks right through the old lady and her daughter (both of them wearing black work smocks); they are serving ladies who do handicraft work at home. Hans's mother does work at home too. In their untidy home she addresses envelopes. It's paid work, mind you.

There is also something natural about the potatoes and oranges and bananas at the greengrocer's. Anna and Rainer would be certain to compare these things with something they know from the artificial, manmade world of poetry, thinks Hans arrogantly. Nature is much more vitally present to me. I have my finger on the pulse of the age. I let things come and go, in and out of me. In Laudongasse the number 5 tram sets up an almost continuous squealing, approaching the stop by the baker's. I'm not yet spoilt by art and literature, thinks Hans.

His mother also gazes into the reflection of the setting sun. As she does so, her head and heart are occupied with social democracy, which has often been a disappointment to her. If there are many more disap-

pointments she will try the Communists. Where did you get that pullover, Hans? That cashmere wool is a class or two higher than what our budget will run to. Mother sets fire to a thread and can tell from the stench that it's real wool. Hans (returning home from the Elin Union, the firm where he is being trained to be an electrician) promptly informs her that he was given the pullover by his friend Sophie, whose parents are rich. He is still the man and she the woman. And things are going to stay that way. He'll see to that. If you go on like that you'll betray the cause of the workers without realising you're doing it, says Mother. Hans goes into the kitchen, the only room that is heated, and pours a glass of milk so that he will still be able to go in for a lot of sport. He sleeps in a tiny closet, Mother in the cold living room. Screw the working class, long live rock 'n' roll. It's the class you belong to. Not for much longer, if I can help it, I'm going to be a gym teacher or maybe something even better, who knows.

At that moment a fresh swarm of workers pour out of the number 5 that has just arrived, into the side streets. Stale and fuggy stairwells suddenly come alive. The mothers of families dive for apartment doors to welcome their breadwinners home. They snatch their shabby briefcases, battered cooking utensils and thermos flasks away from them; or (in the case of Superior People) relieve them of attaché cases plus newspapers, remnants of Superior People's trout, greasy paper, etc. And the homecomers change into the down-at-heel socks they wear at home and which until recently they were still wearing to work. These people know what having to scrimp and save is like, even if they don't all need to. You can't always go buying some-thing new if you still have the old thing. The first clips have been administered to children's ears and their illtreated voices are uplifted in shrill chorus. No, Karli can't go out again today, I said no. Round the corner, in Beserl Park, dogs go for a leisurely prowl in the grass,

26

and crap a little here and there. War invalids, who at one time were out and about in the streets, watch them with interest, thinking of the time when they were still somebody, on enemy territory in a foreign land, somebody they no longer are.

They crack the leads like whips, which makes no impression on the dogs. No one obeys the one-time soldiers any more, nor do they have anyone whose every word they can themselves obey. Authority is unfortunately a thing of the past.

Hans gobbles up several rounds of bread and margarine and checks his quiff in the old shaving mirror which supposedly belonged to his murdered father. Don't get started on your concentration camp stories again, I've had them up to here.

Across the road, the woman who keeps the knitware shop lets the blind half down. Behind it, bending forward, is a customer, still talking about a new pattern. The era of embroidered pictures on every wall is just dawning and will soon be in full swing. Scarcely have people acquired the hard-won bare essentials than they are already starting to think of the unnecessary luxuries. It'd be best if they didn't even trouble to ponder the necessities of life. If you don't have the cash you get your sunshine from things you don't really need. Or else the daily grind is grey.

You haven't been to the group evenings for four weeks. They could use you just now to stick posters up (Mother to Hans). Piss off (Hans to Mother). She treats him to a long quotation from a book, dry as paper.

Till well into the fifties, the situation of the working people was even worse than at the time of the great economic crisis in 1937. This period is considered part of the notorious post-War phase. Productivity was increased, which was tantamount to aggravating exploitation, but at the same time food was in distinctly short supply. At the time when the action of this novel

takes place, though, everyone is already much better off and the way is clear for a wirtschaftswunder (a German notion familiar from numerous films featuring kidneyshaped fifties tables and cocktail cabinets, and from numerous blondes with big busts propped aloft in wired C-cups). Everyone hails it with loud cheers of welcome. There are always some people, though, in whom the way is never clear for anything, let alone wonders. They keep on opening their doors, but all that comes in is the cold from outside. Frau Sepp is one of these unfortunates.

In faltering tones she tells her son about that decisive year, 1950, for the umpteenth time. It gets on his nerves. In 1950 she said goodbye to her next-to-last hopes. (Today's emphasis is on Olah's drunken bands bursting into factories, beating, butting and thumping, forcing the strikers to resume work. Olah, commander of the strikebreaking posse, is in the SPÖ National Assembly, and so on and so forth, blah blah blah.) Frau Sepp overlooks one point: that her son, in inverse proportion to her own hopes, has for some time been nurturing false hopes, hopes which he himself believes to be realistic. Hans is a young, healthy fellow and relies on his fists, just as those Social Democrat officials Probst, Koci and Wrba relied on theirs when they crushed the strikes. Hans has learnt that you don't have to be an official of the beloved workers' party to bash things down, there's a more straightforward way of doing it, and (above all) you can do it solely for yourself. At some point you'll start accumulating a fortune, a fortune which will go on getting bigger and bigger.

It is lighting-up time and the current is surging into the first street lamps. That current was created by Hans single-handed. Not the Almighty. But you've always liked your work, admonishes Mother. There's better things in life, and I know what they are, too, counters Hans briskly.

To think that that is what your father died for. So what, he didn't have to die on my account (Hans).

Imagine there were just one more person here, Mama, you couldn't swing a cat. But Hans, there are people who have more room than they need to live in. There's a cosy little bench in Helenental, and old villas in the Hietzing part of Vienna. Which is where Sophie lives. One way or another I'm going to get in there too, swears Hans. Tenderly he folds up the expensive cashmere pullover and puts on the mended cardigan he's had since childhood. He's looking after things for later (something you have to learn early, because when you're young there's always a later, but when you're old it's all over), and later he'll be saving for later still, so that he has something for that rainy day which hopefully will never come.

Now, as if at a signal, evening cooking commences all over the building, and smells both nasty and pleasant fill the stairwell, settling into the flaking plaster, where they meet old acquaintances for a chat: cabbage and sauerkraut, potatoes and beans. A second shift of clouted kids howl through the doors. Daddy's tired. His nerves are bad. Psst, be quiet, or else his nervous insulation will tear good and proper.

Hans has a vision of glistening china, silver cutlery, and a prevalent muted atmosphere in both actions and words. In tone and bearing you never make a slip, you'd sooner slip your hand into someone else's pocket. Hans has an ideal because he is an adolescent. Adolescence and ideals go hand in hand. What they produce are resolutions involving love, which is always selfless. For which reason you can help yourself to as much as you can get.

Hans reports that Rainer said that in Nature the strong crush the weak. It's logical, isn't it, which of the two I want to be. Who is this Rainer (Mother's uneasy query). You drive me up the wall with your stupid questions, snaps the son cantankerously, and he pushes off, although he hasn't even had anything decent to eat, which is another need that young people

have. As so often, potato goulash was on the menu today.

Mother stands there in the darkened room, her back aching from writing, swaddled in the dark and battered furniture about her. Which is an indication that she has achieved nothing in life. Which is her own fault. All of the guilty are perpetrators and all perpetrators are guilty. She is also swaddled in the human tea-cosy of the murdered, the hanged, the gassed, those who were shot and those who had the gold teeth torn from their mouths. Servus, Hansi, sleep well (that was her husband's name and it is also her son's). Her Hans, who is already a grown lad and thus no longer a Hansi, is just leaving the house. A pity Papa couldn't see him grow up. But strangers always mattered more to him than his own family. Now Mama has to watch out on her own. It's tough for a boy if he doesn't have a father, you read this all the time, it doesn't matter so much to a girl. People cleverer than Hansmother have said that, so it must be true. And the sun does not laugh at this because the sun has just tramped off for good. All that is left of the Kochgasse are the bright circles the lamps carve out of the darkness of the houses. That doesn't mean that what you cannot see does not exist. If it is not over and done with, forgiven and forgotten, it is still there. It is still there, the setting for many fates of no particular interest. To avoid all that, Hans is heading off for a more interesting fate, and is wholly absorbed in it.

AUTUMN ALWAYS DID have a good deal on its conscience. Especially when someone still young in years is responding sensitively to it. Old people are forever thinking of death, young people do so only in autumn, the season of universal decay in the vegetable and animal kingdoms. Rainer maintains that in autumn nights he puts forth the wings of a magic all his own. Then later, bleeding cats on chains lick the caterwauling from their mauled fur. This is a poem. Rainer's mind involuntarily turns to women whenever he thinks of autumnal decay, his mother (for instance) is decaying without let up. A woman always wants to have something shoved into her, either that or she's giving birth to a child, which comes out of her. That is Rainer's image of Woman. There's an effusive stench of light, says Rainer, in the poem about autumn. It's not quite over, but very nearly. As in his mother's case. Father's still a go-getter. But Mother's all no-ever. More than she loves him, Mother loves his sister. Her need is greater (she says) because her soul is in greater danger. His father, on the other hand, prefers him, because he is the Son and Heir and will perpetuate his name.

Using all those senses that are not currently required for the pursuit of poetry, he keeps his ears pricked for the telephone, which will convey Sophie to the house, no effort involved. If he's asked if he's expecting a call he says no, what would I be expecting, but in reality he is waiting for that beloved voice. Which only materialises on rare occasions. You ought not to take the first step on account of your status. Why on earth can't the voice reach him via radio waves instead of this idiotic request programme where idiotic people send messages to others who are even more idiotic, wishing many happy returns of their dreary birthdays or saints' days. It would have

been better if these people had never been born, it makes no difference if they're alive or not.

Sophie thinks of sport a lot but very rarely of love. A sporting lass has other things on her mind.

There are too many unbeautiful things within Rainer. These things are a tremendous burden on a child, and an adolescent cannot shrug off the burden so easily. Far too often the boy saw his mother, like the skeleton of an old horse, buckle into a big V beneath the father's blows. Usually old slippers were employed for the purpose, which could be thrown away after use. Apparently the beatings began on the very day the War was lost. Up till then, Father had been beating sundry foreigners. Now only Mother and the children were at his disposal. He had chased people into the marshes, too, where they quickly passed away. He can prove it. It was just his bad luck that others who did the same are now climbing up the ranks once more, whereas he is not. That's Fate. It's an individual thing. Even in that erstwhile élite troop there were failures such as his father, destined to remain unimportant little shits forever. The élite component disappeared and all that remained was a lump of humanity. But he's an honest worker and has nothing to be ashamed of, he says. He has already tried his hand at a variety of jobs, but so far he's always failed at them. He drove to France because he wanted to handle balloon advertising for a French product, but they found someone they thought smarter and assigned the project to him. One more chance passed by. And Father is gradually shrivelling up, naturally, with age.

Mother tells him the children's education is the most important thing. It is a duty. The grammar school affords the opportunity for that education. Father tends to say they should go and start earning, which rather alarms the educated twins. They do not believe this can be expected of them.

From the overgrown corners of the room, the ugly mug of impending poverty (which in fact is no longer impending but has long since been a fact of life) gives a friendly grin and a wink. The twins' jeans, oft altered and reinforced to protect them from wear, drag furrows through the floor's protozoic ooze, Mother has to go cleaning strangers' homes, her own home is neglected. In the homes of those strange people there are strange men. For this reason Father roars like an ox being roasted alive. Mother won't be spared, there's nothing to protect her, constantly she's kicked and knocked about. Furthermore, she does not create that atmosphere of tranquil cosiness which should be the hallmark of the housewife's home. And it really is up to her to create that, since the ex-officer's task is quite different from the promotion of contentment. Wherever he comes across cosiness he destroys it.

Among their acquaintances, who are few in number, Father is considered an oddball who utters bizarre comments and won't accept a single thing he is offered, because he'd just as soon not eat from other people's fleshpots, thank you very much (as he puts it).

Father often thinks of the dark skeletons of people he killed. The white and immaculate snow of Poland turned bloody and maculate. But snow goes on falling, again and again, and by now it bears no trace of those who disappeared there.

Mother, on the other hand, tries to teach her children the principles of humanity. That is the task of a mother. Still, Mother soon has to abandon the attempt because the children are out to be inhuman and do everything they can to look the part as well. Whatever you do is in vain. And revolting. Everything's revolting, but it's never disposed of. Not at all. It's all revolting: the crumpled papers, old cigarette butts on the floor, cheese rind, wurst skins, coffee stains and in particular apple cores and orange pips. They are the worst. They are not cleared away because retching is a delicious feeling. The flat is full of corners and recesses crammed with piled-up garbage. The petit bourgeois always has something

to hide, that is what those corners are there for. Chez Witkowski you can view everything the *petit bourgeois* has to hide because they throw nothing away. And there he stands, the Good Citizen, amidst his corners and recesses, ready to withdraw at the drop of a hat and indulge in unseen piggery.

The twins' unhappiness makes them superior because they have shaken off the shackles and do what they want. Rainer says: people's lives are predetermined in some way or other, but not mine, I'm superior to them on account of my Will. On the other hand, the individual is free if he wants to be. Rainer avails himself of that freedom, graciously: here he is, being awarded his accreditation certificate. There is a certain heroism in him. In this lonely youth. Lonely in the sense that no one sees him, which halves the value of even the prettiest heroism. Still, at least Rainer can look himself in the face when he's alone with his mirror.

From time to time a day will be quite normal, and Father will pick one of the children at random and beat it, bellowing as he does so. Because the child in question doesn't want to do what he wants it to do. At such times the child will flail about helplessly. But the child proper will rise from out of the body to a somewhat higher elevation which affords a better view of the cruel goings-on. Anna and Rainer got into the habit of doing this when they were kids, and now they imagine they are still high up aloft, looking down on the rest. Physically, their development is troublesome and hesitant. But their sense of Higher Things has remained intact. In their heads, something is building up, gathering for an explosion of orange light at some later date.

And the time has already come, now that the twins have left Father behind in terms of knowledge. But nevertheless Father believes he knows more than the children do. Age and experience have made him knowledgeable. In this new era, what sets you free is

34

knowledge, not work. We don't want to work, no, least of all with our hands. Many of these youngsters who only want to dance and listen to jazz are too immature to do anything in their leisure time, which is why they are deprived of it.

Mother came of a superior background, but that was a long time ago. She was a teacher. Then all of a sudden the two halves of the parental couple unexpectedly found themselves fucking on the floor. Anna and Rainer hate their parents, because Youth is often over-hasty and uncompromising. Frequently they behave wickedly towards their detested father, disgustedly aping his every movement, snatching his crutches from him, tripping him (that is, his solitary leg), spitting into his food, and not bringing him the things he wants. Bloody-mindedness! bawls the ageing man. But he can never establish whether they are doing things on purpose. Nonetheless he keeps them at grammar school, so that he can go about saying they go to grammar school. This is how values disintegrate. You can clearly see it happening: the value of authority, the value of paternal rule.

But there's still a wife and mother to take revenge on. By telling her that her body bears an ever-increasing resemblance to a mouldy piece of cheese, or by pinching the housekeeping money from the china mug where it's always kept and accusing her of squandering it on herself. Take today, for instance: Mother seeks solace from her children because he has just maliciously cut up the brand new apron (made of pretty flower-pattern material bought in a sale) which she ran up herself on the hire-purchase sewing machine. She has no talent for sewing, but she did the job with care. Taking pleasure in her own handiwork. Things you make yourself are usually better made and of better quality because you know what's what whereas in the case of bought goods you never do know. Though naturally you suspect that the workmanship is slovenly and substandard, so that

the buttons will promptly fall off, and the price is far too high. You can do it cheaper. So Mummy's saved a whole load of money, using her fingers, only to have Papa cut the lot to shreds. Deliberately. Because he was opposed to having a sewing machine in the house. On principle. If Mama runs up a new number for herself, other men, total strangers, might take it into their heads to take a close look at her figure, which is still feminine although she's been losing it. What kind of materials has she been picking, anyway? Right: attractive, bright fabrics, or at least what she finds bright (little mushrooms, bees, beetles, flowers etc.). And what kind of patterns has she been picking? Right: the very ones that emphasise her breasts, hips and ass (insofar as she possesses breasts, hips and an ass). Of all things! Those parts of her anatomy are not supposed to be emphasised. They are there for Daddy alone. And no one else. You're out to pick up a man, eh? Well I may be a cripple but I'm still more of a man than some other fellow with two legs. Want me to prove it? No time like the present. Anywhere will do, the patchwork rug by the bed or the bed itself, which has seen a good deal of suffering and menstrual blood in the past and reeks of it pungently. You can't be busy washing the whole time, you have to relax with a good book now and then. Typical, you buy a sewing machine instead of a washing machine. To think how clean we could all be. But what are we? Dirty. But there you are with your new red apron. Snick-snick go the scissors! All that work, done for, just like that. What a mean thing to do.

Be thankful I'm not doing you bodily harm. I was taught how to. You have to force yourself at first, but then it comes easily, of its own accord. By the way, I've got an idea for a new series of photos, I could make cuts, incisions and little holes in your skin. Or I could use the children's water-colours to get the effect.

I've been baking, I made you an apricot flan, poor Mumsie tells the children ingratiatingly,

seeking sympathy and not finding any. She is counting on education, which prepares the way for understanding and sympathy, and on their hearts, but their hearts have long been missing that particular beat. You invest so much in Rainer and Anna, but all you get back is Rainer and Anna, minus the warmth and affection, and nothing more. There is the flan and there are the glass dishes. I'll put it here, with all the books, there's no room for a fresh flan any more, clear this stuff away, can't you!

No. Won't. Those books are worth more than any flan. We're just reading about how this existence of ours is valueless. Get lost, Mama, the twins chorus, sending their mother packing. She's unwelcome everywhere, poor soul. This has catastrophic consequences for her general condition.

Having given their mother a thorough yelling-at, the twins promptly turn to the flan and gobble it all up. This isn't beneath them at all.

Not a single piece is left for Mama, though she would have liked one too.

RAINER BELIEVES IT is tantamount to degradation of a woman if she submits to physical contact. You can see this in the case of Mother, who is frequently to be heard shouting for help in the bedroom. But it is out of the question that abnormal acts are being performed upon her and that that is why she's shouting. Relatives have often noticed that Rainer's look isn't normal, perhaps it is because he has witnessed this bedroom business too many times: But he has never watched. His head has always disappeared instantly under the blanket. You see nothing in there, and all you smell is yourself. On occasion Rainer will only take soup and he'll refuse to eat solid fare in spite of the fact that men usually adore hearty food. Anna sometimes eats nothing whatsoever. This may go on for days. When the siblings get up from table after eating nothing, they lie down together on one of their beds (which have been separated by means of a purpose-built partition wall, he being a boy and she a girl) and screen off the outside world. Rainer writes poems, the better to screen it off. Frequently he sees faces in trees and they inspire him, headcase that he is. He has no friends, only mates, and Rainer, who despises matiness on principle, finds that often they don't behave in maty ways to him. In the case of a writer like Musil, writing is often a graceful act, like a silvery fish leaping; but not with Rainer. In his case it is someone rummaging and then digging his teeth in.

Every moment, Rainer and Anna are aware that thanks to their parents' having moved to the city they were spared places like Ybbsitz, Laa an der Thaya, Laa an der Pielach or sundry St Michaels. They are glad they don't have to live in the kind of wretched provinciality they know from Grandmother's farm. Anything but that. Where screaming alpine choughs, crows and other

vermin claw at trees already seared by winter. Where various clouds go whizzing across the dismal sky, deer call, and reeking *Volksschule* kids and feeble-minded *Hauptschule* kids pack their flesh into the mail bus. The poverty bacillus is rife amongst them. A steaming mush of woollens handed down by older siblings.

They don't have any fate ahead of them, says Rainer, they're already condemned to death even before they're born, and every one of their heads contains the same picture. The picture inside one head is identical to the picture in the next. And to think that this is in the open country, a free country, though there isn't really the least hint of freedom. Dreary landscape stretches away into the rain, you can't see where it ends but it does end, the limits are in the people's heads. The siblings have discovered narrow-mindedness in the city too. And they rejoice in the discovery, because they themselves went beyond those limits some time ago. They have snatched at the bluish umbilical cord of the places they were meant to stay and bitten it through with their sharp teeth. The trickle of blood is dripping off their chins. A pale pair of tongues, Rainer's tongue and Anna's tongue, are licking at it. Soon there won't be a shred of skin left of the natural bounds of birth. Infinite expanses are revealed, with a cold sun like an unbroken yolk in a bowl of milk.

If anyone's going to do any breaking or hurting around here, it'll be Anna and Rainer.

No more crisp frost on village streets. No more thin-soled Sunday shoes unsuited to weather and wearer alike. No one goes in to see the Western with a spring in his step and (though the only others there are jerks with snotty beaks and hair slicked back with brilliantine) emerges from the cinema a cowboy. No fear of coming home too late or of being hit with hard objects. And then having to lug the heavy bucket of piping pig broth out to the sty. And if you forget to take off your good shoes beforehand they'll stink so

badly you'll have to downgrade them for wearing to the sty only.

The twins are not marginal figures. They are the main characters. They are the centre of things, which is not a central point at all but in fact a broad spectrum of people.

What the siblings exude is not joie de vivre such as a youngster listening to a transistor radio exudes but rather anger and revulsion. You give your kids all the love in the world and the way it turns out in the end you might as well not love them at all. They believe that there is a part of every human being that is not pre-determined. Something unforeseen that is outside society's bounds and thus completely free. Only underlings like cake and the music of Elvis, Peter and Conny.

Rainer sups clear chicken broth with unidentifiable things floating in it yet again, things that cloud its clearness after all.

Then you could always tear these new Conny-style skirts apart with your teeth. The skirts are in fashion, recently the grey masses of girls have been eager to wear them because the material is cheap and they're everywhere you look and if the skirt is red it sends a cheerful message and if it's blue it's dramatic.

Destroy the piled-up crow's-nests on the heads of unbelievably ugly girls and dismantle them by pulling out the hairpins. Grind velour pullovers between your teeth for as long as it takes for all trace of the pile to have disappeared, leaving just the floppy smoothness of ordinary pullovers. Rainer bites his lip so the blood flows, seeing them pass him by, saying take me, no, take me instead, they've applied black eyeliner to their eyelids and white lipstick or pale pink lip gloss, they are a grey flock with occasional patches of blossom in their midst. Beneath the underskirts specially starched by Mummy there is an abdominal

smell. They have to have a petticoat. But it won't wash itself.

Rainer does not want closer contact with a girl just yet. He wants to pass judgement on them from a distance. He still has time for intimacy, he knows.

Mummy enters abruptly and is justifiably alarmed by her brood, but she says: what's needed rather than this is for our off-spring to have beauty in its thoughts, words and deeds. That is why they go to the grammar school. You learn that there. What they need is to build bridges, not demolish them, one bridge leads to our fellow-man and the next from our fellow-man to us. The twins do not want to build bridges.

Anna: We are ourselves indeed a freedom that chooses, but we do not choose to be free. We are condemned to freedom. If I look at you, Mama, that's plainly true. Forsaken in freedom. That's you exactly. And that forsaken condition has no other cause than the very existence of freedom. You can tell by looking at you.

Mummy does not understand. What she does know, though, is that the world would be a lot better off if it paid more attention to its philosophers and artists than to its own tiny egoistic spirit, which lacks an overview. People should place their belief in Beethoven and Socrates.

The twins explain to Mother that the non-existence of that selfsame Mother is conceivable and possible. But I gave birth to you, me personally, one after the other. So you exist. That's why. And so do I. What rubbish. It's a beautiful, infinite, bright and youthful world, especially if you're young yourself. And now they can cut out the new Elvis poster, at last she gives them permission after previously having forbidden them to do so.

Mother is shoo'd out like a fly. And once again the children have the not-quite-normal look they had before.

Mother leaves, and in the doorway she says that her children, who will always be little children for their Mummy to look after, their whole lives long, ought to take pleasure in the insignificant things in life, too. There are people who take no notice of strangely shaped trees, flowers or bushes by the wayside, or even damage them. These are the same people that are cruel to animals. They are thoughtless people, ordinary, average people. Which her children are not. Her children should heed the little things that others disregard. She brought them up to do so. And she has often had to struggle with her husband. The aforesaid husband is a soldier and thus of coarser stuff and he'd rather watch cheap B movies. If he were not of such coarse stuff he wouldn't have been able to kill. He needed that coarseness. A soft streak would have been amiss, it would have been at odds with the profession.

Mother can still see his wide-open mouth as he watched that entertaining Heinz Rühmann flick. It was Die Feuerzangenbowle, his very favourite film. He has seen it numerous times and never tired of it. He is the only one to have perceived the subtleties of the film. Everyone else brays out loud at obvious gags. When it was made, the film was an indication of what lay in store. Father could see as much. Often, without being asked, he describes the content of Die Feuerzangenbowle. Unfortunately the children won't be getting to see it. In the film, the New Era was already showing its true face, in the shape of a young teacher with nationalist ideals. The teacher in the movie says that the Old Era must be unremittingly put behind us. Daddy thinks so too, and the twins are busy creating the New Era. Which is even newer than the New Era in the movie.

What are you all going on about, I'm against anything traditional that's out of date, you know I am. And I saw a whole lot of musicals featuring Marika Rökk, she has tremendous stamina and amazing willpower, because she still dances. And then there was that sentimental

Hans Christian Andersen movie. The star killed himself and his wife and children because the wife was Jewish. Before he died he had one final opportunity to display his profoundly humane brand of humour, which was not a destructive sense of humour. That kind of humour only works if it comes from deep inside. Deep inside he was lacerated by fast-acting poison. Some people die less conspicuously and perhaps the torment they suffer is even greater. As it was, his innards were torn apart, and all that remained to posterity of the Danish teller of fairy tales was celluloid. Something survived him, at any rate.

What wonderful, wonderful times they were. Scorching hot desert sand.

It is especially mild, this spring light that enters through the glass doors designed by Lalique, doors that were at the World Fair in Paris back in the twenties and subsequently brought to Vienna. In her own imagination, Sophie is also made of glass, or sparkling china, or (best of all) high-grade steel. Sport polishes Sophie up and has already succeeded in making her agile all-round. And what sport cannot manage, her father's library accomplishes: supplying the cultural background. She is more of a sporting lass than a culture vulture, though. No intellectual superswot, Sophie. All of her contours are rounded, firmed up and gleaming. Dirt is altogether alien to the way she is, just as years ago everything that was un-German was alien to the Germans, artfremd, though nowadays of course a mighty tourist industry is getting under way, bringing the world into the Germans' homes or else transporting the Germans far from their homes to the world.

Nor is there any point on that smooth surface where an attacker could get a purchase. True, it is a tempting challenge to a groper, but he invariably loses his grip. Sophie enters wearing a tennis dress (she almost always wears some sporting outfit or other) and asks Rainer (who has a love for her that he doesn't show, so as not to compromise his position): Can you just lend me a twenty for the taxi, I haven't got any money on me and Mama's gone out for tea. Weeping softly, Rainer rummages in his little purse, Sophie gets the money, which represents a large sum to Rainer and which he will undoubtedly never see again. Because money means nothing to Sophie. She takes its availability for granted. Whereas Rainer gazes after his delicious twenty for quite a while, even after it's long since flown the coop. Rainer's father considers that riding

in taxis indicates an ambition to be a grand seigneur, an ambition that his son must quash, but it's pointless if he goes paying for other people's taxis. To Sophie, a taxi is a means of transport.

Sophie will never give the money back. She will forget about it. Because for her it has no real value.

Rainer's thoughts will dwell compulsively on that and other money. But he will never dare ask for it back.

The carpet is a great soft Persian expanse, Sophie is something you have to get inside but you don't know how because there's nothing to get a grip on. Should you fuck her in the mouth and pound her tongue to pulp so that she can't come out with any more of those thoughtless hurtful things she says, or should you do it from down below, which poses problems since she never lets you anywhere near the way in. You slip off. Though slipping off is nothing compared with the downhill social slide! It's the lesser evil. There may of course be a causal connection.

Modern paintings and *objets* everywhere, emanating long traditions in culture and art which you can only share in once you have taken possession of these things somehow or other. The best way of doing this is to take possession of Sophie, but (see above) there are no loops or straps to get hold of her by. Though Rainer has studied the rules of art thoroughly and has a good knowledge of them he owns no art objects whatsoever. Oh and anyway, the rules of art do not exist, because what makes art art is the fact that it obeys no rules at all. Rainer has reached this conclusion all on his own. People, on the other hand, are subject to laws because otherwise it would be every man for himself, anarchy. So says Rainermother to Rainerfather and so says Rainerfather to Rainermother. Rainer, however, has rather a penchant for anarchy, precisely because he knows the laws that govern the social life of man and despises them. Everything has to be destroyed. And nothing built up again afterwards.

Out shoots a Rainer mitt to apply the tried and tested lever hold to Sophie once again, but she glides straight through him and says she has to get changed now. Yet again. I'll come with you. That's what you think.

So he stays put. One of the countless errors of the middle classes is that they are soon demoralised when they venture out on their clumsy forays. When they have a real chance they relax their grip and do not even pretend to persist. The whisky's here. Help yourself while I'm gone.

Rainer tugs violently at his cheap loose-fitting pullover, Sophie gives him the slip, yet again. This is getting dreary.

His wretched brain wanders off to old and recent humiliations. Points in his deformed mind where the film is forever catching and sticking. Nothing of beauty. Only unlovely things. Sunday outings with Mother surface, trams smelling of damp socks, crammed with pathetic grey crowds of people of the kind a long war produces and cannot disperse right away. Off we go, to the Vienna Woods. Balaclavas made of unravelled respun wartime wool, baggy skiing trousers, brogues, and worst of all the dreaded packed lunch. Giving off a cheesy reek. Making you thirsty. But you can't go to a café or restaurant because it costs money, children can drink water, but there's no water anywhere to be found. Presently the cheese sandwich will be exuding its quintessence from beyond Mummy's cheap metal teeth and sending forth stench from her stomach, because she didn't chew properly. Chewing too much simply spreads the evil taste everywhere.

The detested shelter where they have to wait for at least twenty minutes till the next 43 comes curving round. The end of the line. Neuwaldegg. Invariably packed in the middle of a pack of impoverished humanity. Often they save the fare and walk back along the Alszeile, at the end of which (isn't Mummy

super) they are allowed a ride on the merry-go-round for the cost of the tram fare, which brings home to them all the more clearly the fact that they are children, a fact they want to put behind them. Nonetheless the kiddies, Rainer and Anni, shout and cheer, the poison of passing cars already in their heads and hearts. Not because it pollutes the environment (which has already been ruined by the War in any case) but because there is no capital to buy a car. And then there's Anni, grubbing in dog-dirt and wastepaper to draw attention to her serious emotional problems. Emotional problems are a luxury and are therefore ignored. She wants to be on her own in a swish car and not stuffed into a lousy tram (let alone with the family) where everyone is equal and you can't be special. If you were in a Mercedes, no one could come up any more and ask: What's the boy's/girl's name. Stroking your head with hands that quite plainly proclaim their owner a member of the worker species. And not realising that the infant they're patting already bears the poison of individualism in its heart. And is prepared to squirt it.

Once, when she was being stroked by one of these mittened hands, Anni actually wet herself, and all the while putrid garlic breath was wafting across her and she was being talked to as though she were a normal child, which even then she wasn't. Neither normal nor a child. The hot urine trickled down between her thighs (that downward impulse), ate its acrid angry way into her hand-knitted woollen knickers, and relentlessly found its way out of the dismal Sunday scene, along the grooves on the floor of the tram. Drip drip. Down fall the maternal arms like clubs and thump and retire upwards again and then down once more, keep-fit for Mumsy who has just had a nice relaxing outing. Insane bawling from the female infant. At the first blow, Rainer has instantly taken refuge between two aged granddads, clawing hold of the Vienna Woods walking shoes one of them is wearing. Does the lad go

to school yet? What's your name, sonny? Piss off, the lot of you.

And out there the Opels and Volkswagens surge out of the autumn haze like sharks, great powerful bodies, unswervingly obedient albeit untamed, and promptly shoot back into the mist, certain where they want to go. While the 43 strains and rumbles ponderously on. Anna lies in her own puddle, appallingly dirty, and Mummy asks other mothers for advice, what can you do with a girl who's so big but still wets herself. Well, you'll just have to do a wee-wee before you start, isn't that right, sugar?! Just remember next time. You wait till Papa hears about this, there's more thrashings to come. Even if Papi only has one foot left, he showed what he could do with his arms and they're as strong as ever. If you have two of them, the brats make twice as much work. Quiet now, or I'll slap you again.

The siblings link hands stealthily, unnoticed by the masses, they bare their milk-teeth like vampires, just wait, Mami, till we're bigger, we'll do the same to you, and worse.

Under the seat are an apple core, two cheese rinds and several wurst skins dropped by someone who thought himself at home and supposed he could make a pigsty of a means of transport that belongs communally to the public. Anna is not remotely consoled by the thought that a part of the tram is hers. It also belongs to others. Some people imagine they're at home wherever they may be. Doubtless he does the same at home. Yuck. Some people.

Young lad Rainer bites into the cheese rind, retching, and sucks at it hard like a leech. Damp sand grinds between his jaws, where some teeth have yet to make their appearance. Slosh, the stomach's heaving already, the bread and dripping (half rotten by now) are straining for the exit. The emergency exit. In the long run you cease to take any pleasure at all in a family outing if it always ends so embarrassingly. One of them pisses, the

other throws up. And to think you could be sitting in soft leather seats the whole time, saying where you wanted to go and getting there without any problem at all.

Effortlessly, Sophie breezes in. This time, for a change, she is wearing an afternoon dress, as she has to go into town with her mother. Bright light enters from behind through the terrace door and, far from roaming aimlessly about, instantly settles on Sophie's blonde hair as its resting place. The parquet flooring glows a little too.

Nothing is natural, yet everything is as it is by nature.

The child in Rainer cries out loud, the worst thing

of all is arriving at the last moment and not finding a seat left in the tram and having to stand. Whining is useless. Grown-ups won't get up, but a child has to be prepared to stand up for a grown-up at any time. So there you are, jammed into an ugly dark forest of bodies each of which is just as unattractive, with no entrance or exit in sight. You're in for good and you've got to go the distance. Packed in among the rest. Hiding amid winter coats stinking of mothballs and pre-war anoraks. And somewhere or other (you're spared nothing) there are two good-looking youngsters, no doubt students, whose fathers have their own cars but do not have the time today to drive their son and daughter here and there, but there is a car, there is one, it's theirs, these two talking about skiing and group travel as if it were the most natural thing in the world. You've got to emulate them, though maybe you'll never manage it, with a Papa and Mama like yours. You've got to emulate them, as soon as you're old enough, though that will be a while yet. How streamlined they look, like the people of tomorrow, and how stylish they are. And those fashionable tight ski pants! Those two belong to no one, you can tell right away, they can live their own lives. The way things still are now, though, the maternal hand pushes you down to the floor, crushing you, making you retrieve a banana skin with your teeth. but do not have the time today to drive their son and with your teeth.

Sophie (whose exterior betrays no signs of any such physical functions, and certainly no low or base ones, but who nevertheless is in excellent working order, though you can't tell how or by what means she operates) leaves for the umpteenth time, off somewhere that's labelled No Entry. Almost every time we meet her she will be needing to go somewhere in an urgent hurry though she'll always arrive late. Which doesn't matter in her case. And Rainer is the one who remains behind, vexed.

THEY REMAIN AT the edge of things, not because they're afraid of the light but because the light, understandably enough, is afraid of them. In schoolyard and classroom alike. The wolf pack always cluster together in corners. They flaunt their unchallenged übermensch status, which the rest would like to flaunt too but they only have untermensch status, which has to apply to some in order that the contrast with the übermensch achievement be clear. Out from the gloomy corners they stick out their legs, suddenly, and almost invariably some Mummy's boy or a Daddy's girl in a checked, pleated skirt goes flying. Their well-behaved fellow-pupils say they never run out of subjects of conversation when they go to an ice-cream parlour with their boyfriends or girlfriends. They talk about rewarding ways of using your spare time, what's going on at school, and who's going out with which Institute of Technology or University student or who only got a neat, natty clerk to go out with. Other subjects of conversation are concerts, plays, exhibitions, parties and records. The Anna-Sophie-Rainer lobby give stuff like this the thumbs-down. They have grown out of the record phase, or at least if they do listen to records it's only cool jazz or rock. When Sophie gives things the thumbs-down she does so less vehemently because she has no need to show vehemence. Things come to Sophie, and sometimes she says: go away for now, and sometimes she accepts them. Depending on her mood and whim. Rainer says it is good if she is hard, the only place she should relax is in his arms, there she can be soft if she wants.

Sophie has to be properly motivated if she's to commit a crime, or several crimes, because she herself does not believe she needs to make the effort. Nor is it nice to stay up at night perpetrating deeds that

shun the light. It takes willpower, since you could just as well be in bed reading a suspenseful thriller.

The writer Adalbert Stifter, a suicide victim, raises his voice above the noisy German lesson. The victim of his own failed life-plan and a wrecked marriage, he has nothing better to do than drivel unctuously on about Whitsun celebrations when he goes out to the hushed edge of the wood at dawn, not where there is a cocky little fawn (who gives a damn about his funny little cock, says Anna, or words to that effect) but where instead he goes walking in what he considers to be the endless countryside, as it were, though what would he know of infinity. His mind is incapable of grasping the concept. Rainer senses within himself the infinite potential of a writer who breaks loose of all the fetters. He is the one who apprehends infinity, not Stifter, as Stifter's ruined life showed, a life in which he never dared venture anything. With military precision, Adalbert Stifter continues his review of various beauties, not only living but also inanimate. Nature tends to an inanimate condition, thinks Rainer, all we do is assist the process. He promptly passes a note to this effect to Sophie, who is scribbling outlines of horses in her spiral notepad. She thinks nothing at all of inanimation. But she thinks a lot, far more, of sporty animation. You have to become aware of your own body, or of a horse's when it shifts from a trot to a gallop. Then the wind caresses horse and rider alike and the fresh air dispels bad or restless moods. You shouldn't rest in a breeze such as that or you'll rust.

But Evil prefers places that are sheltered from the wind. Pale young softies would rather seek out the seclusion of cellar bars, and out there, in the light of day, you can help blind people cross the road or stroke the doggies.

What's the racket, Witkowski one and two, would you kindly keep quiet or do you want a mark against your names in the register? No, you needn't bother with the register, just record your own blunders in your own private notebook. I bet something goes wrong every week. Your breath smells, your complexion's an ugly grey and your ankles are thick, Frau Professor (Anna.)

Stifter benevolently hammers away like a woodpecker at his theme of the sheen of radiant air and wonderful April clouds shot through with occasional rays of sun and the beautiful green strips of winter seed pricking up, he'd have been better getting his prick up somewhere else, says Rainer, casting Sophie a sidelong glance as he snarls and snorts.

Anna suggests roping in Hans Sepp, whom she only recently met at a jazz club, to commit a crime or two with them. He would make an ideal tool, and anyway, he ought to quit the working class milieu he's in. In public life, somebody is always getting a hold on some relatively helpless person, in factories, in offices, in one way or another. At the Elin Union they're urging him to mess about with heavy current. Presumably his life is constantly at risk. Current kills cleanly and unexpectedly. And likes killing. It gives no warning. It strikes out of the blue. The humiliated worker sees a great many others at work who are in the same boat, and solidarity with them is inevitable. And that solidarity gives him a strength he is not supposed to have in Rainer's gang because Rainer is and ever shall be the leader—it was his idea. Wherever Hans looks, he mustn't see any other workers like himself. Wherever it may be, he must see us alone. He is destined to become a receiver of messages, reprimands, orders, encouragement.

Anna says stealing wallets is kids' stuff, what I'd like to do is blow something up. Then people would sit up and take notice. The world out there wouldn't be gently indifferent. They'd pay attention.

Rainer brags, saying that, whenever his father flies to New York, looking down from on high practically blows up (his expression) his chest with

happiness, because up above the clouds there is freedom. The only snag about this is that his father has not been beyond Zwettl, beyond the woods, since the War. A detail Rainer doesn't add. Anna thinks of how she once gave Daddy a bunch of lily of the valley for his birthday, which he flushed down the toilet. Whatever put that into her mind now?

True, it has to be visible to others, but anarchism is sufficient reward if it is practised for yourself alone. Then (and only then) it has a liberating effect. It is wrong to want it to achieve an end. And especially for a group of people, irrespective who those people might be.

De Sade says you must commit crimes. In using the word crime we're adopting the consensus term, though among ourselves we would not describe any of our actions as such (Anna). We need the universally valid norm to get a kick out of our own extremeness. We are monsters, even if we disguise ourselves as ordinary people. We are the children of ordinary people but we are not content with that. Inwardly we are consumed with wickedness, outwardly we are grammar school pupils.

Rainer, who is reading *The Outsider* by Camus, says he would like to put the hostility of the world *behind* him. Once your hope for something better is taken from you, then at last you have the present all in your hand. Then you yourself are reality. Others are extras. When Rainer contemplates an evening he says that evening is a melancholy ceasefire where all life has come to an end.

The German teacher tells the Witkowskis to stop disturbing the rest of the class with their constant gabbling.

Stifter says: Then there were the pale russet woods stretching along the mountains, cloaked in a frail blue haze. Stretching their legs ha ha. Off on their travels. Hope they bought a ticket. No, joking aside (Rainer), if you commit crimes you need the support of someone

who loves you. In his case it is a woman. Sophie. It is not the kind of support a woman gives a *bourgeois* philistine, it is the support a woman gives a young artist. If a human being ventures so far into illegality there has to be a partner waiting at the threshold, all tenderness and intimacy: Sophie. In reality I am revolted by my desires. But the desires are stronger than I am. And my love of you is stronger than I am too. There is no physical desire in it, though. We're keeping that for later.

Crap, says Anni, love is nothing but one skin touching another.

One thing's for sure, I can't stick this Adalbert Stifter a single minute longer, declares Anna. If anyone will force this darning needle from my needlework kit under his fingernail during class without shouting out, and when I say full force I mean full, I'll go to the boys' toilet with him, the cubicle on the left. Rainer finds this kind of revolutionary. Anna says: No, it's not, the aim isn't equality for all, that would be contrary to Nature and genetic theory, this is the exact opposite. Total discrimination and isolation. Equality can only be of interest to those who are incapable of rising to the ranks of the strong. They compensate by downgrading the strong and then imagine the strong are weak as well. Now how about that needle? Gerhard Schwaiger, an average kid, a late birth, covered top to toe in pimples—or at least the parts of his body you can see—and with a tendency to blush, sees his big chance, here it is, zero hour, and instantly rams the needle beneath the nail of his left forefinger. Ow! Sophie gives a smile, like white wool, dabbed with talcum powder for a smile, like white wool, dabbed with falcum powder for good measure. Rainer is astounded that it's Schwaiger of all people, who's normally interested in nothing but chocolate. Schwaiger is pale as a handkerchief and says: Ow, how that hurts. Anna sizes him up joylessly. The Frau Professor says Schwaiger is like a child but if he's so desperate to go, go ahead, go, but next time remember to go during break. And off Gerhard goes, larding his way out the door, first giving Anni a conspiratorial look that is meant to be eloquent. It isn't eloquent, though, it's pathetic. Help me, Anni, please, I've been worshipping you for ages and now I need you to be a bit friendly and obliging or I'll never get a hard-on and be able to shove my prick inside you. Just a morsel of love would be the loveliest present you could give me, baby.

Him of all people, Rainer says to his sister. I hope I don't have to come along with a screwdriver and extract you from the fat, Anni. Got a rubber?

I've got one left. But if I know him he'll have had one on him for months, looking forward to a chance like this. The rubber will be thin and brittle by now and won't do its job.

Witkowski Anna, could you kindly go on reading where we just left off. Yes, Frau Professor, Stifter tells us that people are not free, that they are slaves to the Laws of Nature. So you have to commit violent deeds (if you don't have anyone to do other kinds of deeds with), actions that ordinary people would call crimes but which we define as the norm, though of course it is our norm and not that of the rest.

Whereupon Anna is sent out of the class. Which was what she intended. So while Adalbert Stifter goes on holding forth about the rosy-hued faces of young people who blush if you look at them unexpectedly (the drooling old paederast gets off on shame) Anna strolls absolutely calmly to the toilet and red-faced Gerhard lying in wait for her. Come, come, come to me, Anni, I can't stand it any more, crash, he nearly ends up in the bowl, the jerk with his blubbery white ass didn't get a proper grip, you can see right away that he's inexperienced. Anna slips her panties off and gives curt instructions as to the position he's to get into. Needless to say he doesn't have a hard-on now, might have guessed, that's the last straw. Anxiety and agitation can do for someone who's never done it. D'you expect me to do that too, huh? At last, at long last there's a

sign of life, it stirs, it moves, to the accompaniment of deep crimson and pallor on the part of Gerhard. First it collapses a time or two, like a house of cards. Anna observes the manipulation of Gerhard's member with interest and plays with the rubber. Will it, won't it, yes it will. There we go. Fine. When she sees his red glans pointing her way she thinks: Hang on, perhaps not after all, how revolting, who knows if I can stand it. But presently the question is answered in the affirmative, the wretched under-achiever shakes and rubs his member desperately till it more or less stands up hard, it peeks about and all it sees is the stinking cubicle with its peeling green oil paint, Love has never chosen a setting such as this, nor has Love chosen it this time. The incompetent has been madly in love with Anna for a long time, but this fact is of little help.

A promise is a promise, so she lowers herself upon this over-eager cry-baby, he can hardly grasp that at last the great day has come, hooray hooray, he'll tell some of the other kids his age all about it afterwards, in detail. Memory will make it all more important than it is, in any case, oh that's good, that's so good, I could handle this every day, no problem, but unfortunately I don't get it every day. Unfortunately you have to wait till you're more mature, but right now I feel very mature already. Appi honey, People need this I need it mature already, Anni honey. People need this, I need it more than anyone else because my libido is so strong, I love you, I love you, oooh Anni, now, now! Please stay, don't go now. Best of all, don't ever leave me at all, I'm going to study medicine some time, soon. Shut your trap, d'you have to yap like that, they'll hear us! Can't you be quieter when you come? Oooh Anni, go on, please, don't stop now, it'll be fantastic if I come now, no one has ever felt this just the way I do, the rest don't feel it so strongly, let's face it, I'm stronger than all the rest. You're so heartiful and you have the rest. all the rest. You're so beautiful and you have a great figure, so thin, I'm going to lose weight now too, you'll

see, I'll lose weight just for you so that we go together, there's never been anything like this, Anni sugar. This happens millions of times a day, jerk. Come on, you nobody, shoot your wad, get a move on, Kraftmann'll notice if we're both out so long. I feel as if my insides were being hauled out, Anna, my beloved, that's what you are now, no doubt about it, I love you, I love you. My whole heart is yours. Look, are you going to shoot your juice or not, else I'm stopping. But Gerhard is coming, massively—he gives a loud squeal like a branded pig. If no one heard it's a miracle.

Anna's eyes peruse his distorted face and she fights back the retching once again, only succeeding at the last moment in keeping it down. That'd be great, throw up all over the greasy slob.

We'll never part again, Anna, isn't that right, from now on you're my girlfriend, the whole class'll know, just mine, all mine.

Piss off! About time too. Do you always take that long? For a whole half hour after Anna has left Gerhard goes on begging her for a little love and affection, which he doesn't get, though. At times young people suffer profoundly. Often grown-ups do not take this in at all, and if they do they take no notice.

SOPHIE'S PLACE IS furnished with genuine Biedermeier. None of her schoolmates realises this because they are youngsters of today for whom the past is dead. Quite the opposite of bieder and Meier, though, are Sophie's wishes to be an utterly hard woman for whom feelings do not count, only figures. She would like to go to Switzerland to take special courses in finance and economics, and then deal in shares and currency. Anything that is not currency or a share will simply make no impression on her. In this respect she is a stark contrast to Rainer, who needs feelings for his writing. And for her, his Sophie. Because Sophie has touched the very core of him. Sometimes something of this kind happens to a man and a woman only once in their entire lives, and at times like that it's important not to miss the right moment or things will turn out wretchedly. Rainer deliberately lets feelings right inside him, but there nausea at those very feelings eats its way out and is expressed in a poem. Rainer has quite enough ideas concerning the past, the present, the world. He has only one request: to be left in peace to complete the book he plans to write. The man in him says he has to have Sophie, the artist says: Stay the lone wolf that you are. Rainer puts up armoured defences made of ice, but you're supposed to sense that Sophie could melt the ice.

Sophie is wearing a tennis dress because she has to go out to a match soon. Rainer's lower jaw grinds against his upper jaw. From the outside these jaws look white. What they are grinding is no less than a piece of chocolate cake that the maid brought him. They not only have the occasion to grind, they also have a reason. Sophie is forever walking out of the picture just before you press the button. Sophie is a will-o'-the-wisp. Free as air. The girl has also brought a tray bearing whisky

glasses. The gang have seen the drink in films, where people live on it. In the latest films you can also witness social structure disintegrating. Marriage and the family will be the next system to go if we're not careful. Given that the War left almost everything in confusion, the class system can be overcome and you can even make it up into the higher social strata (or ruling class, as it came to be called) if you've got the required gumption. New German films demonstrate the economic flexibility of private individuals. While behind the scenes Capital is at work on its own flexibility. This is something that new German films have taken from victorious America. In America, boundary violations have always been possible, in Texas for example, where grazing land has boundaries. Creaking like icebergs, companies amalgamate to create amalgamated companies. The water sprays and boils up high. Divorce is in because people finally have the time for a breach between partners, but the topic of capital accumulation is out because it's not supposed to be too visible.

Hans, who is forever having to jump to attention at

work, is the first to leap hastily to clear a space on the table for the maid. Pointlessly, his mother has taught him to behave with courtesy to women, as in the old days. At the last moment, Sophie holds him back, and so the maid has to cope single-handed. She doesn't exist, Hans, you have to understand. But everyone you see exists, isn't that right? Wrong.

Along with all their many other errors, the main mistake of the Austrian anarchists (in so far as they existed) was their terrible social situation, which they wanted to put behind them as fast as they possibly could. But that's idiotic. If you want everyone to be on an equal footing, you may as well have done with it and be a Communist. How dreary. What you have to do is destroy most of what was done by the older generation.

Rainer states that in the summer he is going sailing,

that his brother in America knows several film stars, and

that his mother is going to the warm-water spa at Villach tomorrow. This last is a long-standing dream of hers. And he doesn't have a brother either. Rainer reports that the German surrealist tradition was unfortunately broken by the War. He is interested in aesthetic problems, and wants leader status. Maybe leader status can be achieved by dealing Sophie a short, sharp blow on the mouth, making the said mouth bleed. No, nothing doing just now, she's opening a packet of biscuits, his favourite, chocolate-covered kind. Rainer gobbles like an idiot. The most powerful urge known to Man is the urge to be free of manual labour. Any means that accomplishes that end is fine. Some people erroneously imagine that they have a birthright to non-manual work. Rainer thinks Hans thinks that way. Because at irregular intervals Hans says that the only thing Nature means to him is leisure, which is a positive value. In his leisure time he goes off into Nature. I agree (Sophie), in my free time I'm out in Nature almost all the time as well, that's where to look if you need me.

I'd like to change my job some time, it doesn't satisfy me, I want to become a gym teacher. Feel my muscles, Sophie, I'm building them up just for you, they get worked on every day. When I'm out in Nature I unfortunately still have to keep to the marked public paths, but as soon as I'm good at climbing I can venture off on unmarked paths and pick one edelweiss after another. Rainer avoids Nature whenever he stumbles across it. He gets out of gym classes whenever he can, pleading sickness and debility. Father mustn't know of this. Mummy writes a note for him. Sophie says that it's too bad, public places are increasingly being messed up with paper and worse, the more average people (who invariably dump their muck) go off into Nature. It is a new problem, one which is harming the environment. In the old days people had no time to harm the environment because they were busy doing harm to themselves, in the War, for instance.

Rainer: Hey, Sophie, I've written another poem, another new one about you.

Sophie: It's really the only way you stand out from the masses. Because you don't have the material means to stand out from the masses. Which naturally you'd infinitely prefer. Rainer: You really make me sick today. Money! Yuck. People's minds are independent of their worries about their daily bread. For instance, the upper strata of society often lack the necessary intelligence, whereas ordinary people can sometimes be very bright. The two things are totally unrelated.

In Hans's opinion, all that counts is a person's essential nature. You have to refine your character, Hans would like to go into a longer explanation of this, since it is intrinsically difficult for him. But alas, now Sophie sends him off to repair the record player, because for some unfathomable reason it is not working. Doubtless she thinks every kind of electric current is the same. And he would dearly like to join in the talk and profit by it. Who can say what he mightn't be able to put to use later, when he's a gym teacher! You have to think of the future too. The future is not heavy current. Rainer expounds the beauty of violence. Feeling bones and knuckles break, sinews and tendons rip and tear, taut skin burst. Or even making these things happen. He also declares that they are going to be redoing their home soon, with period furniture imported from France.

You and your fear of contact, you can't even offer someone your hand or look into someone's eyes without being embarrassed, says Sophie, and she dodges Rainer just as he is offering her an unembarrassed hand, to stroke her or paw her some other way. Sophie is well practised at dodging Rainer. Leave me alone, why do you always have to be groping me? People use their mouths to talk, not their hands.

But they kiss with their mouths, Sophie, dearest. The urge is overwhelming.

Hans immediately replies that he's far stronger, wanna bet? And look, the twerp really is reaching out his arm for a bout of arm-wrestling to prove it. However, the grammar school boy with his scrawny arm merely gives him a disgusted look. Pity, says Hans's expression, so much for the trial of strength we were looking forward to. Strength Hans certainly has. Enough for several men. What does he train for, for hours on end? For nothing, since no one recognises his achievement.

Sophie is silent. Anna is vexed.

Lost in thought, Anna picks a hair off the sleeve of Hans's sports jacket. This is an advance, made because Anna feels attracted to Hans. Because when Hans does something he relates differently to things than Sophie or her brother. So what kind of feeling does it give you to touch Hans? Immediately she touches him, and the feeling opens out into a new dimension, the dimension of strenuous physical activity.

Rainer says he finds tennis stupid but he might like to give golf a try. His uncle in England (who does not exist) plays golf. Hans does not know what golf is. Rainer says he doesn't need to know because he has no need of golf either.

Sophie says that in her view the over-emphasis placed on free will and individuality goes back to Christianity.

Rainer, who is still far from having outgrown Christianity and likes having frequent discussions with priests, says she ought not to speak so dismissively of God, because he has not yet decided that God definitely does not exist. He used to be an altar boy and continued to be one into his teens.

Then Rainer expands on Man's free will. Sophie says intellectuals will still go on emphasising free will even when they've got nothing left to eat.

Rainer says: I am the intellectual you're talking about. Sophie says that those who go all out for the intellectual's job end up adopting the ideology of the intellectual.

Suddenly every problem resulting from freedom from material production acquires an inflated significance. A lop-sided world comes into existence, defending itself against everything else.

Rainer explains to Hans that if you are a worker you mustn't think like a writer.

Hans explains to Rainer that he wouldn't want to think like a writer anyway, he wants to think like a gym teacher.

Have you found out what's wrong with the record player yet, Hans? No, I'd rather stay talking with the rest of you. Rainer says he'll have to practise listening first.

At this moment Sophie, who is gradually becoming interested in the prospective gym teacher, asks: What's that you're wearing, the suit you were confirmed in, the trousers are far too short, ditto the sleeves, and where are the cuffs anyway? Not there, that much is certain.

And then the material, no, the way you look is absolutely impossible, it offends my eye. Hans, who specially put on his Sunday best suit on account of Sophie, a suit that has never offended either his eye or that of his mother (who has already let it out twice), shrinks till he's no bigger than a pea, as if the air had been let out of him. There he was, specially wanting to appear before Sophie in a suit so as to have the advantage over Rainer in his jeans, and now he's jeered at like this! He covers all the places where the suit is too short with his hands. He doesn't have enough hands. The suit shrank at the cleaner's, I swear it did, it used to be real long, the sods at the cleaner's let it shrink. I couldn't do anything about it. Perhaps we could sue them, because they ruined it.

Wait, I'll get you something of my brother's. It's the right size, put that on! Rainer's eyes fair pop out with envy. The clothes are a V-neck cashmere pullover and trousers made of a fine woollen cloth, pure wool, the label inside says so. The fact that Hans rather than he is

being given such lovely things cuts Rainer to the quick. But it's just one of capricious Sophie's whims, she's as flighty as a will-o'-the-wisp, but doubtless that will sort itself out once she settles down. She is only playing with Hans, who does not realise this, because he is still a beginner in the art of love.

Sophie says Hans should change right here in front of them. He doesn't want to because his underpants are dirty. But he has to, otherwise the trousers and pullover won't be handed over to him. Anna's eyes burn holes into Hans. Sophie tries to clean a stain on her tennis skirt, a stain only she can see. Rainer, with only himself as audience, says you must take action, act, act, and yet again act. Later you have to bear the consequences of your actions. In general, of course, bad actions, since these moral categories do not exist for us. My father's going to buy me a sports car for my eighteenth birthday.

Funny that you want to do something all of a sudden, says Sophie. Up till now all you've done is read and write poems. She thinks it's not his style.

Rainer says Sophie has no idea what a wealth of rage and hatred there is in him. Thought has its limits, limits that I hit long ago, after all I've been thinking continuously for years, and now I've finished, frontiers are there to be torn down. My father's going to pay for me to go to America for my eighteenth birthday too. The difference between de Sade and Bataille is this. Sade, locked up with lunatics, scatters beautiful rose petals atop the cesspit. He spent twenty-seven years in prison for his ideas. Bataille, on the other hand, sits on his ass in the Bibliothèque Nationale. De Sade, whose aim of social and moral liberation is well known, was out to question a poetic idol in order to force thought to complain of its fetters. Bataille's desire for social and moral liberation, on the other hand, is very doubtful. The difference between me and de Sade, for example, is

that I am not a moralist. That aside, I am everything he ever was, and more besides!

Who are these people, asks Hans, now wearing the cashmere, and he is instructed who they are.

These assaults we are planning are meant to have a framework of higher motives. Above us, so to speak. I shall explain those motives in a moment, says Rainer.

Please, I implore you, don't explain anything, any more explanations today and I'll scream, says Sophie. But I've got to explain why we're going to do it, otherwise you'll just do it without any reasons, and that doesn't count.

Hans says he wants to push ahead with getting some education.

Anna says he'll have to read a lot.

Rainer says he shouldn't read but should listen to him, Rainer. He is the intellectual, not Hans. If the intellectual cannot make his world conform to the ideology he espouses, and in reality (like Hans) has to do unclean manual work to survive, he ends up advocating a world that is not genuine, no longer his own. You'd better defend your own little world, Hans. Don't try to become more than you are because there's an other who is greater than you already: me.

Hans is disappointed that Rainer is sternly advising against working at an education. But he is right in so far as your station in life can cause you greater suffering if you're knowledgeable than if you're ignorant, which can be bliss.

Now Sophie ungraciously shoos them all away because Schwarzenfels's sports car can be heard outside, he is coming to spirit her away to a tennis match for the in-crowd. That is the kind of sports car Rainer is going to get for his birthday, the very same. Might he try it out, so that when his birthday comes he'll be able to drive it right away? No he might not. Rainer does at least attempt to catch hold of Sophie wherever some space is still free, but she slips through his fingers

(which in any case are not very venturesome) like sand. Fine sand.

At the tram stop, their starting point for a return trip to poorer districts, they are still talking about an assault. Needless to say they will not commit it to get rich but in order to liberate themselves once and for all. For the entire future. Hans still isn't convinced that he needs to liberate himself. Right now he'd rather be watching a game of tennis and learning some more about sport. Regretfully he goes on looking around for a long time, but he sees nothing because a sports car is much faster than a tram, which has to labour through the interminable reel of stops.

UST A MOMENT. Let's not leave this tram in such a hurry. Let's stay on a little while. The crowd on board are all one colour and at first glance you cannot tell what they are. Cattle or people. Nothing stands out from the crowd, except for the hat that ugly woman is wearing. It is a shocking colour that is in fashion. It stands out in a negative sense. They are cattle or donkeys, says Anna, they'd trot off patiently to the slaughterhouse, they'd hold the knife themselves and indicate the place it had to be driven in.

The men are a gloomy uniform grey, working life has cut deep furrows in their sexless, barely male faces. You can imagine what they get up to with their wives at home: nothing. Nothing agreeable. But not even anything particularly disagreeable either, they don't have the style for that. The revolting work they do has stripped the hair from one man's head, robbed a second man's mouth of teeth, and put dirt under the fingernails of a third. Inwardly, Hans remains detached from them. This shows visibly in the way he squeezes up into the darkest corner so that he won't be noticed and on no account associated (erroneously) with this herd.

But if a pretty young lady shows up on her own he gives her an inviting wink. This is known as flirting. It is something carefree people do.

Rainer and Anna, who wouldn't be associated with the herd anyway because they don't look as if they do any work, stand there out in the open with the breeze from the open platform blowing in their rugged faces. Soon the tram will be far behind them and they will be driving a brand new car.

The gap between Hans and the twins widened here where other people were present and could see them. Anna and Rainer were on top and Hans was (still)

down below. But it was not to be like that for much longer.

If it isn't the airstream squeezing at Anna's breasts, who is it suddenly squeezing like this? Answer: a chubby man, plainly an office worker, on his way home to his wife and child, plainly out to cop his share of something that's several sizes too big for him: Anni. A fresh young filly much to his taste.

Suddenly some soft mass is resting on Anna's ass, it is this person, seizing the opportunity (which rarely presents itself to people of his kind) to make up to this young and doubtless inexperienced creature and put her to his own uses. There is no parent or guardian to be seen, so the coast is clear, she could be taught a thing or two, you can see right away that the two young ruffians with the little slut won't put up any real resistance to a figure of authority. He is the figure of authority in question, a bank clerk with prospects of becoming branch manager. Only (of course) if he keeps a clean bill of conduct. Which he'll see that these unfledged brats don't sully.

If they kick up a fuss he'll deny everything. In tones of righteous indignation. And he'll say: what a cheek.

Is this a pointed stick being poked between Anna's thighs, or something more disagreeable? It is an unappetising something. To be exact, the bank clerk's dick. Small and pointed and erect, yet still with the vulnerability of flesh, not quite rock-hard (doubtless it never gets completely hard unless you force it by milking away for three hours). The wretch squeezes up against her, begging for a little love and understanding, which his wife is forever denying him on the stupidest of pretexts. A girl's ass like this, doubtless still an untrodden path, really is the greatest bliss. I don't believe this (Anna, tipping off her chums).

The clerk's weight becomes more of a burden. Courage mounting, it pokes a little further in, the crowd on board grows as they approach the city, the crush is

conducive to communication between young and old. Between up top and down below. Usually down below. The woman's place is lying down below, but in this case she is not lying, she is standing in front.

A hand follows, cautiously groping, though no one has summoned it. The hand approaches nonetheless. As if that were where it belonged, it ventures towards the Annabreasts. At this point Anna gives a signal, this is the moment we've been waiting for. Hans is slow on the uptake, preoccupied with a petite blonde (red roses, red lips, red wine), but Rainer gets the message.

As if on command, Anna gives a full smile of wellhoned predatory teeth, the lips part, a moist tongue appears, best act a bit backward, it fosters trust and a carefree attitude in strangers. The would-be libertine makes a nasty sign with his index finger, ambiguously signalling to Anna: I want to get in there, what's the best way, how ridiculous that we're stuck in public transport like sardines in a tin, it'd be better if we were in a big bed, I'd show you where to find God, not up in heaven, at any rate, no, in me, inside me, I'd ram it up you so it came out your mouth, it's big enough, that's how strong I am, a real man and always have been since my youth, which thank God I have been able to preserve, though of course I'm by no means old, call me mature, old enough to value a seventeen-year-old virgin, the wife's already filled out somewhat, see, she's broader in the beam. Naturally a man has his choice of all the age range, every colour, shape and size. That is how a man thinks. That is not how a woman thinks because her sexuality is passive. My personal character predestined me to going it alone. Not every man is predestined to do that. More women are available for sampling than I can possibly consume. Can you feel how hard it is, a real ramrod, and my balls are especially firm and full, feel, this is your big chance, cutie, the chance you've been waiting for.

One money-counter hand takes hold of the Annahand (Anna not having offered any signs of

resistance so far) and slowly guides it to the clerk's holy of holies. It is a hand that does not have to get dirty at work. You can see the sophisticated manual skill of the hand. It is a hand that knows what to do. Counting other people's money as long as it's light and now, in the anonymous dark, guiding a strange lass's hand to the very centre of Life. Here we are, the very centre, correct, the penis. Hello there. Flabby and flaccid, it is upstanding like a monument to something great. Well, isn't it a particularly fine specimen?

Now! nods Anna, and she scrabbles about amid the greasy trousercloth, she can't find it, wherever's it got to, wherever's it got to, a touch on the small side, huh? Now that must be it, hang on, here we are, surely he hasn't got a pocket-knife on him, or perhaps he has, for peeling apples or slicing sausage perhaps. No, it's not the knife, this is the prick, a knife looks different. Here it is, hooray, we've found it.

Hans is still totally dopey but Rainer interpreted that *Now!* back there correctly. Light as a butterfly he wings into the inside breast pocket of the distracted victim from behind and removes the wallet, which is where right-handed men always have it, in the left pocket. This character wouldn't even notice if you planted a bomb on him. There doesn't seem to be much in it, but we're happy, you can buy several paperbacks with this.

Please squeeze it a bit, kid, rub it, stroke it, be nice, that's good, thank you kindly, my wife back home won't do this any more, and anyway I'm really grateful. May I see you again, fair maiden? A bit closer to the tip, that's right. You do that so well. Though I could teach you to do it even better. You wouldn't have time tomorrow after office hours, would you? Pity.

As long as the conductor doesn't come by now and ask: any more fares. Then you'll have to let go. And it's so good, holding on and being held. Aah, no, I can't go all the way, alas, she checks my underwear for

traces of that, along with shit stains and holes that need mending. My job's mending her hole, ha ha.

But now the conductor is indeed coming. In their haste, the twins did not consider that this asshole might not have a ticket yet and would need his wallet. Thank God we're coming to a bend and dropping speed. As the jerk reluctantly reaches for his wallet, the siblings dive from off the rear car with a mighty bound, and the bewildered Hans, who hasn't a clue what's going on, follows close behind, almost too late. They nearly tumble head over heels, regain their balance with an effort, and while the monster in there is searching for his wallet in complete desperation, his money, which was to have magicked forth a birthday present for some nauseating member of the family or other, where on earth can I have lost it, Jesus (then it gradually dawns on him), the young criminals flee like greyhounds into the gloom of an unfamiliar part of town. And soon their hoots and snorts are lost among blocks of flats, not a shopfront in sight, where right now sundry evening meals are being served up and the latest newspaper stories devoured.

And their white, young and very lively silhouettes are lost among the grey concrete façades. White streaks in a glass marble spinning very fast. Ripples in the water, as the stone goes down.

THE TYPEWRITER IS rattling industriously away and beneath its impact black letters form on the envelopes. Hans's mother is making those letters herself. She failed to get work of a better kind because the economic miracle passed her by. Now her son Hans thoughtlessly passes her by as well, tossing his clothes on the floor. You could do with your father's guiding hand, Hans. Good job I only have your hand, I'll be shaking that off soon, too, and taking the hand of the woman I love. Sophie will be the one.

I have the impression you're out to shake off a good many more hands, hands reaching out to you from the darkness of economic misery, the hands of brothers and sisters from your own class who are destined to stay there.

You're right there, I want to get out of this gunge as fast as I can. It's sticking to me. I go to the WAT sports centre and do my training in as many different sports as I can so that I'll see what's what and have the choice of which sport I want to pursue professionally. All I want to do with my hands is a backhand. At tennis. Which my girlfriend Sophie is going to teach me.

Mother is as tired as a dead dog about to be buried. What she does is monotonous. You couldn't call it a job, it's simply work, and it earns her next to nothing. Although it gets her nowhere she is forever urging her son to do this, do that. Such as: Go to the Party youth group as you used to and stick up posters and arouse people's interest. Agitate. He rejects this proposal. I found my way on my own, the others can do the same.

Generally speaking, he will either join a group as its leader or he won't join at all. In a group, the first thing you do is check out the girls, but in this group there

are hardly any girls because women are not interested in politics, which are dirty, but in fashion, men and cleanliness. Since he is a man, this means he has to go elsewhere if he's to flirt, laugh and dance. To enjoy his youth. Ideally with Sophie. Anna isn't bad either, in second place, though she's a bit scrawny. Hans is a sporty type. Hans is the big boss.

Mother sinks into a black funnel of silence, on whose smooth, evenly-curved wall the image of her murdered husband sometimes lights up, be brave, if I have to die I shall die for social democracy, for the cause of the workers, they are the same thing, social democracy and the workers' cause, and one day I shall have my reward. They will never forget me, and I shall live on in our son, too. So be calm, quite calm. In a sense I am even dying for all Austria, which you are a tiny though dearly loved part of, Austria, which no one but the Communists even concedes has a right to exist. As if in slow motion, Mother sees the heavy blocks of Mauthausen stone, killing the emaciated prisoners hewing away at them. After the day's work was over they still had to drag the rocks down the path. And Mauthausen's Mother Earth didn't protest, mothers always put up with everything. Though Mother has always taken her stand, all she has to show for it now is piles of paper. They blur before her eyes.

I'll be going to the jazz club later, blares Hans merrily. He wraps himself up in his fashionable late fifties clothes. Protection and camouflage. As far as fashion is concerned, the age has broken with everything the past had come up with, and indeed youth (generally speaking) has to break with everything if it is to be free at last of the various constraints imposed both privately and professionally.

Work is not a constraint. Man's activity provides his true fulfilment, whispers Mama. True fulfilment, however, can only be achieved if one man is not another man's slave.

74

It's a good while since I was anybody's slave, I'm an individual, and I have my way with other individuals, to be exact: with women. I am responsible to myself alone, and the woman I love is also responsible to me alone.

She doesn't care for statements like this, doesn't Mother Sepp. Her son refuses to take a stand against his oppressors. And now in her mind the date February '34 stands out, when she was still little more than a child. She saw them, hosts of her fellow-workers who'd been out to improve the quality of their lives, lying dead and bloody in the street. Fascism brought up the heavy artillery, the howitzers it had at its disposal, and the men who manned the guns were sons of workers as well, like the victims, whom fascism disposed of likewise. The twin tides of sons of the disinherited (seeking their inheritance in the dirt and failing to find it because it had plainly been taken by others) sloshed towards each other. One side including a great many unemployed who had been forced into the home guard, the Heimwehr—had been armed to the teeth by their State. The army, artillery, tanks. The other side of the flood consisted of the prickly nests of machine-gunners behind the windows of council blocks, in workers' homes. Machine-gun nests. And the curtain of History tears, and divides up like a ripe watermelon. The fabric is one and the same: those who have been stripped of their rights on the one side, and those who have no rights on the other. Those who dispense Justice are far from where the shots are fired, pulling the strings of unemployment and the national wealth, steering the whole lot into the darkness from which it will presently reappear in the form of a world war. They raise and lower the curtain of humanity on ropes of speculation, arms dealing, pay and price manipulation, inflation, racism, and warmongering.

Nothing better occurs to him, Hans, than to slick his gleaming hair with pomade. The

brilliantine creates dreaded additional laundry work for Mama, washing greasy stains off the upholstery fabric, stains that are very difficult to remove, every blemish is like that. But he does it so that a more attractive appearance will boost his chances of a more attractive life. The most fabulous girl to be had, one that collects Elvis records like himself. You have to make an investment, that is one of the core tenets of economic life, none of which Hans is acquainted with since he imagines he's just doing it for fun.

On 12 February '34 Hansmother was still quite young and was racing along holding on to her mother's hand, that is to say: Hansgrandma's hand, and her mother was holding on tight to Hansmother's little sister with her other hand. And the words come whistling: Run for it, children, it's nothing more precious than our lives at stake, no more and no less. They've taken all our material possessions from us. Now it's our very existence they're after. No matter how. Our lives are at stake, and we don't have anything else, d'you hear?! A massive yellow sun on the wall of the house. The washpowder ad. The Radion sun. The only sun that's shining on this dismal day. And of course it promptly lodges in the girl's memory. The girl hasn't seen many other suns. The Goethe Hof. It was to be pacified by the forces of the executive powers, as the executive put it. And piles of peaceful corpses were to lend their active assistance in this, and their enforced silence was to set an example to other elements who were still making trouble in that pre-War period. The dead sleep the sleep of the dead. On Stiege 2 a direct hit filled the girl with horrified terror when she saw its effect, instantly Emmy and her little sister pissed themselves as if bidden. (The little sister later died in an air raid, she was still at that time the elder child.) Bus-loads of cops rolled up. Chancellor Dollfuss inspected the scene, taking in the overview and the details with great satisfaction, wearing his plumed cap. The plume of the home guard

that denied so many either a home or a guard. The sight of the corpses, shot in the head. Covered with newspaper. A breeze, only marginally gentle, what they call a February wind, lifts the rustling sheets of paper with their headlines: *Attempted Putsch*. Under them, astounded dead expressions fixed on undernourished faces, who is doing this to me and why, after all I'm one of them, the son of a have-not just like my murderer, threads of blood trickling from the corner of the mouth and from the ears. Threads that History is woven out of. Not the golden threads of the cloaks of the Kaisers of Austria and the Kings of Hungary. I must be dreaming, how can something like this be happening to me, shot by a hand that looks like my own. A hand that bears the traces of labour. A hand that would be better holding a drill, a file or something of that kind than a gun, and would be better off reaping the profits of toil than reaping my life. He who cutteth me down like a tree knoweth not that he has already been cut down and gathered in himself, by people he does not even know (because they are always at the Riviera or at hunting lodges in the mountains). I've got it now, I'm dead, I'll never see my family again. And bad things are in store for that family if things go on like this and no one stops them. And people didn't see the general strike through either, dear God. Nor is it exactly any consolation to know that my murderer will die at the front in 1940 and will then be just as dead as I am.

And now these sharp pointed shoes, so shiny you could use them as a mirror to see yourself if you wanted, and Hans does want. With those shiny shoes, Hans is constantly kicking his mother in the belly, that belly he once came out of himself, and he does not even notice. They're fashionable, these shoes. A shade uncomfortable, mind you. You have to suffer if you want to look good, says Hans to his mother, wittily. Then the pay-off will be all the bigger, my pay right now is on the paltry side, alas.

You know, Hans, that time we had to surrender in the council block, the caretaker hung an old white pair of underpants in the window as a sign of submission. Though we couldn't just give up. It would have been a pity to waste a white linen cloth at a time when they were shooting at us. An undamaged linen cloth was valuable. Better for underpants to die than a good linen cloth. And a lot of people were shot even as they surrendered, that's been proved.

Suffering in his tight shoes in order to look good, Hans picks up a wad of addressed envelopes and stuffs them into the flames in the kitchen stove behind his mother's back. He doesn't know quite why he's doing this but there is some kind of compulsion, a voice that belongs to Rainer is ordering him to do it. Rainer's voice is in his ear and Sophie's image is in his heart. They are leading him, inciting him. And in the end he does something meaningless, something a good deal of effort has gone into teaching him to do. It is meaningless because Mother does not notice anything, she'll notice later but she will blame herself, not him. Right now, Hans leaves the house. It is a beautiful warm evening. A pleasure to be out and about.

Once Hans's father had been set free by his work, he died very quickly. There are a great many people who work their whole lives long and still aren't free. Before that, Hans's father had become Hans's father, but he did not have much time to rejoice in the fact. But basically every human being, be he rich or poor, experiences only a handful of brief moments of happiness. Brief but intense. After intense suffering, Hansfather dies beneath a block of original Austrian rock.

At least he was spared the mediocrity of everyday life, his son thinks. The son is constantly in danger of going under in that mediocrity, but he will do everything possible to avoid it. A brief intense life and then perhaps a brief intense death. I want to experience everything

acutely, even if it's only briefly. You're only young once, and I'm young right now. Your father was never young because he never had the time. But there has to be that much time. That's what he failed to grasp, see? He got it wrong.

Hans is right, because this is a new era, at last, thanks be to God, a better age than the old one, this age belongs to the young, and the young are not tardy in grabbing it. HO'S THIS YOU'VE dragged in with you, asks Anna's mother. One of your schoolmates, I suppose. He ought to be pleased he can go to high school and will be able to study afterwards, schooldays are the happiest days of your life but you don't understand that till later, and then it's too late, alas, and the happiest days are behind you. Later on you have to do a job, in your case an academic job, and life is toùgh, you find out for yourself how tough it is.

To which Hans replies that unfortunately he's not a participating member of the happiest days because he does not go to the grammar school. But I'd like to, and that is sufficient because all that counts is the will. Where there's a will there's a way. That way might (for instance) take me to a position as a gym teacher, which would be demanding too but in a different way to being a heavy current electrician, which is what I've learnt to be at the Elin Union. Right now, at this very moment, my girlfriend Sophie is busy (deep within herself) teaching me other sports in addition to the ones I have already mastered (such as basketball, running and jumping, all at the sports centre), sports like tennis and riding. Which is the finest thing in the entire world.

Out of all of this, the only thing Mother has grasped is that Hans is an ordinary worker, which is the kind of company she disapproves of. So you don't attend any kind of general high school? Wanting to isn't enough. Actions speak louder than words. Not that every action is necessarily enough. It all depends. Best of all is having possessions. Go away and don't come back, you're bad company for my two children.

Hans says he proposes to continue his education on his own initiative. This takes energy. Which he has.

We don't learn for the sake of school, we learn for Life, he who learns more gets more out of Life. I want to learn for Life anyway, I don't give a damn about school. You can get left behind and come to a tragic end. People fail both in school and in Life.

Considering the way she is, Anna listens to this with astounding patience. All the while she is pondering how to impress Hans with sundry intellectual accomplishments later on in her room, the room which is hers alone. She will use her piano playing to skilful effect. The heavy artillery: Hans is beginning to value Art, though he does not know what Art can mean. That the two of them will go to bed can be taken for granted, Sophie doesn't do it but Anna does. She will translate a pornographic passage in Bataille for him and, once he starts to drool and slobber, God and the libido will see to the rest. She will get into the most inventive of positions, positions you see in the latest French films, though he won't recognise as much since he does not go to see that kind of film. Nothing but one-two banging. She'll play it cool and austere, but soft enough not to scare him. She looks at Hans's hard muscles beneath his pullover. They are rippling. There are not many muscles in Anna's natural environment. Muscles grow elsewhere. She likes the fact that once Hans is undressed he will be just a body and nothing else. This is a novel feeling, not like other times when the mind is still operating, forever flashing its messages at inappropriate moments. Even the way he picks up objects, you can see that his hands know exactly how to take hold of something. He is an expert on manual things, things you do with your hands. He would know how to use a hammer, nails and a file too; he moves in totally different circles. This attracts Anna. While you're young you have to find out what things are like elsewhere, you already know how things are on home ground.

Mummy says that the Latin for what she just said, that you don't learn for school but for Life, is

on the tip of her tongue, she'll have it in a moment. She has a reservoir of proverbs and sayings. He will not understand, he will be devastated, and in future he will leave her daughter alone. Her family has a tradition of education, it is by no means a matter of your own initiative, it is too valuable a thing for that. Indeed, the abilities and knowledge you have are the most valuable thing of all. What you yourself have is always a risk factor, it's best to keep it aside. And incidentally, she'd prefer it if the two of them did not go to Anna's room unchaperoned. She fixed that room up herself. Flower-pattern curtains. Hardly Anna's style. Women have no business in a girl's room, it's a room for a girl, as the expression implies. Really Anna is still a child. Hans is about to comply, automatically, because Annamother inspires respect, but Anna says she can kiss their asses. And they go anyway, of course. To make up for Anna's uncouthness, Hans says he will even bring some flowers next time, a big bunch, Annamother promptly adds that that can be very revealing. At least the prole is polite. There is a language of flowers, a language Mother has learned. Roses stand for love, always supposing they are red, and carnations stand for the socialist party, again supposing they are red. And then there are flowers that can stand for constancy, devotion, trust and other similar nonsense, you have to be careful not to get them mixed up by mistake, it could be disastrous if it's someone you care for. In general, Nature has its own language, which you can only hear if you are perfectly silent. It is either within a person or it isn't, and he can only hear it if it is. This is every bit as important as book learning, though that is also necessary. You should take note of roots that are a strange shape, stones, and forked branches when you pass them along the wayside, perhaps collect them, and not deliberately ignore them. I'll pay more attention to the language of Nature in future, Frau Witkowski.

Anna: Are you coming, or are you planning to put down strangely-shaped roots? No? So come on. This way.

Mother wields the threat of Father. Which merely provokes a mirthless laugh from Anna. She says: Papa would love to do it to me himself but he daren't.

Mother calms down by telling herself that the two of them are only listening to records and smoking in secret and having secret discussions about art. How is anyone expected to talk to that fellow about art!

Hans has a queasy feeling because being alone with a girl for the first time is very taxing, it's harder to get by than being with his pack of mates.

Anna eyes her face in the mirror, it is on the harsh side, she reflects that now things are becoming serious she would rather be sweet and blonde like Sophie, being harsh is more of an effort, it is difficult to keep it up. Better to snuggle up, all softness, but you must never do that or else they promptly think they can get away with anything. Her line is being hard, like Jean Seberg, that's all there is to it. She has the hots for Hans and imagines what he looks like or to be exact what he will look like in a moment. She has already seen him wearing shorts at the WAT and playing football. He must be even better with nothing on at all. He is like a wild animal, you can't win him over with talk about literature, and this appeals to her. Educated as she is, at present she is nothing but a body and must descend to the level of other bodies where she is one among many and not the best, everywhere else she is better because she has a mind. But that doesn't count now. Anna senses a certain tragedy in this, you're very naked without your head, and her head is what a woman in this situation has to lose. Anna stows her head in the bookcase and inspects Hans, who looks as if he thought he was a wild, beautifully-built animal, say a wolf. He is grinding his jaws vigorously (that old trick of his), which is meant to suggest passion,

arousal, and at the same time loneliness, which John Wayne and Brian Keith and Richard Widmark and Henry Fonda are forever suggesting, over and over again. Using the selfsame methods, though better, of course. The enamel on Hans's teeth squeaks in protest at this rough treatment, the demands that are made on it are always too great. The muscles are supposed to look white from the outside, it's always worked in front of the mirror and has never failed to have its effect on a girl. Girls are impressed. However, you often don't have enough confidence, and usually the girl has even less confidence. Anna knows exactly which film that's out of. She sees the prairie before her, the horses, the log cabins, the cacti, and the lonesome men with their guns. But although she knows all about it, she still wants it, wants it. Funny. You see right through something, but you still want to check if there isn't something else behind there, something you've missed. And even if it's solely sinews, muscles and skin, that'll do fine. No stupid prattle. She herself has the brain, but now she's going to let it alone and be only a body for Hans, who has never been anything but a body.

Anna has found her passage in Bataille and is translating: Simone's mother suddenly enters the sickroom. He pulls down his trousers, because his mother is bringing the soft-boiled eggs. That's what the book says. She can't manage entirely without books. When he exposes himself (in the book), he does so because he wants his mother to leave, and because he takes pleasure in going too far. Fortunately Anna's mother is not present here in her room. And that's exactly how it is with us, Anna continues. In a minute we're going to go too far, it feels good, it says so in the book. Simply for the sake of doing it. Without any purpose. It's wrong to be wanting to achieve some aim.

Hans does not want to achieve any particular aim, all he wants is to get round Anna. Anna has a sensation of unlimited possibilities that starts in

her head, it is a feeling that has often been described and Anna is emulating it so as to experience it precisely the way it is described. Without her head, Anna could not now know that she is only a body and nothing but.

not now know that she is only a body and nothing but.

Anna unbuttons Hans's shirt, making brief, trembling movements because you always hear that you're supposed to tremble. Hans is trembling too, but only because what he's wearing underneath is not as clean as it ought to be, but in all the excitement this goes unnoticed. But don't think this means I love you, he says hastily. I don't love you either, at all, because you don't need love for this, declares Anna. That's news to me (Hans). Love makes a slave of you because you're always wondering where your partner is now or why he's not there. It robs you of your autonomy, it's terrible. Hans considers how best to do it and then does it. Like the aforementioned wolf, the greedy predator, he leaps on Anna's mouth and kisses it. His teeth dig around inside in premeditated fashion, the tongue ditto. It is not very skilfully done, but at least it is savage and becomes a man. Anna gropes, paws and claws at him, using her teeth and fingernails. The latter are not very long because they have to be kept short for playing the piano, a minus point. But by way of compensation things go twice as fast. What you leave out in the way of pain you can make up for with speed. It's supposed to hurt because what's good is perversion, not what everybody does. What she's doing does hurt Hans and he pulls a pained face, immediately recalling as he does so that Gary Cooper also often has a pained expression on his face, suggestive of inner torment, when he is playing a love scene. You have to look as if you were doing it against your will, and then you have to screw the bint anyway because the feeling is too powerful for you. It has to engulf you, and sure enough he is promptly engulfed, the red wave, the white heat, the blackness, call it what you will, of oblivion.

What do I have to do now, Hans wonders inwardly, something always has to be happening, no tick-over pauses, it always has to be continuing, otherwise it's hard to bridge the gap, you lose the rhythm. Now I have to rip her clothes off, if she says no I mustn't take any notice. Anna is far from begging: Please don't, instead she takes her clothes off herself because Hans is clumsy. As she is slipping out of her panties, the thought goes through her head: is this why I read the whole of Sartre in my spare time, all about Being and about Nothingness? What use is it to me now? I might just as well be a girl who's never read anything but Bravo. You don't need any more for this. The fact that she perceives this distinguishes her from millions of other girls, but on the outside Hans, alas, only sees a girl the same as a million others. And he treats her accordingly. As skin, flesh, sinews, muscles and bones. Which all the others possess as well. The realisation that someone totally different (a prettier girl than herself) might just as well be lying there and that it's not at all uniquely her, Anna, comes as a cruel shock to Anna. Inside her, things are like this: she unfortunately sees through what others take in like syrup, and this torments her.

Oh, Hans, Hans, she says, in spite of herself. He accepts this without a moment's hesitation. That's his name. Yes sir! Here. All present and correct. Screwing about to commence.

Then she'll shut up at last, usually she talks too much, it's almost as bad as her brother. Hans thinks that all the talk is gradually beginning to get on Sophie's nerves too. Sophie would rather have Hans's silence, Hans the lone wolf, than all the twaddle of some Rainer who's forever looking for a group where he can shine. It's a compulsion with that character.

Come to me, come, come, come, whispers Anna, as if he weren't already doing everything in his power to come. But he keeps on wilting. It's the excitement of the great occasion, it's his first time, it can remain 86

with you for a long time. She goes on stroking him and whispering words of love, which (incidentally) are pretty banal, she's done better in the past, she's completely changed, because right now she is a woman pure and simple and thus tends to be unoriginal. She says she really wants to have him, he's so handsome, he's handsome in her eyes even if others maybe don't see him that way because she sees him with the eyes of Love, which often deceive you, but so what. She has such feelings for him, he's under her skin, she can't get him out of her system. For him it would do if he could get a poke in her cunt but it's so difficult to get it in if it isn't quite hard, what a nuisance. The sweat is already flying from him and since it isn't working out as he would like it to he turns brutal, no, not to himself, of course not, but towards Anna.

He bends her back, kneads her, forces her head right back so her neck makes a cracking sound, ouch you're hurting me, yes, right, I'm hurting you because I'm so strong and I don't realise I'm hurting you. You're so strong. Ah, at last, the magic word. As if he'd been started up by a code word, he manages it at last and up it comes. But the words Anna would say at other times in similar situations (such as: At last! You ready, huh?) stick in her throat, so momentous is this occasion they call Love, this thing that falls wherever it happens to fall, on soil or on a concrete ramp where it will shrivel up and have to be thrown away. She doesn't know herself how it happened. Heavens. She goes babbling on and on about how beautiful it was and that they'll definitely have to do it more often because she liked it so much and no doubt he liked it too, didn't he, it'll get more and more beautiful as time goes by, that was just the start and if the start was so beautiful just think what the end will be like: even more beautiful. My darling, my darling, and she squeezes Hans so tight that he can't get his breath, but the main thing is that he got his jism out

and put up a reasonable show in doing so. After some initial difficulties.

There is a warm feeling in Anna, and nothing else. In Hans there is a thought of Sophie, who is going to give him his first hour's coaching tomorrow. Now he gives Anna light pecks with his kisser, which is aiming now here, now there, absently and haphazardly. Anna confuses this with post-coital tenderness, which it is not and is not intended to be. On the contrary, it is solely a way of diverting attention from the fact that Hans has no tender feelings for her whatsoever, though he is glad to have got it done good and proper for once. No doubt Sophie does not want a man who is inexperienced, it's quite enough if one of them is inexperienced: her. This kind of thing can even harm a sportsman, it can reduce his fitness, and he needs to be fit for Sophie so he can conquer her in sporting style. Anna doubtless wants to do this frequently, he'll tell her she's got it wrong. She hasn't been counting on the needs of a competitive sportsman.

Hans, Hans, Hans, says Anna softly.

That's my name, all present and correct, answers Hans, laughing at his own joke.

SO THAT NATURE gets its turn as well (and so they can look out of place) the group venture forth into the famous Vienna Woods, where there is a great deal of the aforementioned Nature. In fact there is nothing else. Except day-trippers in quest of a natural way of life, since in the present age industrialisation is proceeding apace. Off the ramblers go, likewise proceeding apace.

The last scraps of morning mist are climbing the leafy slopes, and the youngsters likewise climb to the summit, where there is a tower with a view plus a café and restaurant, where Nature promptly comes to a well-earned stop because you can eat gâteau and you are screened off behind glass. The sun enters at an angle, leaving hunks of light you have to weave your way through. The foliage of deciduous trees and various rotten stuff constitute a rustling carpet. What distinguishes the group from other groups who are out and about dressed for a ramble is that they are not dressed for a ramble, but instead they are carrying a basket containing a sack tied shut. There's an amount of scratching and whimpering going on inside the sack. This is because there is a cat in it. They caught the cat. In Jean-Paul Sartre's The Age of Reason is a character who wants to drown his cats, and so today they are planning to drown this cat too, though this cat also has a right to live. Rainer says that he himself has an equal right to non-existence, just as this cat does, this cat which he is going to assist on its way to non-existence before it can count to three. The cat has its suspicions. Hence the brouhaha in the sack.

Sophie is wearing a casual woollen dress made by Adlmüller. Anna's between-seasons coat was run up on her mother's sewing-machine, you can tell at a glance. Sophie wafts with springy step across roots, pine cones,

twigs and beechnuts. Sophie is the one who has to do the drowning, in a stream in the Vienna Woods which they are still looking for. She is the only one who hasn't yet undergone the initiation. Without which she won't belong to the gang. Because once they tackle their assaults on a serious basis it will be no good her weeping and wailing like a little girl, she'll have to react coolly, impassively. Rainer takes an especial interest in Sophie's participation, since it will be something they have in common, something that will unite them.

As is well known (or rather, as is not well known, because who does know this) the Vienna Woods consist of countless hills; in among these hills there are small mounds which are neither one thing nor the other, and these are divided up by furrows along which rivulets trickle. The springs are clear and gush forth, ramblers quench their thirst there if they have one to quench. Unfortunately there is often very little water in them. Except in the spring. Which is now. Often you hear the rustle of a small animal. Busy looking for food.

The group looks for one of the fuller streams. Otherwise the drowning will take forever. And who can tell if the cat will cooperate. Sophie has long blonde hair which gleams whenever one of the slabs of light gets tangled in it; when it is in the shade it is a muted yellow, brass. Rainer has even accepted that he will cut a lesser figure here than in the jazz club, that indeed Hans, who never seems the superior, might appear a cut above him in this green spot. At least Sophie is prepared to go through with the drowning in the end. Anna stays apart from the others, occupied with not showing that there is now a bond between her and Hans that can never be cancelled, the indifference in her features is a product of long practice. Just now he wanted to kiss her. Nothing doing. Tenderness is for kids.

Still, when she looks at him a tremor goes through her. Prompted by the memory of desire. If mere memory can send a tremor through her, what will it be like in reality?

Was that an animal wailing? No, ramblers making jubilant noises. Hallo! Hallo! They have startled the animals, these fat men and women with jobs for life who can finally do something with neither point nor purpose, that is to say: climb mountains. The Sophienalpe, the Schöpfl, the Satzberg. In sporty outfits that generally strike weird Styrian notes. But they are city-dwellers and their rural enthusiasms are a token of affluence, because they no longer have to live in the country, nor in squalor. And how good they look in their Tyrolean hats!

They scatter leftover food around and are destroying a natural, organic environment, making it artificial, though this is a problem Anna and Rainer are not used to perceiving, since they, after all, are out to spread artifice anywhere and everywhere, as far as possible. Cheap sunglasses hide their pale, bleary-eyed faces, Rainer's nicotine-yellow fingers twitch in the direction of cigarettes, to start a forest fire. Birds utter penetrating cries. Leaves flutter down. Trains whistle in the distance. Sunday.

Anna talks of Schönberg's Verklärte Nacht.

Wrong place. Wrong time.

In this wondrous daylight you go on about night, and not even a real night but one that's been worked over in musical form, says Sophie with a bemused smile. Hans is shadow-boxing the whole time and contesting imaginary wrestling matches and playing football, he thinks no further than the tip of his nose or as far ahead as his arms reach. He is totally in the now. He is a man of the present. The pussy-cat in the sack is not present to his mind either. That is the future. Just don't think about it. He demonstrates how to fool a footballer on the other team and dribble your way past him, he also acts out the other player, no doubt Sophie thinks he is terrific. Sophie is enjoying the sunshine and the fresh air, though she is able to enjoy these for several hours every day on horseback or in some similar way. If you are to enjoy something you must

first be familiar with it. The twins are not altogether in their element. Their lungs are rattling. They have none of that fitness and stamina Hans has so much of. Too much alcohol, too many cigarettes, boasts Rainer, and he tries to start a debate about Camus, to show himself in a favourable light. Sophie wants to go in the real light that's favourable for getting a tan. Hans wants to show Sophie a number of judo stunts a friend taught him. Soon they are tussling and laughing. This hits Rainer's and Anna's guts like poison. Anna hastens to assert that she is now practising the Berg piano sonata, a goal she has long been aiming at, and now she's reached it. It is extremely demanding but she will meet the challenge in the end. Can you eat that, asks Hans, and he neighs like a Lipizzaner stallion. Have you heard this or that or the other record, Anna? No, because that is low-brow music, you have to learn some more, Hans, or else you'll be left standing where you are, and at your present stage you mustn't do that on any account because otherwise you'll be left where there is nothing at all. Sophie's parents have season tickets to the Philharmonic. Often Sophie goes with her mother, just the two of them. Sophie's mother is an acknowledged society beauty, everyone knows her, everyone says hello, needless to say only in those places where everyone knows everyone else. I bet she has no values, says Rainer, who has merely seen her, he is of the opinion that she has no standards at all, she doesn't need any. She goes drifting about among great sterile transparent jellies. Nothing keeps her steady and stable, but the glass-bright mass keeps her in a constant state of suspension, she doesn't touch the ground. Sophie

too will be like that one day, if something isn't done to prevent it in good time, now. Love will prevent it.

The Philharmonic only play reactionary stuff like Schubert, Mozart and Beethoven, spits Anna. When they heard Webern last Sunday they applauded like idiots, but the fact is they despise music like that. The

audience the Philharmonic gets is too well-bred to boo a Webern, they know how highly-rated a composer he is, replies Sophie. But of course they don't like him. Webern's work is a joke from start to finish.

Hans enthusiastically points out a squirrel, a red one. Red all over, really. What a dear creature. It races up and down the tree trunk, its eyes are bright. The sun struggles across the sky. Little midday clouds put in their appearances. Let's hope they won't gather into dark cloud-banks. Here at last is a stream of some size that may be suitable for the drowning of cats, no, definitely is suitable.

Okay then, Sophie. Get in the mud so you can get close to the water, or at any rate close enough. I think I'd rather not do it, says Sophie, I like animals. I always curry my horse myself. You've got to, or else you'll be expelled before you've even joined. I think you're absolutely childish, playing at Indians. The poor pussycat can't help it. You've got to do it anyway. Get a move on, we have to catch the bus. All right, I'll do it. Thank goodness I brought some Elastoplast with me. When I do it I'm sure to have to think of my favourite mare, Tertschi. She's an animal too. We'll have no use for weakness in future, Sophie, as you well know.

Sophie hauls out the scratching foaming bawling cat, which instantly slashes her hand and sets it bleeding. Ow, couldn't you have got a less painful creature? The only thing we could lay our hands on was a cat, get on with it.

In her good dress, Sophie kneels down in the dirt, covered in mud, and holds the loyal pet, which is used to people, down in the water. This takes considerable effort and strength. Snapping, snorting, thrashing and gurgling in the water.

She practically has to lie on the wretched creature, I'm

getting drenched, I'll catch pneumonia.

Before the animal's death can occur, Hans, who was so comical with that squirrel back there, hauls Sophie off the cat, the soaked animal struggles out and races away, spitting. Doubtless a fox will get it, which will not be a very pleasant death either.

Hans gives Sophie a clout so the blood trickles down from the corner of her mouth. Ouch. The gang stands round as if they were the Holy Family and the roof of the stable had been blown off and it was raining in.

Sophie is flabbergasted. Something is stirring within her but she doesn't know what. I hope nothing is stirring within Sophie, thinks Rainer, aghast.

Hans, who has seen all the right exciting films and not the wrong ones, which are plain boring, pulls Sophie towards him and kisses her, so that the blood is smeared across his mouth. It tastes sweet. Sophie is sweet. Like something washed in a special soap powder, no, like something that doesn't need washing at all because it never gets dirty. Angora.

You just have to take a young lass's sweet mouth without asking, says the folk song. And then keep a startled silence because it has come true.

This little scene leaves two people satisfied and two unsatisfied. It is always like that in life. Fifty-fifty. Which makes things fair.

YOU HAVE TO shrink back from me as you would from a demon. Fear is seen in the eyes, hunger in the physique, ill-treatment on the skin, often it's more than skin-deep. It extends into the very soul. That is expressed in a look too. A woman recoiling from the man who's about to rape her. The man she knows is her master in this situation. There must be submission in her gaze. Static. Putting on one expression after another is pointless, this isn't a movie camera, it only takes still photographs. Concentration, Gretl, please. A tenant comes in, imagine this situation: contrary to expectation he finds his landlady, who is still young (which you of course aren't), about her toilet, all alone, he gives her a look that tells her immediately that her hour has come and that no power on earth can help her now. He won't hesitate for a moment to use force. What on earth are you doing with that duster, Gretl, now of all times, get rid of it and show your stuff. You have to ease the lingerie down slowly, try to keep your hand over it, but like everything else of this woman's her hand is in the wrong place, you can see everything.

Herr Witkowski talks like a waterfall yet again, which unfortunately is only silver, Frau Witkowski preserves her silence, which is golden. Herr Witkowski has been familiar with the saying since childhood, he is also familiar with it from the prisoners' quarters at Auschwitz, likewise the statement that honesty is the best policy. Ever since History forgave him he has been honest, it has been his policy for quite a while. After 1945 History decided to begin again from scratch and Innocence, after much hesitation, forced itself to take the same decision. Witkowski started over, at the very bottom, where normally only young people with everything still ahead of them start; the climb is a more

arduous one if you have only one leg, indeed everything is tougher with only one leg; walking for starters. And even more gold is silent (for ever): the gold from teeth, spectacle frames, chains and bracelets that were saved up for, coins, rings, watches, the gold remains silent because it comes from silence and to silence it has returned. All that comes of silence is silence.

Don't leave me standing around stark naked so long, it's cold because of saving on the heating, says Margarethe Witkowski. First I've got to think about how to shoot it, there has to be some violence in it. Double up in pain, imagine you've been hit. That's fine, even you get the message, little by little. If only I knew what angle to choose so as to get everything in. The panties have to be at your feet. And now step out of them. Slowly! That's the discarded skin of an animal you're leaving behind, say a snake, and up you rise, as snakelike as possible, to your reluctant but compelling desire.

Frau Witkowski does this as she imagines a snake would do it, and up she rises, but not to her desire, a stench is filling her nostrils and she has to race to the kitchen, where the rice pudding has burnt. Thus she destroys her husband's delicate artistic mood. The genius was inspired and his prosaic spouse has destroyed it all, totally. I have to see to the cooking, it's high time, too late, in fact. Meanwhile her husband abandons himself to his own thoughts, which are somewhere far down, in the Polish lowland plains, Russian plains too, where Communism is constantly coming from these days. Back there he was still somebody. Who is he now? Nobody. A porter. Herr Witkowski is pleased that the putsch was foiled back in 1950. He too was one of the little wheels (though not a very handy one, given that he lacked one foot) in the ranks of those who did the foiling. Because he tirelessly drew attention to places infected with the bacillus of Communism. You couldn't be too careful. This is how it was: Communist

raiding parties received 200 schillings per man per raid from the Russians, it said so in the paper. The Western occupying powers intervened and prevented the putsch. Restrictions had to be imposed on the circulation of newspapers (not the same newspapers that reported the 200-schilling payments) on the grounds that they had spread unfounded rumours. No one troubled to had spread unfounded rumours. No one troubled to call in the public prosecutor. In this way, a socialist home secretary by the name of Helmer circumvented the freedom of the press, quite effortlessly. This was good, since no one grows heated over things they know nothing about, and staying cool was the order of the day, to avoid clashes. Once a paper starts peddling untruths it has to be disposed of. The Socialists aren't exactly number one party in the Witkowski book, after all, he's not a worker, but this time they kept in line, there's no denying that. Perhaps they will learn something from history at last. Perhaps they will lend their support to the right powers from the word go, that is to say: the powers of high finance, they are the only powers that count anyway because money rules the world (thinks the invalid, who has none himself and so, consistently enough, rules nothing), money can rule all by itself, enough, rules nothing), money can rule all by itself, everyone knows that. In consequence, those who have nothing are left with their nothing, more is given to them that have, and a modern monopoly system is set to begin. Capital reaches out its helping hands from foreign countries in the West, swamping our *Heimat* with foreign money and influences and linking hands with our people to form a chain as strong as the caterpillar track on a tank. Herr Witkowski espouses the cause of Capital, which he does not possess, and the cause of Capital, which he does not possess, and this enables him to gaze with confidence from the Past into the Future. With confidence, because in days gone by he gave Capital his personal protection, and now it is again in full control, personally showing its gratitude to him. By allowing him not only his full invalidity pension but also a job as a night porter in a hotel, where he gets

to see important representatives of the middle class, travelling in the course of their work as industrial sales representatives. So it goes, with the one representing the other, even if he doesn't know who exactly it is he's representing. It goes without saying that Herr Witkowski still represents the National Socialist Party, as he always did, he knows exactly who's in it and what the people in question stand for. After all, it was that very party that made him so big that he surpassed himself. No one else would have enlarged him in that way. Nowadays he enlarges his nice photos. He looks not only to the well-being of the individual but also of the group he oversees. Since he always bears in mind that he represents a whole group and not merely himself in his spare time, he always behaves accordingly. He sets an example. To teach the youngsters. Just as others also represent their companies with dignity in their spare time.

When he considers his children, he has his doubts about the fruits of his upbringing. Strangers are well brought up but his children are not. At the time of their conception he was still an officer. But what was the result? Two children who give him the shivers. In the old days you never used to see children like that, but nowadays there are a lot like them. The wife makes a pig's ear of everything, including the milk pudding, which she stirs; this doesn't make it any better.

He goes to get his pistol, to clean and grease it, you have to do this even if it happens not to be needed just now. Be prepared. The steel is a cold weight in his hand. In the case are his favourite photos of Gretl, the gynaecology photo (which will soon have to be taken anew, the photographer is more experienced now), the brothel photo, the schoolgirl photo with the apron and cane. The pistol case is kept in a secret drawer no one knows about in the kitchen cupboard. It wouldn't interest anybody anyway, his son is unfortunately only interested in literature.

Taking an abrupt decision, the ex-officer (the things an officer has to be capable of, such as decisiveness!) goes into the kitchen to rape his wife, since he suddenly feels like it, but the cow makes an awkward movement, as usual, and he slips on the tiles and falls to the floor with a crash. Where he flounders to and fro, his remaining leg twitching. However badly he wants to, he can't get up. Getting it up is usually a problem of another kind, in fact, but this time he'd have been sure of a hard-on because he was so full of desire. So much for that. It's his belief that the cause of the trouble is that the powerful stimuli he was flooded with as a young man in the occupied eastern territories have been far weaker in recent years. Once you have seen mountains of naked corpses, women among them, the charms of your housewife back home offer no more than a paltry temptation. Once your finger's squeezed the trigger of power, you slacken off rapidly if squeezing strangers' hands at the hotel is all the force you can exert. Regulars greet him with a shake of hands and a slap on the shoulder. Along with popular salesman jokes and anecdotes. He tells them at home to turn Margarethe on if his prick isn't enough, which is often the case. Damn the thing, there are times when it simply won't get up.

Times are growing weaker and softer and so are the youngsters of today. He does not know where it all will end. In half-hearted mediocrity, plainly, if not in something worse. His son is afraid of that mediocrity too.

Papa is still floundering, revolving helplessly, because he keeps paddling on one side only and not on the other one as well, which is a mistake. Recently, to crown it all, he's been tormented to extremes by sciatica and rheumatism too, as if having a leg missing weren't enough of a problem. He revolves on his axis and tries to get up on his foot. Which he can only manage with the assistance of Margarethe's patented lifting-up grip, heave-ho, that it? Now he's standing again, crutches

jammed under his armpits, there we are, he'd imagined that he'd be able to do without crutches when ravishing Gretl, at one time he didn't need propping up like that.

Poor little mouse, why don't we go to bed, it's more comfortable. But the bed gives and I'd really like to drill you into the hard unyielding ground. Well, but still, it'll be snug and warm and cosy there, dear, and I've got a drop of rum left, come on, duckie.

Various parts of Otto's body hurt badly when he props himself up on his crutches and swings his remaining leg, to and fro, to and fro, but he doesn't betray the fact. The charismatic authority he once had drags his wife along behind him yet again. I'm always so tired nowadays, I'll have to get a check-up. Poor dear, yes, why don't you do that. And instead of giving it to Gretl good and proper, seeing that she's right next to him, he buries his greyed head at her breast and can't help crying. She is very moved by this. Because she does not know the reason and mistakenly supposes it's because of her. Poor little fellow, it'll be all right, she says softly, comforting him. It does not comfort him. The lumbering man sobs, he's coped with so much, he's killed so many, and now there's so much he can't handle himself. What bad luck.

I can't help crying just now, I hope the children don't see me in this state. They won't be home so early, they've been out the whole time recently, I don't know where. What they need is a firm hand, which I have, I even have two, though only one leg.

My poor poor Otti. Stroke stroke pat smack.

It's all right, there there.

We'll have a drop to drink, then we'll have a nice cup of coffee, and this evening we'll listen to the Maxi Böhm quiz show. There are valuable prizes to be won by listeners at home, sometime or other we're sure to win. If I don't know the answer we'll just ask Rainer or Anni, children learn so much these days. But we're sure to know the answer, because we're the parents. There

we are, now my Otti's laughing again, there's a good boy.

He tells her to pour it out, but not to be so stingy as the last time, after all, he gets quite decent tips. Even if it's fundamentally humiliating. But things have changed, and incompetence is making the running. Drinking brings the gift of forgetting and is good for the gastric juices. Seeing how rarely there's meat on the table. Herr Witkowski gives a comforted snuffle, looking forward to his good coffee, which he will take with a massive amount of sugar. There are good things in life, there really are, as long as your expectations aren't too high. Of course he could demand a good deal if he cared to. Since he's entitled to it all.

Today he even gets more than usual. Because he cried so much.

CAFÉ SPORT IS another scene. A scene, because that is where the artists and intellectuals go to be seen. Taking part is what matters, not winning. It is like sport, which is where the café got its name. Many have already lost their faith in Art, in spite of the fact that it was they alone and no one else who were predestined for it. They practise Art because it earns them nothing and they are therefore unsullied by filthy lucre. If they did earn anything from Art they'd gladly be sullied. But they would never have recourse to an ordinary middle-class profession, not because they can't master one but because the ordinary would master them and there would be no time left over for Art. You can't express yourself aesthetically, man, if some boss is expressing himself by means of sports cars and villas at the expense of the afore-mentioned artist. Anyone whose cigarette is only a single notch above the cheapest is immediately a target for cadgers.

At the table where the Holy Foursome are passing their time today, two other people are busy trying to prove Pythagoras's theorem by purely graphic means and failing in the attempt. As far as Rainer is concerned, mathematics belongs in the realism sector and is therefore uninteresting to him. If they were discussing literature he would long since have butted in and annihilated somebody, which he has a right to do.

Elsewhere some Greeks are sitting round, practically pushing their dark heads into each other as they joke about women and occasionally chat one up. All this happens close by the Ladies, just where the women have to pass by.

Whenever something is said that isn't to Rainer's taste, and at other times too, irrespective, he will stand up abruptly and stride thoughtfully off into a corner,

where he stares about blackly till Sophie or Anna solemnly fetches him back. What's up? Tell me, please, please. You get on my nerves, stupid cows. I have other concerns, at a different level, the level I live at. You bore me rigid. Please, please come and sit down again, Rainer. You lot don't understand anything at all, how can anyone take action together with people like that, they'll run away from everything because they're cowardly mediocrities. Rainer wants the others to get their hands dirty on his behalf so that his can stay clean. Let the others take action for him. He'll keep clear. But he'll egg the others on. And he'll take his share of the money, he needs it to buy books. He sees himself as a spider in the background of their net. But he's going to go about things without the safety net of petty middle-class security. He will pull that net away from under the others' backsides so that they have to rely completely on each other and on him.

Rainer gapes at the cigarette butts, scraps of paper, red wine stains and crumpled paper handkerchiefs (and other, worse things) on the floor and waits for the inevitable nausea. Sometimes it comes, sometimes it doesn't. Right now, this very moment, nausea has seized hold of him at last, so that he drops the pen with which he was about to jot a line of a poem in his notebook, the ink squirts out, wasted. Now, was that nausea or wasn't it? No, on the whole it probably wasn't. The place looks as philistine as it always has done. You could hardly say that space looked even slightly heavier, thicker or more compact. But (like Sartre) he has realised that the past does not exist. And the bones of those who have died or been killed, even those who passed away in their beds, have an altogether independent existence of their own and are nothing but a little phosphate, calcium, salts, and water. Their faces are merely images in Rainer himself, fiction. At this moment he has a very strong sense of this. It is a loss. But he doesn't tell anyone that Jean-Paul Sartre had already sensed that loss in exactly

the same way before him, he pretends the loss is his own.

Hans, who lost his father, is not thinking of phosphate, calcium, salts and suchlike, which is what his father is now, instead he is humming an Elvis hit, without the lyrics because they are in English, which Hans never got to grips with. Generally speaking, there are few things he has got to grips with. Though he'd be happy enough getting to grips with Sophie.

Another scene is the jazz club. Rainer wants the others to commit crimes. When the musicians take a break he strolls over to the saxophone and tries out a few fingerings he thinks are right, though maybe he wouldn't produce a single note if he were to blow in it. All that counts is that the people who see him imagine he can play the saxophone. When the musicians return he hastily lays it down so no one will smash his gob in for damaging a musical instrument. Then he orders a raspberry soda, the cheapest drink there is (they haven't bagged a wallet yet!), and starts a poem (he'll write the beginning today and the end tomorrow). Nothing out there can distract him from it. It doesn't matter what she looks like. Even Sophie has to accept this. Though one isn't as severe in respect of her, because she is the woman one loves. Love is only a small component in Rainer's life, because he knows that Love can only ever be a small part, Art makes up the rest. In the poem, Rainer expresses contempt for all fat people, with their poncy flash rings, nothing but money-making in their heads. True, he's never seen people like that close up. Sophie's father is on the slim, wiry side, really. He is a sporty type too. Rainer would not care to despise the father of the woman he loves, so it's fine that he does not need to. He has the image of fat rings on white fingers from Expressionism, which has been forgiven and forgotten. He despises them all, day-tripper obesity, caryatids in tails, it wasn't for that that his mother pushed him out of her (so he writes and so he feels,

intensely). But his mother would also protest at the thought of having pushed him out for these good-fornothings in Café Sport and Café Hawelka. She did it so that he could have a decent education. Which he at present doesn't care a shit about.

Even in here, in the unvarying gloom, Rainer is wearing his fashionable diamond-shaped perspex sunglasses. His hair is combed right into his face. This is supposed to be a Caesar haircut, but he does not look as if he were from ancient Rome, he looks as if he's from modern Vienna, which is incessantly whispering that he should go on helping to rebuild his home town and make it more and more beautiful. This, however, he has no intention of doing. Vienna, the City of Flowers: a perennial favourite for school essay-writing competitions, Rainer has already won a prize twice, once he won a rubber plant, the second time a handsome fern which has already died because loving Mummy watered it to death, ferns tend to prefer it dry, as the nursery gardener confided to the young essay-writing competition winner. (He came third, but so did nine other high school pupils.) The advice was ignored. His school always participates in things of this kind and then shows off about it afterwards. All those flowers, springtime blossoms and others, burgeoning in every corner, on every square, are now decidedly improving the city's appearance, fresh greenery, replacing the foreign uniforms that vanished when the Treaty was signed. At last. Even the Russians, the worst of all, vanished too, though as a rule they do nothing of their own free will, they prefer forcing others, particularly women, to do inexpressibly awful things. They enjoy that. Now they're gone, and the Nazis, both the neos and the old guard, can come out of their grey nesting boxes into the daylight again, like flowers. Hail fellow, well met.

Oh and, while we're on the subject of blossoms and leaves, Rainer has only ever seen grammarschool pupils

among the other competition winners at the awards ceremonies in the Vienna schools board offices, which is because grammar school pupils can express themselves, they can write down what they feel when they see a tulip or a lilac bush. What they feel is Joy. And Hope for the Future. Even if someone else is capable of feeling Joy, it doesn't mean he can write it down, without making any mistakes, not by a long chalk. The language they speak isn't the language of high culture, it is the language of their own, which is not recognised. In Austrian usage there is a vast and gaping rift between these two linguistic levels, which comes from the inequality of Man. And will continue in perpetuity. Not Man, the inequality. All it takes is for one speaker to use the imperfect, and lo, the other no longer understands him. That is what happens to Hans with Rainer. Hans is awkward, Rainer is articulate.

Rainer's talent for writing was already recognised back then, now he is out to make it his definitive profession. In his case, his profession will also be his hobby, which is ideal. Many people claim that this is how things are with them. Usually that is untrue. If a plumber or a butcher claims his profession is also his hobby, it is undoubtedly untrue. Nor do you believe it if a tram driver or bricklayer claims as much. If a doctor says his hobby is healing and helping people, you're more inclined to give credence to the statement. Healing and helping can be both leisuretime pursuits and jobs at one and the same time. Hobby is a word that is rapidly gaining currency. The Yanks have gone, their language remains, hooray.

Reluctantly Rainer now notes that Hans, the jerk, is not his own tool at present but the jazz musicians'. Hans is zooming hither and thither, zealously folding up music stands, cramming double basses in canvas wraps, alternately closing and opening the piano depending on what he's told, wiping out trumpets, stacking the scores in piles and distributing them once

again when he's given the order, picking up chairs and putting them down and scraping them along, undo-ing everything he's so carefully accomplished simply because one of them snaps that he's done something wrong, asking how long it takes to learn to play the flute, sax, trombone, bass, etc. Piano takes longest, no doubt, learning to play the piano is the best policy, like honesty, which this Rainer is about to make an end of. I'd like to do something like that some day too! Being able to play an instrument must be nice. Perhaps even nicer than being a gym teacher or an academic. In a minute, after the last number, 'Chattanooga Choo Choo,' he'll lug a whole lot of heavy things outside along with a crowd of other idiot volunteers, where another good-natured fool will let his car be misused for the transport of instruments, just to be part of it all for once, which is all that counts (see above) because winning isn't everything. A number of questions remain unanswered: Is it difficult? How long does learning to read music take? What is the correct way to tune a violin? Who do you approach if you seriously want to learn to play an instrument? I'll volunteer first thing in the morning. The things you like doing, you do voluntarily. Working on heavy current is something you have to do, though. That will have to be given up.

I can't stand it any more! explodes Rainer, breaking out of his thoughts and into Hans's. What he was just thinking was: I spit on you all! With your packed lunches and fat bellies. I am gigantic, I walk on the ceiling, you can all see me, clear as day, right, that's me! He snatches the clarinet case which eager Hans is about to help carry outside out of the lackey's paws and smashes it down on his head, it makes a roaring sound and the wind instrument inside it howls. Hey you, yells the musician in question, have you gone crazy?

The amateur clarinettist, a law student, does not understand the expression this prompts on Rainer's

face (impenetrable, expressionless) and so ignores it. If he only knew what Rainer is thinking about him right now! Rainer is thinking: I'd like to rip your throat open with a meathook. The chemist's son has no idea that this is what he's thinking and thus has no occasion to be afraid, but Rainer is proud of having thought something so brutal. Soon it will be done, for real. At Rainer's table the plotting and planning is begun in earnest. I can't be saying everything four times, that goes for you too, Anna, though you know about it in rough outline. Being my sister. Sophie must know, since she is the woman I love, and Hans, seeing that he's the one who'll be doing the dirty work, will be put in the know as well, always assuming he can grasp what it's all about. Which is by no means certain. Are you coming, Anni, or aren't you? She is not coming yet because, perceiving a unique opportunity, she is casually trickling off Chopin's étude for the black keys at the piano, casually but a great deal of practice has to be put in at home if something like this is to result, and she's about to start on something from The Well-Tempered Clavier when the jazz pianist (a medical student) comes up: Kid, you're in the wrong groove, why not forget it and go on home to Mummy and keep up the practising, but not here, not in a cool joint like this. This isn't a music school, you come here when you've finished music school or you've taught yourself to play. But if there's anything else I can teach you, honey, I'll be glad to, stop by again when you've got some tits. With Annamother around, teaching yourself anything is quite out of the question, you have to have expert tutors, nothing else will do.

A cold shiver goes through Anna because she has discovered that possibly she is not quite perfect and has to go on developing further, a notion she rejects. She has already reached the finish and has nothing more to lose. The fact that there might be something else ahead of her drives her crazy, because as far as she's concerned she's done it all, and murderous feelings surge within her.

There must be nothing more to come, only absolute nothingness, where there are no moral standards, such as this student no doubt still has, even if he talks to a woman in a way that seems coarse. As she goes by she knocks a half-empty glass of beer and splosh, there go the contents all over the know-it-all young academic's brand new blue jeans, they'll have to be washed, which will mean a little more wear and tear, which will hurt the student's finances. Fine.

Rainer is going on at Sophie, who is sipping lemonade, she shouldn't gabble, she should listen, though she isn't saying anything anyway. What Hans thinks is that if she doesn't want to listen to him (to obey him), she ought to feel (him). But Sophie does not want to listen (or obey), she wants to see. She wants to see Hans lift the heaviest of heavy objects, and even heavier ones, with the greatest of ease. There isn't a single soft spot on his torso, though hopefully there are soft spots inside him. Rainer's torso, by contrast, has something of a chicken about it. A chicken that has been totally starved of sun and almost totally of feed for a long time. Still, he doesn't just cluck, that's true.

Hans flings himself into an armchair and describes in broad outline (the details are yet to come) his future music studies, which will enable him to give pleasure to people and help them relax and will make him successful. Down, boy, says Rainer. But he goes on to say how the old woman gets up his nose with her stupid envelopes and the work she did for the Party when she was young, that is why I want to get my distance from all that, maybe musically. Rainer says he'll hit him in the gob in a moment. In a low trawl, Sophie says: Leave him alone.

Anna: You could bore the pants off the Goethe memorial on the Ring, Hans.

Sophie: Don't be so arrogant.

Hans: See that, Anna? When a woman loves a man and she can't show it and doesn't want to show it either,

she'll stand up for him in front of other people. In doing so, she realises what her own feelings are, in spite of herself. I've seen it in films, time and again. Anna zaps her hand between his legs, not a bad spot. Are you two at it again, breezes Sophie. Hans shoves away the unloved hand, which he nonetheless still needs from time to time, and is ashamed. Sophie is not supposed to know. Though she is supposed to suspect. And to want it herself. On the one hand, Anna now wants to punish him, and on the other she is afraid that he doesn't want to do it with her any more. Although she was good, no doubt about it.

Hans is my concern, defending him is no business of yours, he can defend himself and I'll tell him now. And anyway I don't give a toss (which is of course not true). Hans knows that a woman who stands up for a man in front of other people may often look as if she's doing it against her own will, but it is stronger than her will. Gentleness conquers toughness. The last impression in the world that Sophie gives is the impression of inner turmoil. She orders a rum and Coke. This is too expensive for the twins and they look away when the waiter comes, but the waiter is used to that kind of thing. Hans orders something even more expensive, his mother back home in her old kitchen chair would take leave of her senses if she had any notion of it. His secret overtime.

Anna says that the weak are defeated by the strong in the world of Nature. A reed by the north wind, for instance. And silence by the forest. Rainer: So this is going to be robbery and assault.

Hans: I'm not crazy. You don't know what you're all talking about. It's madness.

Rainer: Madness? Categories such as that do not exist— as far as I'm concerned, everything is healthy, except for fruit and vegetables. In art, too, madness comes in handy, in the art of the insane, and soon there will no doubt be artists who inflict wounds upon

themselves, they will be the most modern of all modern artists. For example, you're injured and you go for a walk along the street and display your injury to a police inspector, calling it a work of art, he does not understand this, and the gulf between him and the artist (who is at one and the same time his own work of art) becomes immeasurable, never to be crossed. Submission to something you didn't preach yourself is no good, I quote. Because Man must burst his ridiculous bonds, which consist of what is supposedly current reality with a prospect of a future reality of scarcely any greater value. Quote: Each and every full minute bears within it the negation of centuries of lame, broken history. End of quote.

Bah, goes Hans, gurgling down a drink. That's one of the few jobs I wouldn't care for. Policeman or artist. Though maybe an instrumentalist. He will also see that the woman he loves (Sophie) is not exposed to disagreeable things, Beethoven and Mozart may be allowed once he's subjected them to close scrutiny.

Anna turns her listening apparatus windward because there was a heart-felt inflexion in the name Sophie that she did not care for. It is shitty that, in obedience to a natural law, you no longer like what you already have quite so much and instead strive after the unattainable, she herself would like to be the unattainable but Sophie has already picked that role for herself. Shit. For all she cares, Sophie can die. Sophie promptly notices, she raises her eyebrows.

Rainer says to Sophie, doesn't she think that of all of them Hans is the one who ought to want to be extraordinary most of all, because in the way he thinks he is the most ordinary. Don't you agree? Anna says that every sentence Hans utters comes out exactly how it's been uttered at least a thousand times by other people before. Is Anna at the helm or at the rudder in this love affair? We shall see. Perhaps we shall see in the next few fractions of a second because she is out to grope

Hans's thighs again, where there is certain property she is interested in acquiring. But the thigh in question is removed, you don't do things like that in public, least of all with Sophie present, and so the hesitant loving female hand reaches smack into some old chewing gum that's been stuck there. It's sticky, and where Love has found its place, there Love sticks.

Hans is against violence on principle. You only believe this if the one who says it is physically very powerful and thus does not need to use force. He bought a book by Stefan Zweig, an important writer, and liked it a lot, but he'd still like to ask a thing or two about it, since it is literature of a more complex kind. Sophie, do you think you could give me some information about this book? Rainer says that Sophie might be able to answer his questions but he will do so himself because literature is his field, not Sophie's. Sophie's exclusive field is his own literature, she has to concentrate on that twenty-four hours a day. If Hans tries his hand at simpler stuff first, that's fine. Hans says that Stefan Zweig is one of the most difficult writers there are, though. Rainer says that the mental bonds linking him and Sophie are far stronger and more enduring than any physical bonds could ever be. Intellectual ties last your whole life long, physical ties last a week or so at most. At present I'm reading Camus's Outsider together with Sophie. The hero doesn't care about anything, just like me. He knows that nothing is of any importance and that all he can be sure of is the death that awaits him. You have to get to that stage, Hans, where you don't care about anything and nothing is important. At the moment everything still has to be important to you, so that you have a position to build on.

The assaults will be a powerful experience. Which one can subsequently discuss.

Hans wants to save Sophie from herself and be there for her. Sophie says she doesn't need him to be there for her. Rainer says he quite deliberately does without

support of any kind, that's why he is so strong, because nothing bothers him. Hans says that getting ahead in his career does matter to him.

Anna: The best thing you can do is to imagine there's nobody else but you. Then you won't be judged by anyone's else's standards, only your own. That's how I do it, for instance.

And now the Annahand, sticky with chewing gum, wanders over for a third time, and Hans, flattered, lets it stay. The bird in the Annahand is worth two Sophies in the bush.

Rainer is pondering how to incite the others without getting his own fingers too dirty. First he'll need an elevated position to command an allround view, the view from the Hohe Warte is better than that from the Elisabeth Memorial in the Volksgarten. There are born leaders and there are the rest. He'd rather be the bellwether than the sacrificial lamb, that's for sure.

HANS POKES HIS head (born in the Burgenland) first to one side and then to the other, to see if there aren't any more beautiful women around whom he doesn't know. There aren't any, or if there are they don't want to get acquainted with him. You wait till I have my new pullover on, you'll all be doing an about-turn and chasing me. Hans knows. He winks at a black woman with a little brown guy so you'd think there was something wrong with his eye. But he sees perfectly well whenever some female beauty goes by. When one does, he thinks she is his. Every man would like to possess all the women in the world, but a woman only wants the man she loves and to whom she is faithful. Anna will presently be transporting Hans off, to be alone with him. She realises that this boy means something to her. Hans realises that with his fresh and carefree ways he means something to this girl, probably because he's been reading a lot of good books recently and she can accept him on that account. Anna represents practice for Sophie. Anna is fond of Hans because he has not read as many books as the others, he is more physical, she is all sensation, she doesn't know whether she's coming or going. The feelings of both are in turmoil, which is the hallmark of youngsters who have not yet discovered who they are and found their place in the modern economy. But Hans has had one of these places for a while now. The place in question is by a heavy current cable and he means to change it.

Out in the cool bright sunshine, which they will soon quit for the darkness of an unhealthy room, Hans wilfully kicks paper and other litter, tricking and dribbling past one or several players on the opposite team. Anna tries to waft along in a lively, supple way but the effect is tired, stiff and clumsy. Light is not Anna's

domain, nor is Nature. Anna's domain is artificiality. Where she blossoms. But here there is only the light of Spring, dust, exhaust fumes and the Viennese air.

Hans discourses on Sophie's complexion, which is always healthily tanned, you can see she gets a lot of exercise in the fresh air. The wind and the sun have created that complexion. It is pure, and so is her blonde hair, which is silky, yours is often so greasy and straggly and drags on that thin bony trestle which you can hardly tell is meant to be shoulders. A clothed coat-hanger. But nevertheless kind of attractive. The very thing for a man with sporting talents who is about to discover his mental abilities. Don't you want to learn to play tennis too? You're sensuous enough to acquire a special feel for the ball. No, I'd rather practise the Berg sonata, which is a challenge for a young pianist. You'd be better off bergclimbing than bergsonating, ha ha. So you don't become too much of a smart-alick berk

Thank God, the old folk are not at home. You have to be grateful for small mercies. Anna unbuttons Hans's shirt to see what is under it. Nothing new. The usual: a muscular, unhairy chest with beautiful, smooth skin, which you can get stuck into nicely. You can't wait today, baby, fine by me. Anna sinks her sharp vampire teeth into various parts of Hans. Ouch, says the latter, my lunchbreak's only short so let's forget the foreplay, you told me that's what it's called, let's shove it in straight away. It'll all be over soon. If he were with Sophie, he'd be in a flowery hay-scented meadow or on a warm beach beside a warm sea or in a ski hut covered with fleeces and fells, but as it is he's only beside Anna in a flat in an old building. Sophie is blonde, Anna is dark brunette, one-nil to Sophie. And that will be the final score too, one-nil to Sophie.

I want you so much, I want you so much, I like what you're doing, whispers Anna. You like that, don't you, Anni, hisses Hans between clenched teeth, oh and by

the way, I'm about to come, you know, the readiness is all, I'm coming right now. Here I am!

Anna howls and coughs because she is having trouble getting her breath, Love has grabbed hold of her with terrible violence, Love always does that, it's a bad habit but Love can't kick it, it comes whether you want to or not. Anna doesn't want to but unfortunately she has to.

Anna points out to Hans that he won't find another woman with as broad a theoretical knowledge as her own in a hurry, there aren't so many like her anywhere and in Hans's circumscribed circle of acquaintances they must be even fewer and further between. No other woman would understand what she felt with you, but I understand it, that is my advantage, and that's is why I require gentle treatment, my sensibility suffers worse because of the world's wickedness than other women's. Love me, Hans, you will, won't you, please. A woman like me doesn't often ask for things but when she does you have to give her what she wants because it means she has swallowed her pride.

I'm not tensed with anticipation any more and I have to get back to my place of work before they notice my absence.

Anna kisses Hans heartily. This makes a pretty loud smacking sound, which embarrasses Hans. He moves away from Anna and pulls on his work trousers and checked shirt. On the table are the second cheese sandwich and the bottle of beer you need to restore your energy. On the bed, the woman who will build you up even more. You have to love a man a lot if you'll let him eat a cheese sandwich beforehand. Anna loves Hans so much that she did not even notice the first cheese sandwich, just as a mother no longer notices her infant's shit.

Hans says he does not believe that that was Love, because Love is still ahead of him and looks more like

116 ELFRIEDE JELINEK

Sophie and is Sophie. Long after his echoes have died away in the stairwell, Anna is still looking after him like a cow looking after an express train. She knows that Love looks like Hans, which is by no means an unattractive proposition but is still decidedly disagreeable. Because he has not realised what a gem she is and that she is the best woman he'll find, really she's too good for him in fact. Alas, he is in pursuit of faraway happiness, yet in reality happiness is so close. As close as the Good Things in Life are. But he must needs go a-roaming far away. Which is disagreeable for her. Though not for him.

SHAKEN BY THE wind, various trees tremble against the night sky. It looks as if they were being shaken by invisible iron clamps, but this scene of seeming disorder, which is in reality orderly, was created by a gardener, who put the trees together that way on purpose. They are creaking and squealing as if they were really for it now, but no one is doing anything to them, except the wind. After all, Sophie's garden affords them total protection from wanton damage by strangers. The impression they make is one of unconstraint and artistry, and that is precisely the impression Rainer wants to make too, crouched at the foot of a tree selected at random, maltreating the German language (as the German teacher puts it), though really his essays are of an unconventional type, slapping the rules in the face. Apart from his sister, the only person who understands this is Sophie, and no one else. He beats savagely at a blue spruce, repeatedly, because he cannot think of a certain word, it's on the tip of his tongue but it just won't come to him, but then, just as he's hitting the innocent spruce for the fifth time, suddenly there it is, the word is Death, of course, and it enfolds him in its gloom. He is forever having to think about death. He makes the appropriate face. In French, Death is a woman and appears in Cocteau; in German, Death is a man and appears in his own work. A poem is in the course of composition. Composition is a tormenting business and frequently goes unfinished because the poet gives up, discouraged. He has precious little patience for the business, because the making of a poem involves torment and unfortunately takes time, which the artist generally does not have because after all he has more to create than simply the one poem and has to be constantly roaring on ahead.

Sophie does not roar like the wind, she glides like

the blade of an ice-skate across a mirror of ice. This ground is her own ground, her own territory, and she needs no particular grounds to walk there, the ground is covered with an English-style lawn and sprinkled with pedigree flowers and water from a sprinkler. A white mirage materialises out of nothing and turns out to be she herself and (Rainer hopes) will not return to that nothing in too much of a hurry because he needs her for inspiration. He is stuck at the part where Death places the sailor's cap on the face of the dead child in the pond. This is reminiscent of Trakl, though only slightly. He tries being brutal, to conceal the tenderness he feels towards her, and orders her to sit down on her own lawn. This is something that she would normally say to him, usually the person who extends the invitation is the owner. But she sits down nonetheless.

A party is going on in the house, guests in gossamer dresses and brocade dresses and dinner suits making conversation. They are managerial people and they manage a great deal, as the word implies. Occasionally they can take a joke. What they manage is golf, or riding in the Krieau. The feeble sounds of a foxtrot can just about be made out, the women's pastel patches of colour glide to and fro to the music. Sometimes they flit, sometimes they shove and scoop like excavators and thrust everything aside, servants with trays flee for safety; if the servants are honest and hardworking their positions in this household will be permanent and secure. The dresses are wonderful and looking on is a treat, even if only from a distance, which is where Rainer is at present, he says he wouldn't go inside if you paid him, because if you're outside you have a better grasp of social structures, since you can see more of the overall picture. Structures of this kind have no place in literature, however, because they already exist and do not need to be invented, which is the exclusive task of poetry. The patches of colour lapped by the heads of their wearers surface like vast patches of colour (that is

all they can be perceived as) from some crystal depth, jewellery glittering like the foam on waves. Rainer looks on, gaping, from his position, not of course in the street but in the grounds. Even that position is relatively unnatural, because this person is mostly to be found in interiors, carefully screened from the street and what goes on there. What Rainer's interested in is the raffish style of that girl's room of Sophie's, not the riff-raff in the streets. When I say girl I mean girl, because you are not a woman yet, Sophie, but it will be unbelievably more marvellous once you finally are one, once I've made you one. It will be an explosion, but without any of the fouling that usually goes on among human beings, alas, if the man is a jerk and the woman none too beautiful.

It has never occurred to Sophie that you can do anything else with bodies but sport, the thought has never entered her head, never struck her. There may be something apart from what I'm familiar with, something different, but what could it be? I can't for the life of me find out what it is, but it can't be necessary since I don't miss it, don't feel I'm going without something, so it won't be done, either. Although she often does do what is unnecessary. She has framed photos hung on the walls of her room: Sophie aged three, aged four, wearing beautiful tasteful dresses, on a private estate or outside one of those giant showcase hotels in St Moritz. The effect is terrifically aesthetic and she likes looking at those pictures since they emanate a certain harmony she has somehow lost, she doesn't know where, but she isn't looking for it because recently she has felt a slight need for dirt, which is the very opposite. Dirt in a grand style. Because everything Sophie does is stylish. Nothing by halves. Little piggy Rainer, by contrast, merely turns out paltry rubbish, which he then even proceeds to destroy by talking about it incessantly till every last scrap of muck has been transformed into gold, whereupon it can be slung out, garbage. Once it's gold it's no use to 120

anyone. Why not wallow up to the hilt and deliberately forgo the transformation into literature? It is enough if you yourself know it's shit, does everyone else have to know too? Perhaps the act of describing muck means more to Rainer than the muck itself? How squalid.

Sophie's mother materialises, from out of a huge inherited fortune, in front of the huge iron gateway. Sophie's mother arises from out of the ground like a candle flame suddenly lighted, a crowd of people immediately fall upon her, scratching with their feeble claws at the portals of her capital, but they are given no reply, this crowd, and have to slink off with nothing accomplished. But she doesn't simply do nothing what-soever, this mother, as you might expect, she is also a first-rate scientist and extremely beautiful, she gets her fulfilment out of the things she does, some people do more and others do less, she emphatically does more. Merely being at home isn't enough, you have to be a scientist too. It is like a picture by Klimt being pulled along by an express train, out of the darkness into the light. Her pale blue silhouette is by no means conceived as a memorial to all those who kicked the bucket in her very own steelworks in the Nazi period, it is intended as a beautiful sight for unprejudiced eyes; even if you have reservations, you still have to recognise beauty as such when you come across it, irrespective of the person. She tells Sophie to go indoors so that she does not catch cold, in any case some guests want to see her. Your friend can help himself to some of the homemade raspberry ice cream in the kitchen, it doesn't matter if he stuffs himself, there's plenty. You can't buy my love, Mama. Promptly Mummy goes indoors, hissing, flings herself on the bed and succumbs to a fit of hysterics, screaming like an animal in its death throes, sundry people are unable to calm her down and a professor of medicine who is present accordingly gives her a sedative. She couldn't care less about her guests, she'll kill herself here and now if her one and only daughter doesn't love

her. Her husband is spat at and thrown out when he asks how she is, he comes from a relatively poor family and took a course in mechanical engineering, which involved his parents making considerable sacrifices. But those sacrifices have been forgotten, so have the parents, only the sobbing wife is still there.

Sophie drops a curtsy and swirls her white tulle frock like a peacock's tail. The tulle crackles softly, like burning wood shavings. In the slightest of breezes it lifts a little, because it offers the breeze quite a purchase, which is something Sophie never does at other times. When the material rises, Sophie's slender legs are revealed in wispy stockings, which appear all the more expensive once you pause to reflect how easily they ladder. To be thinking of how long things last when confronted with this pearly sheen is pure perversion, and Rainer makes a great effort not to think the thought, he's quite sufficiently occupied in thinking how short-lived his poetry is. This occasions him little pleasure, since many generations to come are supposed to read these poems attentively. But perhaps they pour to read these poems attentively. But perhaps they never will. Because they will be unacquainted with the poems. Thoughtfully (let's hope that at least Sophie is thinking of those poems, but no, plainly she isn't) Sophie picks a tiny pointed twig up from the floor and rips a hole in the nylon with it, she widens the hole and zap, away the ladders run, these stockings are so fine that you very nearly can't see it but you know that where there was nylon previously there is now nothing, it's been ruined. It's disintegrating. Her hair has that gloss because of the one hundred brush-strokes. These are as important in caring for it as butter is on bread, always supposing you don't have to use margarine in private. Sophie has totally wrecked her right stocking, can I get in first and beg a pair for Anna, thinks Rainer, if she's doing wanton and irreparable damage, better not, whatever you do don't ask for things. I'm going in again now; after all, Mama's out of action for the

rest of the evening yet again. If they want to hear one of my poems (Sophie writes them too, though without much enthusiasm) I shall read them some dirty passage of de Sade or Bataille in French, it won't shock them but it will amuse them. Not like Schwarzenfels recently, who blasted off at the people he was playing with at the Club, in a really common way, and broke a lot of glasses. He leapt onto the table in full uniform so everything clattered and crashed. People put up with it, though it was poor style, Schwarzenfels is an enfant terrible and there's nothing to be done about it. He gets drunk and becomes abusive. Simple-minded. He's a pig. He drives a Porsche, which Rainer would dearly like, though he wouldn't want the owner's intelligence, which is low.

But then, Rainer does not manifest much more brain now, either, in trying to shove his unwashed head between Sophie's legs. The attempt fails. A hasty sidestep on the part of the girl, who has already been standing again for some time, means that he smashes his head against the trunk of the unsuspecting spruce; this was partly intentional and as a result the bang is louder than necessary. I love you, Sophie, by which I mean that everything but you is of no interest to me, once and for all. It is for you alone that my facial muscles now twitch in such pain. But the pain was only foreplay, now I'm going to kiss you violently, which will be the climax. Since you happen to be soft, Sophie, it is good if I'm hard, because opposites are attracted. Our mutual attraction is powerful and we cannot do anything about it. A renewed gust of wind sets the clump of birches complaining bitterly and the two willows groan as well, at a nicely-judged interval. A bird, disturbed in its nighttime repose, flaps up, squawking. You don't get any peace in a public park as it is, and now there's no peace here either. The moon, low down, races like a lunatic across the sky, but in reality it's only the clouds that are racing. Rainer sizes the moon up critically and says something about it, it has to be an image that has

never occurred to anyone else before, otherwise you might as well just say that the moon is like a silver disc in the sky or something of the kind. Sophie says that love's ecstasy is no more than ambition satisfied (Musil). Rainer says that the only ambition he has is in Art, but there he is very ambitious, in Life he is through with everything, his life is ruined because he is outside society and social norms. His love is wholly free of anything but love. He parts the cleavage of Sophie's dress and contemplates a breast, then realises that he is standing in the wet grass, alas, and tomorrow he'll doubtless have caught a cold. The soles of his American slip-on shoes have been padded with cardboard lids rather too often, and the cardboard has a short life, it becomes sodden; the lid on Rainer's desires has just as short a life, he's greedy and the lid is constantly lifting to let off steam.

Sophie tugs her cleavage back into place, to cover what it's supposed to cover, and shoves away the weirdo's hand. Because it was greedy, he won't be getting what he's after. She repeats that if Rainer's material circumstances were different he would not have to be an artist, Art is the only thing which still has a certain value for people in spite of being immaterial. This definition is rejected by Rainer, because he doesn't give a shit about people, he produces his art for himself only, if anyone else cares to take an interest, fine! Maybe one day he'll even be in print, he'll have a publisher! He buries his head in Sophie's stomach, which is flat and very warm, without pebbles inside; if one of her arrogant friends is watching, he'll envy him, because that lot can't do things like this. For one moment, Time stands still for man and woman alike, it is a good moment, because usually Time makes everything worse, poor people grow old, rich people can buy a little time but they can't hold it up for good, it always catches up with them. In the last analysis, Time is democratic, which Rainer is not. Because Rainer despises the masses. That is why he

clearly towers above them. In Sophie's hollow he feels like a young animal failing to find any more to eat at the mother's belly and unfortunately having to go out into hostile Nature to look for grub. Later on it will perhaps have to provide milk itself, unless some miracle spares it the business of reproduction. Rainer is afraid of the future and afraid of growing older. Sophie really has to go now, which is something she frequently says, as we know the gives her the appropriate reply so that you know. He gives her the appropriate reply, so that you can see her struggling with her feelings for him, and failing. She really ought to use her energies to smash in the faces of the good citizens within. He runs his hands up her legs until the aforesaid legs come to an end and his hands come to an end too because unfortunately they are shoved away. Some anarchist, only out for revenge (Sophie). No, I don't want revenge at all, why should I, I'm after whatever is meaningless as a matter of principle. De Sade said that wherever human rights are evenly distributed and any man can avenge the injustices he has suffered, there will be no great despots. They would be silenced instantly. It is only the vast quantity of laws that prompts crime (Rainer). The laws we have, and all laws like them, do not apply to me, they only apply to those who need to be led. I tend to the leadership side of things and in future, for instance, I plan to lead you as well, my dear. I have enough hatred in me for two. Who is the second person your hatred will do for? But I don't need hatred, see, I can create it without any purpose at all. I can't think what I'm supposed to hate.

Up top, Rainer has pushed the dress aside yet again and bites Sophie's right tit, which is tiny and pale pink like a child's, there is a little yell like one of the countless birdcalls you hear around here. But the yell promptly lapses into silence again. Ouch, it went.

You're nuts. I think I'd best cool you off a bit. I'll go fetch your ice cream in a moment, I'll fetch it right

away.

The lawn rises to meet Rainer, this comes of his nausea, the nausea comes of his aggression, the aggression comes of his desire for Sophie, the desire for Sophie is caused by the fact that she is such a pretty girl. Reality slops across Rainer as if the swimming pool were being emptied on him. Underneath, he is in absolutely black wetness, which can penetrate at every opening, even though you desperately try to plug them. When he finds himself being licked he looks up but licking him is only Sophie's pointer Selma, named after the writer Selma Lagerlöf, one of Sophie's early literary experiences, but one who has no merit since at that time she didn't yet know Rainer. Rainer hugs the unfeeling animal, which snuggles up to him. At times animals are better than human beings and you can learn from them. You can learn tenderness and how to show affection, for example. Sophie lacks both qualities. Rainer takes his ice cream from the servant's hand and trots off, long since deserted by Sophie and more recently by Selma too, who races wildly off across the lawns, taking high-spirited leaps with her well-groomed legs (she is not on duty at present), chasing an imaginary quarry. And Rainer plunges into the darkness in pursuit of an opponent that is very real, probably it is Rainer himself because after puberty the young male is his own worst enemy, or so he is informed. This comes from his seething hormones. He opens the gate of the grounds and enters a part that becomes poorer the further he goes. His figure becomes smaller, not because it is growing more distant but because it can't help being scaled down by its surroundings. Just now in the grounds he was still somebody, now he is a nobody on a tram. To experience this is dreadful because it implies the danger of vanishing altogether. The darkness swallows up the railings of the estate as if they had never existed. The estate is gone, Rainer is still there, but elsewhere.

Behind him, all the light disappears, it is called Sophie and never stays for long. Rainer, however, always has

126 ELFRIEDE JELINEK

to stay where he happens to be, because he cannot change the way he is. In this respect, for once, he resembles other people, who cannot change the way they are either. Now THATI have seen larger rooms, small rooms like this one seem even smaller to me. And they really are small, says a petulant Hans, and angrily he kicks at the council flat, which can't help its size and is humane nonetheless since it has everything that is essential in life. Which isn't much. Because mankind can get by with very little if need be. And so the flat does not have much to offer.

There is a wind blowing here as well, but it is a city wind laden with dirt and dust from building sites where the last of the ruins are being cleared in order to make Vienna even more beautiful. Gentle light passes through, from which you can tell that the gentleness of springtime has arrived early. The light is typical of this old quarter of Vienna, it leaves nothing unregarded, though neither does it reveal anything especially worthy of regard. The air is dry, splinters of glass, insects and 'flu bugs are to be found in it for brief spells. Girls with bobbing stiffened skirts and pony-tails sail by, their basic characteristic is youth, which they will shortly lose. They enjoy dancing and music, one floor higher dwells the pleasure they take in their future job prospects. They will be able to choose a profession because the economic boom is on, though it needn't necessarily shift you a floor higher. It might just as well fall on top of you.

Hans has a memory of the years of his youth. It goes like this. For five schillings you can sit in the first or second row of the stalls at the Albert cinema and see for yourself what the economic boom looks like, the boom you're on the brink of joining, though for the time being it's just for other people and you only look at it from the outside. It wears fetching tailored suits over corsets, or dirndl dresses with plunging necklines, and kisses Rudolf Prack or Adrian Hoven or Karlheinz

Böhm. Everything is better now, or if it isn't better yet it soon will be. 1937: Managers 100, Workers 100. 1949: Managers 115, Workers 85. If it's a man, he kisses Marianne Hold or dear jolly Conny, who is to a younger person's taste. Sometimes he sings while he's about it. He often does so, in fact! What he sings is a little hit tune and his name is Peter Kraus. Often there are comical mix ups and you roar with laughter and it turns out that Christian Wolff is in fact the son of a company chairman, though he doesn't look it, his audience look like nothing at all and that's exactly what they are. Conny is saucy and promptly falls in love with him, when he still looks like nothing. This says something for her heart and character. Which are what counts. The slicked curls of the viewers bob in time like cocks' tails and are already looking forward to the moment when they will prove, under the caresses of girls' hands (those of trainee hairdressers or secretaries of the future), to be precisely what they in fact are: the slicked curls of apprentices and young employees. You shouldn't wish to appear to be more than you are, that is the message. At times the movie heroes even try to seem less than they are, on purpose. It is totally incomprehensible. Sometimes the girls' hands reach one storey lower to the pale tool that never gets to see the light of day, bathing trunks at most, but often it's tired from sitting around and simply won't be persuaded to stir. Sometimes it stands to attention instantly, but it pays no attention to the feelings of the person handling the tool. All it wants is to squirt off, then it's happy, and not into your hand, right.

And sometimes bumper-bosomed Edith Elmay turns out to be what she is: a factory owner's daughter, which you couldn't have told by looking at her. But the cinemagoer knows all along and enjoys the delicious mix-up situations where someone pulls someone else's leg, in the grip of a great love which is misunderstood at first but which will conquer all. We would never jeopardise a burgeoning love with misunderstandings,

who knows when the next will come along, you're lucky if you find someone.

Many of the young cinemagoers (who see themselves as the hub of the action because the girl next door is the movie's heroine) are already dreaming of their own car or Vespa, their parents have barely had their war-damaged lives restored to them in good order, have barely had time to get somewhere in their dull, confined, timorous ways. Do those lives still work or have they gone rusty? They can't have gone rusty because the parents keep on working and working, they have to rebuild the Fatherland. Egoistic wishes have to be stifled, the only wishes that can venture out into the open are those for new vacuum cleaners, fridges or radiograms, thus keeping trade and exchange going. Trade certainly keeps going, but nothing changes. Not so very long ago, a Socialist Party paper in Graz called for the liquidation of strike leaders, and thus choked off one particular change, soon the only sign of life there'll be will be advertising, at least it changes the street scene into one of brightness and colour.

Ruth Leuwerik kisses O. W. Fischer, weeping. Maria Schell kisses O. W. Fischer, weeping. Weeping, a mother's heart considers the Sunday potroast which its negligence has let burn. Meat is dear and something of a luxury. The Alps jostle into the picture with ever greater frequency, and folk music makes itself heard. Twins populate the Wachau or the Dachstein, singing incessantly, till every one of them gets the husband that suits her and retires into private life with him. Their viewers are disturbed at the thought that these glossy people have any private life at all, just like themselves, if they lose it they won't get another. The main thing in that private life of yours is your health. You have to do as much as you can to provide content in that private life, which some seek in a villa at the Wolfgangsee and others in a council flat or a caravan, what counts is having the will. But not even

the blonde long-legged Kessler twins have two lives at their disposal, that is to say, of course they do have two but each of them only has one. Peter Weck drives up in a new sports convertible and presently drives away again, but before he was on his own and now the enchanting Corny Collins with the dimples in her cheeks is sitting beside him, snuggling up and bubbling over with charm. For the next few hours she will not leave him, probably she never will. Nor would any other woman in her position do so, because it takes so long to find True Love and once you've found it you mustn't let it get away again. The girls in the cinema wouldn't let it either. They always stay as long as possible, and if they are uncouthly sent packing they shed lovesick tears, as Maria Schell has often done. Now and then some adolescent creates an unpleasant disturbance, puking beer and hitting people, then he goes home and is thrashed, to balance things up and restore the immutable order. Along the way, a lot of people hurl abuse at him, especially on account of his unclean leather clothing, which he likes so much precisely because it is dirty and which he saved up a long time to buy. He knows he won't get a Corny Collins anyway because the latter already belongs to Peter Weck, but he tries hard. Heinz Conrads, the local star, now somewhat advanced in years, also kisses a lass at last, he is more of an elderly person's star because he has human qualities, the unimportant elderly people who no longer play any part in the production process can make do with a native star, no special guest star need be imported from abroad. He provides the proof that the older generation have values whereas the young generation go by appearances. Youngsters spit on the elderly and their ideas, but a year or so later they haul out the same ideas themselves because they themselves are older now and have settled down. Hans is also a little older now, but he simply won't settle down. Then they even buy a flat of their own, if they can afford it.

The sun sets, as it so often has done before, and Maria Andergast sings a duet with somebody I've forgotten, it couldn't have been Attila (Paul) Hörbiger, could it? Peter Alexander sings a duet with Caterina Valente. Caterina sings a grotesque duet with Silvio Francesco, who is her own brother in real life, and pulls a face so that you can tell what high spirits she's in again today, such high spirits she can scarcely believe it herself. Lolita sings about a sailor and then does a duet with Vico, who likewise pulls faces so you think any moment the rest of his face is going to fall off, leaving only his teeth. The sailor abandons his dreams and the travel agencies boost their turnover in dreams. Vico rolls his eyes so you can see the whites, he's so happy, it's as if he were having an epileptic fit. If he goes on like that, they'll have to wedge a piece of wood between his lips and secure his tongue so that the talented Swiss singer doesn't choke. Otherwise his great future will be prematurely ended. Young bambis pole timidly across the screen, their long baby legs are so sweet, and presently they're scooped up from the ground and squeezed to a corseted bust so that their tongues pop out and their eyes roll. There isn't a starlet alive who can leave a bambi, which is a creature of the forest, on the ground where it is. Because they love it very very much indeed, this little fawn standing merrily by the fringe of the forest. The person picking it up is Waltraud Haas, Haasi, playing a blonde orphan who finds a good master in the priest of Kirchfeld. She is on the brink of being led astray but she runs away. The young salesgirls in the cinema squeeze their thighs together, weeping, so that the groping lathe operator or welder hands are jammed in tight with no room to manoeuvre. The hands want to get in, but all they get into is the bag of popcorn, a recent American invention which is overflowing with sheer abundance because there's a lot in the bag. The oft-practised boob-grope is nipped in the bud this time round because Conny, that cute little Marianne, has an exam to take at the

conservatoire. Watching her, they sweat the sweat of leisure, which is pleasanter than the sweat of labour because it is sweated on a voluntary basis. She (Conny) has been trained to play serious classical music, true, but she prefers singing lively hit songs in a night club, where the director of the conservatoire tracks her down, but he has to laugh (heartily) at his very best pupil's transgression, she will soon be marrying a rich young man, even though at present she's still putting up resistance. At times, Conny groans out loud in this film, which isn't normally in character since she is of a carefree, cheerful nature, as Youth should be (the serious side of life makes its appearance quite soon enough), but lovesickness even gives her a hard time, it's hard to believe. But you know her worries will soon be over. Bibi Johns and Peter Alexander sing a duet of love, jazz and fantasy, they want a house by the sea so blue with a garden I'll be true to you. Ernsti, alas, comes home later and later, he wants a VH, he'd be better off getting married. In the end the four lasses from the Wachau are married off too. Not to Wachau lads, though, they'll be marrying city boys, let's hope the latter don't think in too materialistic terms (as people in the city often do), they ought to have picked a country boy who knows what values are and where you get them: Nature.

The envelope-addressing Hansmother butts in on the pot-pourri of her son's thoughts because she would like to improve his mental ability. She fails in the attempt, because all he listens to is rock'n'roll, which his friend Rainer frequently explains to him. Rainer will have a Campari and soda before him at such times and he will explain how modern music achieves its effects, Hans would rather let it go ahead and achieve its effects but Rainer's blather prevents this. Rainer has already lied, too, claiming to know a musician personally, which wasn't true. He doesn't know any musicians at all and is only bragging. This Rainer often supplies interminable overall views of subjects that are

of no interest to anyone. And now Mother also supplies an overall view so that her son will be far-sighted, all in vain. Today as always it is a history lesson, Hans has had as much as he can take of that. Mother opens a book and reads in a dispassionate tone: On Friday 6. 10. 1950 the schilling was devalued, from 14 to 21.60 to the dollar. Allegedly this showed that the wage and price agreement of that year, which supposedly compensated fully for the increase in prices, was a con intended to deceive the people. (So what. All that matters is having the schillings in your pocket at Café Hawelka or the Picasso Bar.) Mummy reports that many social democratic union officials left the old party they loved so dearly because they couldn't stand the united front that had been formed with the reactionary volkspartei against the struggling workers. The emotional burden was too great. If you're a socialist and a socialist union secretary calls you a bastard, you have to leave the party. Mother goes on and on like this in her boring way, working as if she were being paid for it, which she is. She needs the money. She would rather do something more interesting but she is too old. Because the future belongs to the young workers and so does the present. And in the past, too, young people were permitted to bite the dust first. Youth is never passed over. It is always up front. When the old has become unbearable you have to start something new. Hans finds his old life unbearable and wants to start a new one. If your marriage has become unbearable and you can't take it any more, you have to get out, thinks Hans, who saw this in an American film where there were problems. Mostly he prefers German films, though, not because he wants to support the homegrown product but because they are not so full of problems. With James Dean everything goes so fast and often you don't get what's going on, you've hardly understood one problem but the next has reared its head. It's better to break things off, a short sharp cut that may well be very painful, than to

134

endure everlasting torment. Hans thinks of Anna and her cunt and that the old must give way to the new, usually something better is already waiting, otherwise you could just as well stick with the old, which in fact you chuck for the sake of what's new and better. What counts is choosing the right moment and the right place to make the break. You have to follow your heart, which in any case always tells you what you already want. Hans's heart says Sophie out loud and jumps, and four-metres-plus further on it lands in the sand, well done! Hans has private problems, his mother has public problems which are uninteresting because they produce no apparent profit and only waste time. Work wastes time too, to be exact: the time it takes to do it, but then you have money to take home, and with that money you get on the trail of quality, if you have a nose for it. Hans is beginning to understand his feelings for Sophie. In films this often takes a long time but then it can suddenly go very quickly and acquire powerful momentum.

Sophie alias Vera Tschechowa alias Karin Baal are so cool and classy, they commit trivial and serious crimes, walking the wet streets, for the sake of a man, which is the wrong way. When Hans says: Stop, choose another way, not the path of dishonesty, they consent and on the next day they are already off with him to do something better with their lives than committing crimes. Hans has made them do this because he loves them. A valiant social worker lends his assistance, which in this case Hans will not even need because he has enough willpower for several people. From time to time someone will be shot and will lie dead on the cobbles. You have to avoid things reaching the point where a gun is drawn, you have to see about changing course before it's reached. Crime is not essential to happiness and a career. In fact it rules them out, totally. To forge a career, you have to inspire trust. Hans has taken this first step, because Sophie trusts

him. He will take the second shortly. At times Rainer boasts about a pistol that supposedly belongs to his father but which he can borrow whenever he wants, which is bragging too, they all know Rainer's talk. But then, his father does occasionally let him drive the car though he doesn't have a licence, that much is true, Hans has seen it for himself. This may come to a bad end, to be exact: the death or injury or imprisonment of Rainer.

Karin Baal dashes out into the headlights of a car. Hans dashes after Sophie, catches up with her, flings her to the ground, and makes it clear that honesty is the best policy. She believes this right away. Vera Tschechowa's raincoat is snazzy, the material is shiny, a man could wear that too.

Mother asks Hans to fetch her the soup she's been warming up on the stove. She has put one foot up because it is hurting. She is scattering paper all around her: On Tuesday 26. 9. 1950 strikes began at almost 200 firms in Vienna. 8,000 demonstrators advance as far as the Ballhausplatz, which has been sealed off by the police, and hold a rally outside the federal chancellery.

Wednesday 27. 9: In Vienna, Linz, Steyr and other industrial towns, but particularly in Wiener Neustadt and St Pölten, there are vast rallies and protest marches. It is the climax of the strike.

Hans fetches the soup and, unnoticed, spits a thick gobbet of phlegm into it, stirs it in, and hands the soup to his mother as if he hadn't spat in it at all.

On Saturday 30. 9. 50 the all-Austria congress of factory committees convenes in the assembly shop of the Floridsdorf locomotive works. 2,417 delegates take part, at least 90% of them members of factory committees. The congress makes the following demands: 1. The price increases to be cancelled. 2. No devaluation of the schilling. In response, the government calls for the defence of Liberty, which is being endangered by the worker's rash and ill-considered

136

actions, they mustn't be intimidated by violent criminals, in other words: Communists. They also call upon the workers to dismantle the street barricades and expel any high-handed outsiders who may have infiltrated their factories, because this strike is allegedly out to destroy the basis of the workers' Future: all-round prosperity, which (as is well known) the workers get the lion's share of, though all in all they haven't deserved it. Mother goes on reciting yet more of this text.

But Hans gets up and goes out. As he goes, pretending to do it accidentally, he sweeps a high stack of newspapers and books off this educated working class household's kitchen table onto the floor. Without picking up the mess he has made, he goes out in a hurry.

THOUGH RAINER DOESN'T have a driving licence yet, his father occasionally lets him use his car, which they have trouble paying for. Father only has capital principles, no principal capital, and he has already been convicted once of faking bankruptcy. He has difficulty accepting his unstoppable decline. The tiniest speck of flyshit will give him new hope. But everything will be fine if his son, a minor without a licence, drives. The car's the main thing. Which is Rainer's view of the matter too. But mostly he is only allowed to drive when he's taking his father somewhere, very seldom on his own. The cripple squeezes in and out of the car as if he were doing bar exercises, a complex and wearing process that gets a man quite out of breath. Today is one of those days when he suddenly decides to drive out to Zwettl in the woods. It's nice out there. Hardly has he taken the decision but he's whipping his wife Gretl in the bedroom, where man and wife can be intimate. The whip is one of his numerous souvenirs of the old days. One of the others is a bayonet. All the son and daughter hear of Mother is a low moan, but that is enough to tell them that she is being beaten again for her marital sins, particularly infidelity. You whore, you whore, the moment my back's turned you're in bed with another man. And this other man is the businessman downstairs that I've been keeping an eye on. I won't put up with these goings-on for long, though. But Otti, you're wrong, I don't go to bed with any man but you, that's enough for me. You only live for those moments you can be with that impotent goodfor-nothing! No, I don't live for those moments, I live for my children and their education, that's all. See, you admit it. What did I admit, Otti? At any rate, I'm going to give you a thrashing to remember now, so you never do it again, and if you didn't do it I'm going to thrash you

so that you don't think of doing it. But I didn't do it, not at all, please don't hit me, Otti, ow! That was the ow the siblings overheard.

Rainer says: Anni, we've got to do something about that old bastard. But Anna says no what can we do anyway, let the old folk alone, let's worry about ourselves. But he's going to kill her. Let him, it'll be one less, and the other will be gone too, in gaol, where he'll die like a dog, all alone. We'd be free at last. But he's got the pistol. So what. He's far too much of a coward.

So Mother, having enjoyed no protection from her children, hurries bruised and worm-ridden into the

kitchen to prepare the lavish Sunday breakfast. Anni wants to put in a lot of piano practice today and then go for a walk with Hans, Rainer on the other hand is to drive Father to Zwettl because Father wants to go there and work things out of his system physically. He'll try to be unfaithful to his wife but won't succeed, still, no harm in investing a clean shirt in the enterprise, just in case. He's always dressed up to the nines, is Papa. He will try to pick up women who are even younger than Mama, who is much younger than he is. He's adopted an elegant German accent for the purpose, to arouse interest. Come on, come on, let's be off, if we don't get started now we'll never get anywhere and I want to be off into the woods. You can be the chauffeur, son, because you're my boy, all I have apart from you is a daughter. Also you can play chess with Papa in the evenings, which Anna can't because she doesn't think logically. Unfortunately philosophic books by Kant, Hegel and Sartre have to be left behind when Papa wants to go out to the woods, no power on earth can do anything about this. If I come back and find you in bed with that businessman again, I'll murder you. I'm not yelling the way I usually do when I make the threat, Gretl, you've disregarded me often enough already, no, today I'm telling you coolly but incisively that I shall kill you with my Steyr-Kipplauf pistol, I am one hundred per

cent in the right. But Otti, no, for Christ's sake no, the businessman's happily married and the only contact I've had with him has been out shopping, but I always hurry and don't pause for any private talk. But you do pause to change your panties first, I've caught you there, haven't I? Only to be clean, and smell clean, when I go out, Otti. I don't have anyone but you and the children, I'm seeing to it that they get a good education at school because I come from a well-thought-of teacher's family.

Revolted, Anna goes to the piano, in quest of oblivion through sound, and she finds it too because music requires concentration. Father says it sounds horrible. But she is her mother's darling. Mother has a woman's feelings, as she does too. Mother pats Anna in passing, which makes her livid.

Thus Father and Son, one on this side and the other on that, one bored and the other labouring and heavy laden, clamber into the automobile, which can seat four (though today there are only two), and drive off on a north-bound freeway, into Nature, where there is a popular café for outings where you can make the acquaintance of ladies who are on their own at first but often leave accompanied. And already they are amidst gentle wooded slopes and meadows, and reservoirs burrow into the ground, a typical feature of this landscape, which borders closely on Czechoslovakia and where you can already sniff the harsh air of neighbouring Communism. The air is harsher because you're further north. Spring hasn't progressed as far here either. There is a smell of pine needles, like the spray you can buy, the houses are fewer and further between, the economy is depressed, as is proper in an economically depressed area. The voices of birds are uplifted in warning, watch out, don't have an accident, and deer appear on the horizon, only to disappear again promptly in their beloved natural heritage, revolted by the car exhaust fumes, which promise to become a problem if the cars increase in numbers. Nowadays,

not everybody has one yet. It's a pity you have to put up with cars, seeing that Nature itself is so pure and uncontaminated, says Father. Cheerfully. As if he hadn't been threatening murder (just now).

Right now he is a poor thing and in the hands of his chauffeur son. You're my very own boy, she couldn't manage a second, couldn't Gretl. These men are always taking pornographic pictures of your mother, I'll show them to you some time, they're the filthiest things you've ever seen. If it weren't for the fact that strange men took the dirty stuff, I'd say the photos weren't altogether without artistic merit, but these other men are simply lecherous and that renders the effect null and void. Ugh.

The son grinds his jaws and says nothing, defending Mummy is pointless because Pop will only attack her all the more violently. He'll calm down. Rainer's knuckles stand out white on the wheel as if they were going to split through the skin. The only thing that helps is thinking of Sophie, whom he can't see today because of Papa and his wanderlust. One hopes she won't be giving any other young man the eye. They wanted to have a long talk about Camus, about his book on absurdity and obsession, but now they can't talk at all because the woods are beckoning seductively and asking: Where are you from? The city? Then this is the place you want, this is the place for country matters.

His son's silence turns Father nasty and he accuses him of incest, have you screwed your Mama too, when

I was out slogging my guts out for all of you?

Stray villages make their appearance by the road and then fall behind again, with regrets because they haven't been chosen for lunch, because a different village has been chosen. In terms of quality, Zwettl is not much better, though it is bigger and situated by a reservoir. At last it appears and makes a good impression, one it frequently practises. It even has a monastery to offer, called Stift Zwettl, which they

don't take a look round because you can't expect it of a war invalid. On Sundays the town is resting and jolliness is rampant. Father and son eat a good schnitzel with a cucumber side-salad and a beer each. They are shrouded in the rural earthiness of a real ethnic pub. Father is already flirting with a strapping dark-haired can't-be-more-than-mid-twenties at the next table, all on her own, he buys her a wedge of Sachercake with a particularly large dollop of cream and a glass of wine to go with it. A coffee to follow. The girl gives a highpitched giggle. Eh, schönes Fräulein, how about it, you and me (better than all alone!), even if I'm disabled, I can still stand on my own two feet, or one as the case may be, I'm still a man. Giggle giggle cackle. She comes over to Papa's table, Papa pays for a couple of liqueurs, a kiss with love, advocaat with raspberries and cream. They are expensive and taste terrible. Papa has already bought her that much. The son will be throwing up any moment. Father ruins the fat woman's bee-hive hair-do, grabbing the bird's nest, may I, hoho. You may, sir, heeheehee. The girl scrutinises the son, who looks the student type. The son fixedly scrutinises the synthetic curtains at the window with their enormous pattern. The invalid scrutinises what has been waiting for him and him alone beneath the dirndl skirt all these years. His hand shoves up to dark heights. Meanwhile his son is in those loftier altitudes where he composes poetry: Here you pitch and toss, pale scraps in the depths. I am the great relief, crying out for itself. My dwelling place is all the images of the day after tomorrow.

Father anchors his other hand in her cleavage, where things are full to turning, they'll be thrown out any second now, every one of them. But the landlord, who like Father fought in the War and was an illegal party member in the old days too, stops by in jovial mood with drinks on the house. Whenever Father is offered something free he doesn't say no. He is already a little

merry and cracks a pretty naughty joke: is the lass old enough to go on the game yet, she's too stupid for it, that's for sure. Screech cackle cackle. Perhaps you could teach me a thing or two, sir. There's nothing you don't know, but if anyone can still teach you anything, it's me. Hawhawhawhaw. Heeheehee.

The jolly party breaks up, though not before the question whether the boy has done it yet has been asked, or hasn't he ever, is he allowed? Father proudly says yes and declares that he coached him himself. But Rainer never has done it, which only his sister is permitted to know, because his talk says the exact opposite. To hear him talk you'd think he'd already slept with any number of girls goodness knows how many times, only for Rainer to have to abandon them all too soon. These things are indicative of Rainer's minimal social adjustment. He lies like a book. And he reads a lot of books.

Books are where people get their lies. Better to have a son serving an apprenticeship than a lying son at grammar school.

Bye-bye waves the girlie's little mitt. Her name is Frieda and she works in a sugar refinery. All's foul that ends foully. I'd have laid her easy as pie, wouldn't have needed more than a finger and something else, drools Papa, and he shoves his hand down the top of his Sunday trousers, which are freshly pressed though they won't be for much longer. Inside the trousers he moves his busy fingers, which haven't done any real handiwork for a long while, the last time was during the War with intent to kill. Now they're doing the very opposite. Father strikes his member in order to cause an ejaculation. This will bring him relief after his good lunch and no doubt he will then fall silent and asleep. But right now he still feels the need to report on the quality of women's pussies, which are sometimes moist and wide-open and at other times dry and tight so that you have to expand them first. Listen carefully, my

boy. Whatever else, he has to stand up straight, otherwise none of it's any use, like this fellow here, isn't he a splendid specimen? A red mushroom cap spies inquisitively out, perhaps it'll all hit the windscreen with a splash and have to be wiped off.

Rainer keeps his own puke down, it doesn't taste as good as before when the *schnitzel* was still intact and undigested. This wretch does all of this with my mother, he thinks. And she has to put up with it as a marital obligation. And I still want to do it with Sophie, though with her it'll all be completely different.

Father picks up speed and breathes deeply. At fairly regular intervals a beery belch or even one of those farts Rainer particularly dreads fills the old banger. Rainer steers the vehicle down minor roads towards the reservoir, Nature is coming menacingly close, opening wide a yawning chasm to drag him down. The green's growing dazzling and dangerous. So much green. Like a vast hollow made of spinach. Father's wrist is working away ambitiously, he undid the top button back at the pub and now undoes others. You have to have room to manoeuvre. Father is approaching his climax at top speed and his son the reservoir likewise. The reservoir lies deserted in the feeble afternoon warmth, it is still far too cold to go swimming, you can't do that till summer. Father gives his son a man-to-man look. The son does not return his gaze but stares straight ahead. Light is mirrored on a ruffled surface. The water murmurs in amazement: What, it's this cold and you want to come in? A pair of wild ducks lift off, flapping and spraying. Sauve qui peut, it's familiar enough and no one wants to die too if some jerk takes his own life. The trees rustle as one man.

Now we're both going to die together, horrible, thinks Rainer, putting his foot down, and instantly the engine, which is relatively feeble but still powerful enough, starts to roar. Have you gone crazy, boy? The water's surface beckons, keen to embrace them. At last something's happening for a change at this dreary time of year. It's very deep here because the water has been dammed up artificially. Nature cannot always come up with dangers of this kind on its own. The gravel on the shore squeals in agony. With a scream the springtime landscape swings round and waves a stop sign. Stop! No going past this point. Danger. Millions of tiny creatures are run over, their faint warnings fall silent. Somewhere or other a watchdog barks, it has no freedom and has never known what freedom is because it has always been on a chain. It doesn't pine for the unknown. A peasant with chickenfeed in her apron gawps at them. The juices are beginning to rise in the grass because it senses the approach of summer. The water's edge surges towards them to welcome them, well well, today of all days, and we were thinking nothing was going to happen. Air-borne creatures drone on, flying low, but cannot be heard above the noise of the car engine.

At the very last moment the patricide plus suicide is aborted. One is too much of a coward to put a premature end to one's own life, there is too much still ahead of one. Which is invariably a mistake, but you believe it anyway and that is what counts. Rainer sits on the shoreline, white as a ghost and trembling. He gets a clip round the ear and says: I only wanted to give you a fright, I knew exactly when to brake, I'm a good driver, Papa. Did I alarm you? And what if the brakes had failed, huh? Another blow, one to the right and one to the left. Dad practically wet himself, luckily he managed to hold back. But he's got to relieve himself, urgently, thanks to the beer. Rainer, still weak from his intent to kill, has to drag his beer-bloated Papa to the edge of the forest, where the latter wants to have a piss. By way of punishment and revenge he insists that the lad support him the whole time while he's about it and admire his prick. How big it is. And back there Rainer saw how big it was then. There, that's that.

They turn slowly and carefully (the crisis having been overcome for today) and drive back to the city. The woods protest, they'd have liked to see more of these two, they very nearly got to keep them altogether. But as it is Papa keeps Rainer and Rainer keeps Papa.

THE JÖRGER BATHS provide a strong contrast. In the first place a contrast to the woods, where Rainer was recently and where Man has not yet won the struggle against Nature – 'the dark green, mighty forest and tough grey granite have shaped the destiny of these parts, and the deep gorges and vast plateaux have a sparse, stern beauty all their own. The impressions of these dark, silent forests have borne fruit in many who have succeeded in penetrating the defences of that formidable beauty.' The parental flat, which the Jörger Baths also provide a contrast with, is totally different. There is no liberty there, no clear open spaces like in the woods. Instead, the walls are gradually becoming smothered in complete gloom. There is no blue sky to be seen, nor any mysterious dark lakes embedded anywhere. The gloom is located in countless washpowder packs, old suit-cases, crates and boxes, stacked up to the ceiling, which have absorbed the horror of an unimportant bourgeois household (far too small for four people) over the years and are now generously pouring the aforesaid horror back out over the adolescents. All you have to do is lift any lid, at random, and out wells the fug and does its fuggy job. Nothing is thrown away, everything has to be kept to mark its own filth and that of the owners. Yellowed articles of clothing, broken crockery, children's toys, sporting equipment, souvenirs of the remoter parts of the country, papers, heirlooms, sundry apparatus for various activities, and in among the lot the yellowed, broken lives of four people, two adults and two adolescents. Rainer wants to raise himself up to the light, no matter where, in a wide-open landscape or a brighter flat with no clutter, if possible, except for tubular steel and glass; but to reach the light he has to leave the house, because inside there isn't any. You can't even breathe in

and outfreely because even the air is in short supply. And young people need air especially in order to grow to their intended physical proportions. But you can create your own light if none is available. To this end, Rainer often tells the others at school that his father drives an E-type Jaguar and has often taken planes abroad, which is all lies. His father, for his part, claimed in front of witnesses that the well-known pop singer Freddy Quinn was his illegitimate son and that he had had to pay maintenance on his account for a long time. This is also untrue. No matter how often Rainer parrots the story, it still isn't the truth.

What is down at the bottom on those endless white tiles across which the light glides in shimmering streaks? Not the ultimate and universal Truth which the adolescent seeks in his spare time when he has nothing better to do. What is down there at the cool bottom is water. As is water's way, it makes a blue and transparent overall impression, which is only occasionally blurred when there are too many waves, which is sometimes the case with Truth, too. Everything conduces to smoothness. No trace of roughness can be felt. Sophie too conduces to smoothness, among people. The smoothness is deep at one end and far shallower at the other, which is intended for non-swimmers. The pool attendant's whistle is shrill. The springboard springs with a creak. Muted cries call out, you can't tell where they come from or where they're directed, in this vast, echoing hollow vessel you cannot pinpoint sound. High above is the glass cupola. Up there, that is where Rainer wants to be, looking down on the youngsters splashing each other, but where is he in fact? Down below. And alas, he is a poor swimmer.

But you have to conceal the fact that you're a poor swimmer, are afraid of water that's too deep, and therefore tend to stay in the shallow end. This doesn't suit the image of someone such as himself who is always going deep down into things. Here, he can't get deep

down. He is out of his element, though most elements are his. Anna and Rainer go through a lot of motions intended to show that they are good swimmers. But they're not. Splashing and spraying a good deal, they fling themselves into the one metre-deep water where you can stand, and try to make it look dangerous. The green over there, the sheer mystery of four vertical metres of water, fills them with a horror that could not be any greater if they were able to look right inside themselves. The cleanliness is enjoyable, heightened by the intense stench of chlorine, which declares: I kill off every single one of the bacilli and germs in here. Unfortunately I have to leave stray sperm and urine to the filter. Nor can I penetrate under the skin to kill off the hatred and nausea felt by these young people. The water slops about within the ceramic bounds intended for it and cannot quit its confines. Just as you cannot quit your own skin. Lots of people are giggling, laughing, shouting, squealing and doing sporty things. Some of them take weirdly contorted dives onto innocent swimmers, others dolphin about elegantly and skilfully. Anna and Rainer are not of the latter party. For them, being expected to perform something they can't do better than everyone else is awful. So they pretend. But all too frequently they have to make way, either down below when someone slips through, eel-like, or up above when someone threatens to leap onto their heads. Make way for the ones that can do it properly, is the plucky swimmers' motto, and they swim pluckily, so that the twins necessarily get left behind, because their territory is the world of the book, which is not in demand here and has neither a seat nor a vote, only trained athletes are wanted: to be precise—expert swimmers. Which is unfair, because these values are in fact worth least of all. Physique also has a value here. Above and below. More up above in the case of women and down below in the case of men. Both are developed as you might expect, given the ages of these youngsters,

that is to say: the twins are on the under-developed side. We are referring, of course, to Rainer's and Anna's primary and secondary sexual features, which are more in evidence here than beneath their everyday clothing. In both his case and hers they are on the stunted side. As if in a hurricane they cling to each other, brother

As if in a hurricane they cling to each other, brother and sister, and spit venom at a muscular show-off who has no idea who Sartre and Camus are or where they live (France).

At the opposite end, the deep end, Sophie, much to Rainer's displeasure, does the crawl in an immaculate white bikini which conceals a good deal but, alas, still displays a fair amount which belongs to Rainer alone. Sophie swims with style, her hair is concealed by a bathing cap, and she practises without over-zealousness because if you're that good you don't need to be overzealous. She is here on a purely private basis. Clearly she has completely forgotten Rainer's presence, in spite of the fact that that presence ought to be both a constant threat and a challenge, not to give of her sporting best but to work on their private relationship and improve it. Taut as a bow, her body slides out of and back into the cold green water, which is known as the watery element. If something tenses, people say it tenses like a bow, but Sophie tenses her body as only Sophie can and not any two-bit bow and arrow. A gleaming opened safety pin sticking into a plastic skin. Without leaving the slightest trace of a prick. Sophie merely pricks Rainer's heart and Anna's mind, because she is weightless, only her horse knows her true weight because it often has to bear it. But no one has ever heard Tertschi, the horse, groan beneath it either.

The cupola reverberates with the bellowing of a school class turning up for a swimming lesson. Rainer and Anna observe them secretly in order to learn something and then try it out when Sophie happens to be looking. But they are too cowardly and don't like getting their heads underwater because you are helpless there, it's

difficult to breathe, and you may easily lose out to a better swimmer. They'd rather look on from above. A youth, a fitter or lathe operator to judge by his build, dives between Anna's legs, and she squawks loudly and vanishes altogether with a splash. Cautiously her brother reaches down into the water to rescue her. Sophie trouts up with a hiss to help, but Anna has already recovered. Rainer trembles lest Sophie now notice that he is not a good swimmer, but Sophie doesn't need to notice anything of the kind, she is simply enjoying the feeling a body affords you when it is getting on with the private business of being a body and nothing else. Then she bounces under the shower because she is in a hurry. Rainer and Anna follow, cheesy white. Sophie is svelte and lithe beneath the jet of water. Rainer deposits himself at her side in order to expound his love. He says among other things that the abstract notion of happiness should be equated with the abstract notion of love, and he emphasises it once again, particularly strongly, because he has already asserted it repeatedly. Love is happiness, happiness without love is just inconceivable. The tremor of real happiness will (supposedly) only pass through your agitated heart if you become aware of it, if you realise that somebody belongs entirely to you, that he loves you with every fibre of his heart, that he'll be true to you, come what may, and then, that's right, then you can say: I'm happy. To claim as much if you get a good grade for a piece of schoolwork would be decidedly ridiculous. I don't understand a word you're saying, replies Sophie to these words from the heart, letting the water patter down everywhere to wash off the smell of chlorine. She twists like a serpent, twirling into the jet like a drill in a bikini. Only he who loves and is loved for his own sake can be happy, and what produces that happiness is not so much the sense of sexual communion as of two people being together, right, as he (Rainer) once had the honour of explaining to you (Sophie), the sexual act viewed as

a whole probably affords less happiness than a totally ordinary kiss or often indeed one simple word from the one you love. Witkowski Jr. keeps the thought of the sexual act at a considerable distance but he would quite like an ordinary kiss, only he doesn't dare ask for one. The thought of the sexual act has never occurred to Sophie. Beneath the jet of water, her face is as remote as if there were a motorway between them. With heavy weekend traffic on it. All one wants is one tiny kiss and one doesn't even get that. Not long ago, Rainer cut some pin-up photos of girls out of magazines, but he removed the breasts and bodies with scissors and only accorded what was left, the faces, a place of honour on the door of his wardrobe.

A huge patch of light slops across the tiled wall, some stupid cretin is playing with a pocket mirror. The narrow footbridges, stairways and galleries shake and sway under the wet feet of swimmers. The brightness is unmerciful. Anna sits on the floor, holding both hands to her because she doesn't have a bosom. She is speechless, which she has occasionally been at irregular intervals. Once at school, when she was fourteen, she suddenly stopped talking. Because she was a good pupil she was granted special permission back then to give examination answers in writing. Nowadays she is better again, but today's is a particularly bad bout and she can't say a single thing. So Rainer does enough talking for two, and says how much he wants to have Sophie, later, much later when both of them are at last mature enough. Not yet, because you have to have patience. Later, though. The moment you set yourself up beyond human nature and perhaps even try to force happiness and love, in what they call an open marriage, it's guaranteed not to come, Sophie. The latter steps out from under the shower, spraying water as if she had been born in that element and grown up in it (a feeling you have with her in every environment, regardless of where it is, on the earth or in the air). She

does not confront the problem but gives Rainer a brief slap on the shoulder and goes off to get dressed. Rainer follows her everywhere, hither and thither, thither and hither, which gets on her nerves, as if he couldn't simply go wherever he wanted of his own accord. She pats him once again, like an article of furniture or a puppy, get out of my way, it's my very own personal way which I've leased, go find your own way!

Rainer says that (as in *Faust*) work cannot make you happy, at best it will satisfy you. Work is a means a lover avails himself of, to take his mind off things and partially work off pent-up tensions. By way of explanation: I don't think I'm mistaken in saying that you have loved, or you do love now, or at least you will be capable of entering into the emotional life of a lover. Once you have done so, you will know, perceive, feel, sense that, for the moment of concentration, work can free you of the burden that oppresses and constricts your young heart. Whenever you are near to the loved one, you are overcome by a feeling of profound tranquillity, which then makes way for powerful agitation, so powerful that your hands turn white and begin to tremble slightly. That's exactly how things are with me. Rainer clings to the railing, which is there to prevent him from falling in, because he isn't a proficient swimmer. His knuckles are white yet again, as he quite rightly said just now. And thus you live in two states, two conditions, which are in constant alternation, and both of which are happiness. Water's state is fluid, Rainer's is semi-solid.

His sister crouches at his feet in a bad mood, saying nothing, asking no questions, but merely deciding in that deathly silence within her that she won't go swimming again in a hurry because water is not her element. Her element is musical sound, the waves of which pound and foam and ebb away, they may shower down but they never shower. She opens her mouth but nothing comes out, not a word, not a musical note. Silence.

The water does not welcome her, it repels her. The attendant blows his whistle shrilly because one lad has been too beastly, leaping right into a group of people and knocking them over, but the people simply laugh. An inconceivably smooth smoothness creeps out from under the twins' wet soles and slithers away like a snake. There is nothing those soles can get a grip on. And somebody must have sneakily taken away Art, which normally provides them with a support to grip hold of, and transported it to some unknown location.

Anna opens her mouth again. Nothing. Again. If the whole writing business starts again, she'll kill herself.

Rainer states that happiness and love, which are identical, are feelings (or rather, one single feeling) of the kind you cannot describe. Any account of the phenomenon is bound to be inadequate and can never do service for true feeling, dear Sophie. Anna wants to reply to this stuff about love but cannot manage to, though she could think of the answer.

Together with her brother she shuffles towards the lockers. Sophie is already slipping wirily out of one of the cabins, completely dressed, her hair done, how sweet is the way her damp curls cling to her temples, Rainer would like to stroke them tenderly but she would probably ruin the little gesture. How sweet Sophie looks! But she goes off right away, saying: See you tomorrow, I'm in a hurry today. We've got a lot to talk about tomorrow, I've been thinking over the attacks. These words darken the clear overall impression made by the Jörger Baths today; where there was glistening brightness there is now dull gloom because Sophie has gone, perhaps for ever, but probably just till tomorrow morning at school.

Rainer's and anna's rooms are separated by a thin DIY partition wall which lets everything from one side through to the other and back, teenagers simply don't have any privacy. You can't develop without the other one noticing and developing too. Today, for instance, Anna develops a physical appetite for Hans, and lo, in two shakes Rainer has his ear to the wall that keeps them apart, to pick up tips he can put to use with Sophie. Though no one's meant to realise that he still has anything to learn. Because, you see, in their teens youngsters invariably believe that no one can teach them anything. Naturally Sophie is somewhat different from his sister, Sophie is destined to become his loved one, who at a certain age takes the place of a brother's sister. It is to be hoped that the changeover will take place on time and the young man will cut his ties with the parental home without any harm being done.

Get undressed, I want to have you right now (Anna). Then I'll listen to the new record afterwards, okay (Hans). By now the act has been practised a number of times and goes more smoothly than it did at the outset. First some foreplay is performed and then you force an entry into Anna and rummage about inside as in a drawer of old socks when you're looking for the second of a pair. Don't pound away like a moron. Sensitive, sophisticated friction's what's called for. What I often can't say with my mouth because I'm totally speechless with rage, I express with my heart and my whole body (Anna, neurotically). Lips are silent, violins whisper: love me tender. And Hans whispers, hey, this is great, A1, and it'll be even better, just think how long we've been waiting for it, any moment you'll scream with desire and honk like a ship's siren.

Lying on his side, Rainer absent-mindedly studies himself in the blotchy mirror on the wall; today as so often he is practising having no expression and showing none. He practises keeping his face frozen and impassive so that people cannot detect any changes of mood outside, on the façade, and adapt their responses to those changes. His aunt often says that nothing satisfies him, not even his parents, who make such sacrifices, in fact he is satisfied with them least of all, although they are extremely pernickety with the kids, in front of strangers too. He only wants to listen to the very latest jazz records and is neither undemanding nor modest. Don't imagine he wears just any ordinary shoes! Not him! All he wears are winklepickers, which ruin your feet. And he won't wear the trousers from his old confirmation suit either, oh no, it has to be jeans. Since pocket money has to be saved (his parents might as well keep it themselves and have done with it), one has to go begging to Grandma or the aforementioned aunt for money to buy jeans, which means running errands, which robs one of one's personal dignity and practically forces one to assault and robbery, what alternative is there? Right now Rainer has no alternative either, he simply has to listen to Anna shouting more more more and yesyesyesthat'ssogood and to Hans burbling Jesus, Anni, you've got a great cunt and fanny. Which rhymes. Hans says you ought to be able to do this all the time and it's a pity that it's only possible at rare intervals. He'd be up to it any time, it's her parents that are the problem. Is that my sister, who I know like the back of my hand, uttering those noises? wonders her brother, and stares expressionlessly into his mirror, mirror on the wall.

Promptly he sits down at his desk and in spite of himself writes down a boast on a scrap of paper, a boast he is going to spread about the class tomorrow. To the effect that his parents flew to the Caribbean only recently, where they got a terrific tan

and met some interesting fellow-travellers. They went swimming the whole time and walking along a white beach beside a blue sea, they went surfing a lot too. On the outward and return journeys they travelled by aeroplane. I am telling you this in writing because it is a means of communication that is very much my own, I feel an urge to tell you things this way, even if they're meant to be secrets. Rainer has no friends, alas, only mates. Still, even mates can be told this story about the Caribbean.

Next door Anna gives a great howl, it sounds revolting, one's mind may be on the same wavelength as hers but one's body isn't, her inarticulate scream of desire sticks to one like pine resin, it goes: Ahhhhhh, now! Presumably he's squirting his juice into her at this very moment, that strapping Goliath. And she even accepts that crap he's dumping inside her, she will put to organic use what others waste and wash their hands of, secretly washing out the sullied sheet with cold water. One can never bring a schoolmate home because home both looks and is disgusting. One is ashamed of one's ancestral home. Now Rainer is writing yet another lie, a love poem to Sophie, which is a subtle process. The title is Love, and it continues in the same clueless way because one is confined within one's limits. Love, then. I see your face before me night and day. Carissima . . . that was how the letter began in which I confessed my love for you . . . Blushing, you heard me swear my love. Kisses . . . I kissed your red lips, candles were burning beside us, we gazed into the bright flames and the crystal glasses. Where are you supposed to get crystal here, the only glass in this place is in spectacles, there's nothing but battered old cups. As for Rainer, the facial expression is still under control.

In the adjoining room, which is no more than a closet, Hans is grunting gibberish, Hans who is no more than a jerk, a jerk of the first order. The

stupidity of it must really be getting too much for his sister, that is presumably why she is making no reply. His sister, who reads Bataille in the French original. Though at present the latter seems to have slipped her memory altogether. The wall of Rainer's den (a 'young person's room'), like most of the walls in this poor persons' flat, consists of unwieldy objects stacked high, because nothing is ever thrown away, all manner of junk which may be of some value after all or may become valuable some day in goodnessknowshowmany years. In his direct line of vision there is an old refrigerator, the door of which was removed by some heartless person years ago. Inside it are apples, a piggy bank, an old clock with only one hand, several pairs of glasses (no longer used), a flower pot, sundry cleansing agents, cutlery in a plastic tray, a razor, various toiletry articles in a brightly-coloured plastic bag, an ashtray, a purse with nothing in it, several tattered books, one or two maps for long walks, and a china bowl with a sewing kit. Inside Rainer's head the sea is roaring, and tanned feet, attached to slender legs, race into aforesaid sea, the feet belong to Sophie, and the second pair of feet, also tanned, which now enter the field of vision are Rainer's and likewise enter the salt water. All are equal before the Sea, rich and poor alike. The business of swimming can be taken for granted because in this daydream the watery element is as acceptable to Rainer as the dry element he normally inhabits.

Oooooh, cry Hans and Anna in unison, which is not a particularly intelligent comment on the situation, in Rainer's opinion. Doubtless Hans is now looking her in the face and noting that said face looks really wowed. In an old cardboard suitcase there is a bayonet, which is also old, dating from the First World War. It is a precious souvenir and the blade is 25 cm long. Which is plenty. It needn't be any longer. Rainer would like to be photographed by Anna holding this bayonet, for a lark. He would hold it the way you hold a rapier in fencing,

but it would look awkward, that's for sure, because he always looks a little silly if he doesn't happen to be talking about philosophical problems. At present the bayonet is peacefully resting in the container intended for it, the suitcase. Along with it are broken toys, a slide projector for showing holiday slides which were never taken because there were never any holidays either, and a pile of pieces of felt. In his interior world, Rainer has already detached himself completely from this family; in the outside world he will detach himself by assaulting and robbing innocent people.

Aaaaah, comes a noise from next door, for a change, a variation on the same theme, though it introduces nothing new. Rainer goes on practising keeping his face impassive despite his hatred and his hand relaxed despite extreme aggression and his mouth unstrained despite his greed and anger.

Eeeeeh, rollicks Anna, yet another orgasm, who knows however many that is now, amazing. Tonight will doubtless be another occasion for Rainer onanism, to ease the tension, but in spite of himself and in total darkness, which is where he normally leads his life anyway.

Rainer, like countless other teenagers of his generation, is an adolescent who never gets what he wants and always wants more than he can get, though perhaps he'll make it once he's a full-grown adult. His position is hopeless. That is how he himself sees it. Once, last year, he expressed the trust he placed in his gym teacher and showed him one or two of his own poems, by way of a shy approach to the confidential closeness that can prevail at times between two human beings. But plainly the gym teacher entertained the whole staffroom with these paltry and (granted) as yet none too skilful works, guffawing the while, because other teachers often teased the young creator by quoting single lines of poetry at random, out of context.

Next door Anna is screeching as if something were hurting her. But no doubt this is indicative of unendurable desire, which is why it sounds like pain in many ways. Hans promptly starts bawling too, to keep her company. Like two wolves howling. Bestial stuff. Not really what makes Man noble at all. I think they've finished now, there's nothing left in Hans so they'll stop now and at last turn the record over.

Impassively, Rainer gawps into the mirror, and Rainer gawps back out of the mirror equally impassively, only the other way round. Rainer is on the right side, that is to say, the side where he himself is. He is not there in anybody's place, nor does anyone want to be represented by him, not even his class, which elected someone else as class spokesman, though Witkowski campaigned furiously for the job. The reason they give is that he boasts and wants to appear better than he is and is forever saying things that are untrue. This isn't a very matey way to behave to the others, because you have to be truthful, even if it hurts, even if you might be beaten as a result. You could bear the blows with pride because you hadn't lied to escape them.

I wouldn't play with fire myself, I'd have far too many reservations, says Rainer. A lot happens in the mind, enriching a person, but nevertheless some things still have to be put into action.

In Father's pistol case, an iron case 7–8 cm deep, 30 cm long and 15 cm wide, lies the pistol. Underneath it are nude photos of Rainer's mother, including one or two close-ups of her genitals. Father always has the key with him, on his person. In a school essay on Paul Claudel's play *Le Soulier de Satin* Rainer puts forward the fundamental view that remorse affords no protection from punishment, and freedom can only be achieved through punishment.

Anna and Hans are just emerging, rather dishevelled, from Anna's room, pretending it was great. You could

hear it, loud, replies Rainer. His sister snuggles up to her brother with her whole body, as if she had an incestuous act in mind. But no, she hasn't, because she has just been satisfied. Hans talks about some kind of sport. Compared with this, his carry-on back then was pleasant.

The dirty dishes are stacked high in the kitchen sink, the bottom of the sink is caked in a furry, mouldy, greenish felt that was once bacon and eggs. The young adolescent often gets in his own way and unfortunately there is no way of avoiding himself. There is a lot of dust on the furniture, dust which Mother ought to have removed. But she is out. Really, one can't invite anyone here. Often the adolescent obstructs himself more than his parents do, and is in his turn considerably impeded by the conditions of his life. For instance, the two of them could fetch a duster now and clear things up.

We have to go over the plans for our crimes in detail, Rainer reminds them. Come off it, not now, not after that intense experience, breathes Hans, heavily, like an athlete, and he makes an eloquent face. You ought to screw too, you wouldn't have those thoughts any more. Though Anna may possibly be pregnant, it is Rainer who throws up, a biological curiosity of the first order. Dad and Mum will be home any moment and will find an unwanted friend in the house.

Sure enough, here comes Mum and here lollops Dad. Won't you give me a kiss, eh, a kiss for your Dad, he demands of his own darling son. The latter flushes and says no, you know why not. Well, why not? Because Auntie said not long ago that only homosexuals kiss people of the same sex. Where does the boy get things like that, when we were young we had no idea about things like that! He gets if from your sister, you heard what he said.

And the ceiling complete with the light attachment – two of its little glass cups (where the candle-shaped electric bulbs are mounted) are already broken – folds down upon Rainer and his needs. But it's not as if this put an end to the needs. They are merely locked up in a prison with no means of escape.

 \mathbf{K} OCHGASSE HAS BEEN taking Hans in for several years now, to make him forget his childhood in the country altogether. All that's left are long lines of men in working overalls, washed-out trousers or smocks, and nothing about them reminds you of green meadows and a little stream. The city has no mercy, it takes a great effort to stand out so that others notice and acknowledge you, sport helps you achieve this, you fight for your team and you may even win! The muddy paths rutted with tractor tracks, the rural animals and people, have retired to the places they belong. Kochgasse conveys an urban atmosphere, today it takes him in once again and sucks him into the correct hallway, which is functionally furnished so that workers will feel at home there and not come across anything unnecessary which might be a pleasure to behold and would perhaps encourage them to want inessentials in their own lives.

No adornment, no gables or oriels, no turrets, no stucco reliefs, those are all for the irremediably dead bourgeois. Who doesn't really exist. A down-to-earth image to match the down-to-earth strength of Reconstruction. Which the workers who live here have been busy at for a long time. The Poetry of Life can be supplied by doilies, family photographs, pictures of deer, and the new furniture, from which may sometimes come the unwonted sounds of a new era, always supposing the furniture in question is one of the popular new radiograms. Bought on credit. Every inmate is allowed to create his own Poetry, the architect left space clear on the walls and ceilings for this purpose, for pictures and statues. Whether aforesaid Poetry is up top, round the sides or down below is just a question of the degree of maturity of the people in question.

Hans enters and instantly hits on naked simplicity.

It has no character whatsoever. Only Mother's work impresses a stamp on it, heaps of envelopes are lying around ruining the impression. Hans is now familiar with rooms unblemished by use, where islands of furniture drift by from the depths like floating packice. Sophie has a room of that kind and he has often spent time in it, always keeping Sophie from something urgent that she was just intending to do. But she is glad to have him there and give him pleasure because there is something between them and that something is maturing by the hour. It is not only her environment that makes Sophie different from the other girls he knows, however. She is so special. He'd know her among thousands. Even in working overalls it would have been love at first sight, as they say in hit songs.

What Hans means by this is: if she had been wearing

What Hans means by this is: if she had been wearing overalls too and not just him. In the flat, Hans finds two mates from the Workers Youth Group, which he is also a member of (whether he wants to be or not), waiting for him. They have posters with them and a bucket of paste which they are stirring. This leaves Hans essentially unstirred. Recently he has taken to changing at work before heading for home. He won't wear anything in the street but trousers and a pullover. At one time he would cycle home wearing his work clothes, but nowadays his muscles are clad in the clothing Sophie has given him. The things have stretched somewhat and are visibly creased in the critical areas, although Hans looks after them very well and is forever shooing his mother off to the ironing board. They lose a little more of their shape every time and adapt to Hans's. Their original owner is now studying in Oxford and will no doubt have bought himself some new things. Where muscles come from and where they go are two quite different things.

and where they go are two quite different things.

Hans's muscles go into electrical current and are absorbed by it wholly, they are transformed into pure energy. Hans often chews a square, snow-white lozenge of dextrose to replace the energy he has used up.

Recently he has practically been living on these lozenges, they are so pure and so regular in shape, like Sophie, and sportsmen advertise them. They are called Dextro Energen. Skiers and tennis-players alike know the uses of Dextro Energen and avail themselves of it.

the uses of Dextro Energen and avail themselves of it.

Hans goes instantly to his closet to take off his good clothes and put them away tidily. Wearing his everyday clothes, even though he will very probably be going out again (wearing his cashmere) in just half an hour, he enters the living room, where his fellow-workers are skulking. These last few weeks, the new company he's been keeping has given him greater assurance in his dealings with people of every race, class and nationality than back when all he knew was his own race and class. These young fellow-workers represent a step back to his former life because they are of his own class and in that class they will remain, you can tell right away, they are incapable of getting anywhere. Mother has made them coffee to warm them up and every one of them has a thickly-spread slice of bread too. Her son gets a slice as well. The youngsters with the bucket have their enthusiasm and their socialism, and Hans has his ambition, which is so strong that you can even swim against the current, you can even fight against heavy electrical current, which is an invisible enemy, Hans will take on anyone who represents an obstacle to his future. Hans puts on a new record so he doesn't have to listen to the old tune about the Communist Party, which is scratched and sounds awful, and furthermore the two of them always say the same thing although they are different people, they have no lives of their own, no individuality. They do not realise that Hans has already quit the long chain of hands passing the bucket of water forwards in the direction of the house that's on fire (which you cannot see, but it must be there because otherwise there wouldn't be a bucket). He has got out and has simply gone away, and the last in line needs a little more energy to bridge the vacant space,

but that's all. They declare that the time to join forces with the right people has already been upon them for some time.

One day, once he is mature enough, Hans proposes to join forces with Sophie, in matrimony.

Hans's hands are worn with labour. He has been working since he was fourteen. There is a paste of grime and sweat under his fingernails. The grime and sweat unite to form one substance and so do the body and the mind, a two-in-one unison Hans has been wanting to get to know ever since he got to know Sophie. On Sophie's nails there is not even varnish, they have no need of it, they have nothing to hide nor do they hide it

Mother knows the parents of these two from a bus trip they took together and wants Hans to get to know them too because they have the kind of sense her son lacks. You have to join a group, one individual cannot achieve anything on his own, only when you're united do you become stronger. Hans says he has already found a group of that kind and is respected there on account of his special abilities, which nobody else respects him for. No one can take his place in the group, he's unique.

I'm irreplaceable at basketball, both as a thrower and as a catcher, but anyone can do my work exactly as I do it, and it's the same in Life. That is just one example of how things are in every branch of Life. Work is an evil and people keep telling me that it is a necessary evil but I could manage without work and Life would be better. All I need is Sophie. If she loves me, I can even do without work.

Having said this, he is all contempt for the wretched extra-thickly-spread margarine slice, margarine again, no wurst, yuck and he hurls at his fellow-workers the proposition that it is the individualist who must achieve his liberation and not the group because a group is unfeeling and anonymous and you disappear in it, never to emerge, unless you

are its leader or the group is made to measure, like his own group, which he helped sew together.

All this time, his slice of bread goes uneaten. I give you enough of my money to buy decent butter or wurst. It's high time to become an individual. That is the newstyle worker, the modern worker. Though I won't be a worker for much longer. The old-style worker remains a worker for ever. The individual worker requires a lot of space, light, air and sun, where flowers, grasses and trees flourish. Which the aforesaid worker comes to appreciate again, at long last. He neglected all those things during the political struggle. Sport is also writ large by Modern Man.

Mother now makes the cardinal error (one she makes whenever she flies into a rage and can no longer control herself in her behaviour towards her son) of talking about the concentration camp. About the child who was eating an apple and was smashed against the wall till it was dead, whereupon the mother went on eating the apple. About children whose torture consisted in being thrown from the second floor. About the mother who was sent to the gas chamber along with her two-day-old child because she had begged the doctor to be allowed to give birth to the child. The doctor gave his permission. A great many friends of your father's and mine, of both sexes, were beheaded at the district court, too. I think of them constantly.

Hans exaggerates a yawn. He's heard it all, frequently, and his opinion is that times have changed and people too. People have other things to worry about now. Particularly young people, to whom the future belongs, which after all they are helping to fashion.

His two mates with slush in their heads are stirring the contents of the bucket, ill at ease, so that the paste will stay gummy and not go hard. For which the paste has to have warmth, which is not available outside but in the cosiness of a kitchen range, which is where it is right now. They do not know which side to approach this

Hans from, he makes such a self-confident impression, plainly the others have already appropriated him and harnessed him to their own purposes. Outside a cold wind is lashing cold rain along the streets, the trees are bending over into wet loops. This is the violence of Nature. Countless invisible hands, from the workers' movement, are reaching out to the two young lads with the bucket of paste, pushing them forward to put their arguments to Hans. And some of them are in fact issuing from their mouths now. But he does not pay any attention to them. He only listens to the voice within himself that says you have to go to the roots of existence in order to understand yourself, and only then can you understand others. If you imagine you can do anything for others without first having grasped your own natures, you're deluding yourself. That's absolutely essential. Sometimes you may do things that even appear nonsensical at first glance, but they're not, because they're terrifically important for you. My new friend's name is Rainer and he's in better shape than this dump. Which isn't true, objectively speaking. The Witkowski's flat is in an extremely shabby state. But this bedazzled young man does not see that. Who is this Rainer, asks Mother. Which she has already asked once before. But she's forgotten. His father was in the SS, replies Hans, now he's a pensioner and a porter. His kids go to grammar school with Sophie and I'm going to go to technical college some day. You wanted to be a gym teacher the other day. Not any more, I definitely want to make a bigger success of things.

The paste-bucket bearers are silent. They have to be going now anyway. Outside the downpour is easing off but it is still shaking the panes to the foundations. No doubt a similar downpour is lashing Sophie's window and making the birch trees in the garden tremble, it may as well bear a message of love to her while it's about it. Without a shadow of a doubt, Sophie will be sitting in the lamplight doing her homework, how Hans would

like to be doing that too, but he doesn't have a school to go to, nor any work worthy of the name.

So aren't you coming then, say the two poster-pasters, and they get up. Why not go along too, suggests Mother. In that pissy weather, no thank you, but even if the weather was fine I wouldn't go because that would be just right for tennis.

You always enjoyed your work. Your work is what's really made you a member of the working class, one of the unbroken line of human beings stretching out before and behind you, the people who will forge the new era (Mother).

You must be joking. Enjoyed it? Manual labour is a primitive stage of employment which will come to an end altogether one day, says Rainer. He, Anna and Sophie say that human culture did not even start to develop till people learnt to distinguish between manual work and methods of doing the same work with tools and other aids. Without the work the mind does, there would never have been any culture. Which is the most important thing of all.

Mother says she must be going crazy, and the two pasters say that they must too. We don't think we'll get through to him just now, Frau Sepp. Goodbye, then. We're going to leave this mate of ours, they've got to him, maybe he'll see the light but on the whole we rather doubt it. We're seeing more and more cases like his these days.

Mother says: Please stop by again when you can stay longer. We'll convince him, you'll see. But you have to be going now.

The gusts of wind outside take their cue, open their arms wide, and swallow up the two youths plus their bucket. Let's hope they don't swallow the posters too. The posters are paper and that means they are defenceless against the wet. They are protected by makeshift plastic sheeting. Anyway, the storm has abated, the walls of houses stand out wetly, the asphalt

is gleaming again the way that wet asphalt gleamed in the film. After all, it was this asphalt's fellow-asphalt that played the part in the film.

Mother says: If your dead father knew, your father who sacrificed himself for the cause.

He didn't sacrifice himself, they killed him. If they hadn't he'd be alive today. Where did it get him. I'm sure I won't be sacrificing myself. If I read Rainer's books about pain it's more real than if I think about my father's pain in the deathcamp at Mauthausen.

Are you going out later, Hans?

In this lousy weather? Right now it's impossible to see fifteen feet ahead on horseback, which is where all earthly happiness is, and out in the country the evening mists are drawing in, reducing visibility further. On horseback the open country is different from when I visit Auntie Mali on the farm. Later on I may go to a jazz club.

When I look at you I feel as if I may have lived my life in vain and your father may have died in vain. But when I look at the two comrades who were here just now I know there was a meaning in it after all, a meaning my own son can't afford me.

Death's good for nothing anyway, it costs nothing, nothing but your life, giggles Hans wittily.

He is uninterested in strangers on principle, because he is only interested in himself and Sophie.

Go on, eat me, there may be worse times ahead, admonishes the spurned slice of bread and margarine. But Hans believes in a better future and does not eat it.

T WAS NOT so very long ago that Rainer strayed and quit his predestined path as one of God's children. In the past the Catholic faith served him for many things which he now hopes to recover by violent means. Recently his sister Anna has been tending with ever greater frequency to be a mute in the midst of this jettisoned detritus. Still, at times it all bursts forth out of her and washes away almost everything that gets in her way. Today they are both lying on Anna's bed, holding each other tightly in their arms; they have diverted the wind of Reality to the dining-kitchen (done up in a farmhouse style) and in here they let the wind of the Past blow. Rainer is possibly going to break a taboo in here, the taboo on incest, to see if anything comes of it. But in the event he doesn't break it after all. So other dams have to break. The adolescent knocks them down himself because this degenerate home's door will stay shut if ever freer morals come knocking. Say the worthy progenitors.

Along with other misdeeds, Rainer used to be an altar boy at church. Nowadays this is a source of abhorrence that memory cannot cope with. Papa used to say: Off you go to mass. And off he went. Father's blows hurt worse than the cold tiles under his raw knees. That icy winter cold at 6 a.m. and the priest's slaps, though at least he didn't use aids such as coat-hangers or crutches, whack, yet another clip round the ear because Rainer got his Latin muddled and answered back cheekily a time or two, though no one had asked him anything, he'd been given an order. And then wearing these white lace-trimmed vestments with black collars that drag and make you look like a girl. And then the pictures, mostly of God and the Virgin Mary, in sundry styles and materials. The majority are rounded in shape because they were made in the Baroque era. And

the giggling groups of youngsters, the Flock of Catholic Youth, bleating, shoving into the Catholic Youth hostel to play table tennis, serious songs issuing from the student throats of the older ones, and that pride when a child becomes a member of the Flock of Catholic Youth. Of late they have been able to watch TV, and do so, all the time. The Church always has the latest gadgets, and uses them against its members, too. Golden banners and flags with portraits of the Blessed Virgin, girls in navy blue pleated skirts: it all happens in the unloved Piarist Church. At choir they often say that God summons young folk, and lo, there they are, the moment they're summoned. Because young folk are proud of their Christianity. Which takes courage in a world grown thoughtless and heathen. Rainer is also a constituent part of Youth. Unfortunately he is the poorest component, and shows his wear and tear particularly clearly. He goes forth unto God, but he does so reluctantly, albeit he of all people has been summoned the most, because God knows his weakness and his reluctance, that is why he summons him especially loudly: Rainer! Rainer! He'll be throwing up on the tiles any moment. If he went to the high-class Piarist Grammar School, God would doubtless be well pleased with him, but his parents can't afford the fees. His rich fellow altar boys are never clipped round the ear. Naturally this fact struck the enlightened Rainer immediately. He always notices things like that rather than immersing himself all the more profoundly in prayer and ignoring the outside world. The Church takes whatever it can get and keeps hold of it. The Church never passes it on to where it's needed. Rainer needs love, not blows. God supposedly loves him, but the fact has never struck him, he's only been struck by the priest.

Nonetheless, Father kicks him into the sacristy every Sunday, with his one remaining foot, to get dressed up and show off his talents to his auntie and grandma in the choir of bright and cheery youngsters. God especially

loves the choir because it sounds so hale and fresh. Rainer's auntie and grandma are diligent churchgoers, and in May and in Lent they do extra shifts and now and then fork out funds in recognition of his pious duties at the altar, so that he can buy himself a pair of those fashionable shoes with the sharp points or a pullover some time. These funds, alas, are the whole point of the exercise as far as this superficial lad is concerned, but he will learn to search within himself. Right inside. And then the scratching and scraping of feet in outsize interiors that are just about suitable to the greatness of the Lord God, you can't see Him, true, but then He needs an awful lot of room. Boys on the left, the young servants of the Lord. On the right the girls, the young handmaids of the Lord. The dean's words go smack down the middle, to the effect that Our Lord has suffered the little children to come unto Him, even though they probably had something better planned at the time. The altar boys sit resting during the sermon, most of them thinking of some kind of mischief, filth, or school affairs of no consequence, which does not bother God since He is even acquainted with the concerns of infants and His ear is ever open to hear them. But Rainer thinks of God, in person, in order to confide his worries to Him. For a short while, God is even his last hope because nothing whatsoever is working out any more and Jesus (of course) will fix it, but before that can happen you not only have to pray, you also have to make sacrifices, and Rainer prefers not to invest. It's too uncertain. Anyway, why does the fellow have to be up there and not down here, down where your prick is, which, if Jesus is to be believed, you mustn't rub or squeeze, not your own and (of course) not anybody else's either.

Only one image involving a certain harmony has remained in Rainer's memory, where it has stuck for a long time. One big Catholic Youth girl had looked out a certain passage in the prayer book for a smaller girl, and,

having done so, stroked the little girl's head, over and over, which made Rainer quite calm inside. For years and years he would think of the scene in the bathtub (an improvised tub in the kitchen) while Mummy, even when he was a big boy, soaped his body to make him clean all over, one of God's Children within and plainly identifiable without, too, as a Child of God. Nonetheless he was always embarrassed, although a Child of God is pure in every respect. I'm your mother, I brought you into this world, and you don't need to hide from your Papa, he's got the same as you, in the same place too. Which prompts a muffled howl deep in Rainer's throat, the way a wolf howls.

Mistakenly he longs for harmony and peaceableness, indeed for beauty, which he often unlawfully tells his schoolmates about. So that they will understand him, he describes that harmony in terms of expensive cars, air travel, parents who kiss and crystal that glitters, all of which can be viewed in his home. Though things like that cannot be purchased. They are either within a human being or they aren't. But his schoolmates don't believe what he says.

Come on, love, you have to be quite clean, Anni doesn't kick up a fuss if her own mother does it, it's just as if you did it yourself. But go right ahead and be embarrassed if you insist. Being embarrassed is healthy enough, at any rate.

We are all the same, that is to say: human beings made of flesh and blood. But not you, Mama, you're incorporeal like the Lord God and only Papa degrades you physically, and that's why I say that that body does not exist, that's why I cut away everything below the chin before I pin up photos of pretty girls on my wardrobe. Because flesh rapidly starts to stink once the meat's been killed and left in the fresh air. This boy! Now dry yourself off properly, you can do that yourself, can't you.

The organ thunders, and Rainer dries

himself off, you're not supposed to look down at yourself while you do so, your gaze should be straight ahead, everything you do is done in honour of a Higher Being. When you're bigger a lot of things will be different, some things will finally take it easy and lie down.

Anna tries to express most things by way of music. Today she has already gone through Schumann and Brahms on the keyboard, tomorrow it may be Chopin and Beethoven. What her mouth cannot say, music says, including things that come from the Lord God, as many composers (Bruckner) have claimed. Rainer reads some old diary entries out to her, to the effect that great things can only be accomplished as a result of long-term, precise planning and preparation. Back then the statement struck him as being universally valid. That's what it says here. It goes on: 1. What am I planning, what is my great aim? and 2. What might be conducive to the realisation of that aim?

At that time, Rainer still wanted to study some science subject (chemistry) at the Institute of Technology, now all he wants is to get hold of other people's wallets and then some day hold a position as a teacher of German literature, writing poems on the side. The paramount principle (it says here) should be that natural science will never be an end in itself, will not remain the sole concern of his thought and actions, but will have its place in a larger, more comprehensive structure. He wants (as the diary says) to have higher standards, above and beyond human thought, but at all events they have to be standards. May the Christian faith be the foundation of my life to the very end. I see my task as a scientist as follows: to introduce Christian thought into the area chemistry gives me access to and achieve a synthesis of the two fields (at least in part, as he has added in all honesty) – to the greater glory of God. Listen to this, Anna! It's incredible, incredible. One result of this endeavour would necessarily be to use chemistry for the good of mankind, to make existence fit for human

beings. In this I see a way of practising Christian love of my neighbour, in my whole life, by employing all my talents, powers and abilities. May God in His Grace allow me to realise this ambition.

Whaddyathinkofthatanni? The basic essentials are: 1. Thorough knowledge of chemistry, maths, physics and Christian thought, and 2. Thorough knowledge of German, English, Russian, French. In this, may I at all times succeed (guffawhawhawhaw!) in remaining modest and humble-though not in such a way (oh no, not on your life!) that I go crawling to the kind of people who might cause me problems at some point or from whom I can profit although their actions ultimately run counter to my ideals. Furthermore, I must have 1. Self-discipline hahahahahascreechhahaha! The siblings rollick in a heap, drooling with laughter. This last needs to be a process that emerges from constant engagement with the world about me canyoubelievelwrotethis? No, says Anna. Well, not bad, a whole word, to be exact: no, a new record! A minute later she is able to talk away again like a parrot. But no one knows of the traces left within Anna.

From countless portraits and ceiling frescoes, the Lord God looks down on His children, who have turned out so wretchedly, and is astonished that He could have created something like that and then taught them this fact in religious instruction classes. Belief still causes Rainer problems in his honest moments, he cannot yet rule out the possibility that such a God does exist, even if he and Camus have substituted Nothingness. He hasn't disappeared yet, and numerous priests are even personally acquainted with His family.

Come and get it, children. And in a moment they are sitting down to their ever-popular dinner. As always, Rainer addresses Mother when he wants to tell Father something. Tell him I'll knock his crutches away and send him sprawling on the cold stone floor. I want to write a poem but there's no foundation

here for it to stand on. Yes there is, you have the choice of a cosy farmhouse floor or a stone floor, says Anna, which is quite a speech for her. Father promptly yells like a raging bull and says he'll break his back for him if he talks so disrespectfully. Then his son will have a fractured spine and will be creeping about the floor like a worm whereas he will at least still be able to hop or hobble. Father also says he can take him away from that grammar school any time because he is the breadwinner in the family. Mother offers round mash and stewed apple and says that in that case Dad would have to admit to people that he'd sent his son to be an ordinary apprentice instead of to grammar school, wouldn't you, Otti, eh?! I'll beat you black and blue as well, Gretl, see if I don't, because at that age I was one of the illegals, doing my duty. And nowadays I still do my duty, at a desk where there are a lot of keys to rooms that I have access to at all times.

Rainer bares his teeth like a rabid dog. The Saviour up on His machine-made parlour crucifix looks worried. The pressure of His crowns of thorns is considerable, because the barometer says a storm is on the way, and in the parlour the black stormclouds are gathering too. Our crimes will be crimes of violence, Anni, don't you agree? Not committed when we're worked-up, though, to get rid of aggression. No, you have to avoid getting worked up: you have to do it in cold blood. You're quite right (Anna), because otherwise the crime itself would be of secondary significance, whereas in fact it must be the main thing.

In the big farmhouse chest, which you could fit an entire butchered pig carcass into, there are a lot of broken toys left over from childhood days. Like everything in the flat, these toys have survived into the desolate era of leaden adolescence, to no one's particular delight. Rainer's old diary also says that the task (whatever it might be) is a big one, but oughtn't that very fact be the incentive to tackle the problem and thus

ultimately gain in strength? This calls for self-discipline, respect, tolerance, and the ability to do without things. Nowadays Rainer tells anyone who will listen, and everyone else too, that at home he never had to do without anything because his family has everything there is to possess. Which is a lie. But here it says that doing without will make him richer (it's unbelievable!), he will scale the mental heights, where (as it quite clearly says in here) a bracing wind, fresh and cleansing, blows. Yuck. Everything that's been cleansed is, in his opinion, nothing more than a fine ice-cold stream of air. The image on the picture postcard of Ourladyoflourdes is curled up at the feet of the Redeemer, which is where it belongs and not, say, at the head, the draught is to blame. There are waves in the holy water in the heartshaped container too, it's slopping about. The rosary, also from Lourdes, the gift of a neighbour, sways gently to and fro in the fresh breeze of Youth. This fresh breeze is coming off a life that has just got off to a fine start and will hopefully not be cut short prematurely.

Mother finds consolation and help in religion, in her difficult situation as breeder and household manager. Papa tolerates this without comment, even though the Lord is a man too, as the word implies. He'd better not get too close to Mother, hadn't the Lord. She's the one who is forever chasing after Him.

Rainer never thinks of those filthy photos which apparently exist, though according to his sources they are photos strange men took of his mother. The fact vanished from Rainer's head as fast as it had entered it. Supposedly there are close-up shots of genitals too. What you don't see doesn't exist.

The stewed apple is eaten up by Papa almost singlehanded, though it's the children who are still growing and Papa has finished growing, indeed he has already been maimed. Mummy doesn't get any at all. After all, she was the one who made it.

Outside, some stupid clouds or other are massing

and will spill all any minute. Right into an everyday evening.

The twins leave the farmhouse parlour with their arms tightly round each other and enter the world of the music that sounds forth from the record player, the artist is the very opposite of the farmer who has a parlour like that at home. Anna enters the realm of silence and Rainer that of manic talkativeness, which is his way of trying to get hold of the world. The Poet is a King in his realm. His is the Empire of the Imagination, in which there are unlimited mansions.

THE CAFE IS a typical grammar school kids' café. So a large number of grammar school kids are there. They are discussing religious or philosophical topics. Schoolgirls go to mass with jazz music, throw their first parties, and after a lovely concert of church music bestow their first kiss. A grammar school boy seated at a marble-topped table tells the person sitting opposite him that the time may be right for their friendship, their first fleeting acquaintance, to become something else - the grammar school girl still describes the two of them as chums, which strikes the grammar school boy as reticence of an incomprehensible order. Somehow he senses that that is exactly what might endow their relationship with a quality of permanence, though, and he says it out loud. At that party last Thursday he was aware of it, too, the schoolboy says in low, soft tones. And so the pleasure he takes in symbols that can express with such marvellous directness what words can never say is all the greater.

Hans listens to this foreign-language dialogue and scans the pastel-coloured ice creams, squeezed-out teabags and pots of hot chocolate. But he promptly withdraws his gaze in alarm on realising that no one wants it

Presently the schoolboy says to the schoolgirl: Not even the canniest of historians will ever find out who it was that kissed whom on that 27.3.

Hans wonders: What does 'canniest' mean, and what's this 'whom' anyway, and what is a historian?

The schoolgirl says that she is looking forward to the holidays and that the great day of her first ball must have been under a lucky star because it was such an exciting evening, I have good memories of it from the start to the very last moment. We were dancing and everything seemed so sparkling and beautiful. The

two young pupils confuse the various past tenses; and though they constantly have to make use of them, they still remain as new in their mouths.

Hans also hears that the fellow at the next table, who doubtless has no idea what a real man has to be capable of, went skiing in the Ötztal Alps. His thoughts were with the schoolgirl beside him a great deal, as they always are when he is in the mountains. The connection may not be apparent at first glance: the thing is that whenever I see lofty mountains I have profound thoughts, and aren't friendship and love – and fidelity – profound human experiences? demands the schoolboy, and the schoolgirl answers that she too went skiing, but somewhere else. And once again all that passed between them was written words. And a telegram that never reached you: Happy Easter and baci mille. Brigitte.

Hans wants to order a beer and another one later and yet another, but Sophie has already ordered a coffee and a cognac for him. Sophie's soft silence nestless into her dark pleated skirt and dark pullover. Hans is silent too, in her brother's expensive gear. All around him Innocence is talking, sons and daughters are talking away as if they were being paid to do so, about things and doings and goings-on that are as innocent as they themselves. Hans is neither a son nor a daughter because he is the son of a nobody.

Prater Park dappled with sunshine in the first light of day, the wet grass, the wet leaves, the thrill of getting up really early for once, the horse's neck nodding, a fine spray of powder snow, the swish of steel runners in glacial snow, shrieks of merriment when someone takes a tumble, and then a jolly evening in the log cabin, with punch or glühwein, ditties to guitar and accordion accompaniments, and then that notorious step outside the door of the cabin, gazing into the starry winter heavens, the first kiss, and someone to catch a star.

Hans wants to try a huge gâteau with buttercream like that some time, but Sophie imposes her veto. He is not allowed to booze and then sing hollodero or spit at people either.

Thrilling car trips with elder siblings acting as chauffeur, Father gave them a little car as a present when they passed their school-leaving exams and later he'll give you one too. Evenings of music played *en famille* in a wood-panelled room, Father playing cello, Mother (who is a doctor) playing piano, the siblings playing flute or violin, loved silly by their parents. New Year's Eve at the Semmering house, the youngsters laughing and giggling and kissing as the provisions the merry party need are lugged up to the house, which has about as much in common with work as a carwash has with a blast furnace, how dearly, how very dearly Hans would like to carry loads far heavier still, so heavy that everyone would marvel at him. The itch to travel. To head off to the romantic old monastery and take part in spiritual exercises at Whitsuntide, to find what you have lost, and subsequently say it is impossible to describe that Whitsun atmosphere. They often say it is impossible to convey an atmosphere in words but they use an incredible lot of words to say so, words you wouldn't think anybody had ever heard of, but they are familiar with every one of them. Whitsuntide, says the youth, who is already a student, Pentecost, it suggests strength, the Holy Spirit – or is there perhaps something else to it?

Hans pricks up his ears and lays them back because there is undoubtedly something else to it. Love of a young girl, for instance? Judging by the sheer

Love of a young girl, for instance? Judging by the sheer radiant power of the experience, it cannot be anything else! After breakfast there are discussions of fidelity and such matters, and then they join forces to cook up something for lunch, followed by another discussion, of duty and affection. Some masses are beautiful and profound yet low-key too, which really gets to you.

Now Hans is permitted an ice cream after all, and he splats about excitedly with his spoon in the unfamiliar pinkgreenandbrown slush, piggy that he is. Aren't I a mucky pup, demands Hans, and Sophie smiles. And now I'd really like a piece of chocolate cake. You'll be sick (Sophie). Nobody has ever seen Sophie eat, but she must do so because she still carries herself upright and walks about and uses up calories.

Birthday parties where everyone loves everyone else and minor quarrels only serve to make that love even deeper, rather than eating it away like nitric acid. A cool church, words spoken freely but not too freely, the sounds of guitars playing, the togetherness of a group of people that are as one, afterwards we have to take our leave of Father Clemens. Alas! Slide shows that are both interesting and fun. Walks on clear starry evenings, on your own land or on land adjoining your own. Something that represents a new beginning, a new bud set to blossom. Eternity is silence and sounds are transience, gets written into the appropriate diary. Sunshine and parents who get on well, visits to castles, farewells, sadness (though with a twinkle of merriment in one eye because it is perfectly likely that we'll meet again), siblings who help you cope by playing amusing parlour games, siblings who squabble and laugh as they do so, the piano, Debussy, Impressionist paintings, a lake, sheep, the miller in the forest, golden clouds, rambles with a rucksack on your back. Minor rendezvous and major plans, the chapel of the Hofburg, jazz clubs, lemonade, swimming baths, leaving the slopes, not enough snow, alas, skiing injuries that heal, jokes that make you forget you're confined to a sickbed. The feelings you have, birthday surprises, evenings spent listening to Fischer-Dieskau singing *lieder*. Being confined to your bed, a passing fever, visiting art galleries, 'satisfactory' for your Latin homework (a grade that calls for a celebration). Visiting Grandma. Rain, a dark sky, street lamps, the back seat of the car,

wurst rolls, skin creased by laughter, photos, a silk headscarf, integral calculus, translating Cicero, debating whether it is right to cause other people unhappiness for the sake of truth. What is truth, what is dishonesty, and what is hypocrisy? Listening to records, discussions by candlelight. Beautiful dresses, your first evening gown, which you promptly wear to the Burgtheater, which you enjoy immensely. Don Giovanni at the opera house, which you enjoy immensely. The boy you only knew as a tennis partner with a powerful service suddenly slips off your coat at the cloakroom, it is as if he had been transformed, and later he kisses you in the park. In doing so he has crossed the borderline dividing childhood from adulthood. A serious matter, which the family celebrates. A point when everything seems empty, faces are revealed as masks with nothing behind them, you are on the brink of a deep abyss, you cannot see any way out (etc.) and you are suffering. There are a lot of expressions that describe this state precisely. As you find out when the problem is discussed among a small circle of friends. The problem ends in mutual understanding and thus automatically ceases to exist. Love. Only ignorant people grow angry, the Wise Man understands, or some other maxim to the effect that Man is the dearest object of God's love. Something or other is sealed with a long kiss and ends in peace. Holding conversations in French and English.

Hans gnaws at his lower lip with his upper teeth. There will be a hole there shortly, though that is still better than having an Abyss of Principle yawning before you. He and Sophie understand each other on principle, though. Sophie is sucking lemonade through a straw. This morning her mother threw another screaming fit before driving off to her bank to do something or other. As always, Hans is flexing his muscles, quite openly, he slides to and fro on his chair as if he'd shat himself, he gives Sophie a confiding wink and in his turn describes a terrific booze-up where one or two friends of his were

hilariously abusive and went on a rampage, a few things were smashed up in the process. He is talking too loud and everyone can hear him, nobody understands him, but they tolerate what they do not understand, and if the tolerance is lacking it is through discussion.

Even if occasionally one has to part from the other here, there is still a sparkle in his eye on account of

Even if occasionally one has to part from the other here, there is still a sparkle in his eye on account of the reunion that is doubtless soon to follow, adieu, a grey VW beetle crawls round the bend and is gone, but a great deal remains behind: friendship, and a human quality. To the accompaniment of good-humoured jokes cracked by her family, who are just eating lunch, a girl suddenly leaps to her feet as if a tarantula had bitten her and welcomes her boyfriend, whom she has been awaiting for so long and who is now returning from a climbing trip. Afterwards the whole family does something together. This sense of sharing, which pervades the place like a thick fog, leaves Hans enraged. He pulps the last fragments of ice cream in the metal dish with his spoon, taking out his anger on innocent foodstuffs.

Accounts of hikes across glaciers, farewell to the family. Dearest sister Christine, who is in on the joke. Off to the post office, a one-and-a-half-hour walk, peaceful hours in Uncle Sepp's Olde Bar. A young lad climbing down the mountain to her after first climbing up it. An altogether unique feeling flowing from me to you and from you to me. Grannie, giving her friendly nod. Walking, talking, eating lunch. Taking strolls to the clearing amid the larches. Someone who loves nothing quite so much as the sight of grass and sky.

Hans tests the currents that are flowing here, all about him, from one to the other and from the other to one. What is it that's flowing? The people in question have no name for it, or at least not as such, though their language offers them ways of addressing each other that creates an instant unity. Heading off towards the Semmering hospital, viaducts, tunnels. Going up to the

Jockelhof, fixing the rooms, eating and taking siestas and being too lazy to write during the holidays, a band of mist and a blue sky, beaming, the sky's a fine one to go beaming. Plenty of things to talk about. Mutual understanding.

Hans cannot suppress a cough and splutters half of the coffee Sophie ordered for him too into the saucer, mixed with saliva it comes spraying out of him. In his brain there is a huge hole, which might also be labelled Nothingness in general. When grammar school kids talk, they are simply together, with each other, and the very simplicity of that apparent fact is what expresses the 'immeasurable profundity of what is said', they say in two-part harmony. It is often interesting to watch other people, you sit on a tree-trunk for the purpose. The goal is on the tips of our tongues and its name is Love.

The inexhaustible reserve the youngsters around Hans are drawing upon now affords a brief meeting of glances and a brief attainment of peace in each other. If you are sitting on a felled tree in a pine forest enjoying the sunshine you can easily forget what time it is. Not that you could forget your gold watch, just the time of day.

In spite of himself, Hans glances at his old wristwatch to see if he hasn't left it somewhere. It is still there.

Sophie is silent, and so is everything inside her. Her silence does not imply that she lacks anything here any more than elsewhere. From time to time she says hello to an acquaintance. If she exchanges a few words with one of them, a curious common ground is established. Hans believes that what is between her and him is Love. It leaves him shaken because it generally does leave lovers shaken, but it leaves Hans all the more shaken because he knows nothing he can compare it with. He is at the mercy of Love, helpless.

Another schoolkid is now comparing two people who get on well with two hemispheres that fit exactly,

making a perfect sphere. They talk in a relaxed way, with mutual confidence, about that perfect geometrical solid.

Saying farewell, and wondering if you shouldn't feel just as you did saying hello, but all the richer for having received a gift.

No one has ever given Hans a present except for Sophie (trousers and a pullover), Mother has occasionally bought him something useful. Sophie asks Hans what he thinks of crime. Rainer wants to commit crimes, and she thinks that at last she wants to too. These kids here really get up my nose, don't they yours? You're used to things quite other than schoolkid small-talk.

Hans, who has no greater wish than to be a schoolkid, says he has broken open vending machines in the past, but now he means to lead a decent life in order to win the woman he loves. He doesn't say who that is, oh no. No, he daren't say that.

Is it Anna, asks Sophie. No, says Hans, no, it's not Anna, but I'm not letting on who it really is, and he gives Sophie a calfish look so that she will suspect it's she herself. Sophie can't make any sense of this stupid facial expression and asks if he thinks doing something illegal can break down your inhibitions. Hans is unfamiliar with the word. The word illegal, that is.

If I drank another cognac now I'd start yodelling, I'd give one or two of these schoolkids a thrashing, I wouldn't care who I hit.

No but seriously, I really wouldn't mind getting my fingers into something alive. Hans has only ever jabbed his fingers into wet plaster or Anna. Hans says this alcohol is making him warm, though he's used to drink, once he drank three litres of beer in one go, man, I was really pissed that time, know what I mean.

Sophie sizes up Hans as if she were seeing him for the first time. With a man and a woman this always happens at some point before the sequel can ensue. Her gaze deliberately includes his face and his body, in order to arrive at an overall impression. The season is over, the balls are no longer about to start, as is often the case. She opened the opera ball wearing a paste coronet on her head, which was ridiculous but Mama insisted. Now she has time off and can assess Hans's face. So this is a human face as well. Isn't Nature wonderful, so varied, thinks Sophie. There is an extreme Left and an extreme Right, which come very close to meeting, and there is even this kind of Hans. Apparently the fact doesn't disturb or inconvenience anyone. In Nature the species and forms are many and various, and there are two completely different sexes. Sophie's is an ancient aristocratic family.

Some months ago, in her dancing partner's arms, Sophie forgot everything, in particular the world about her, and now she wants to forget everything once again, in a transaction of a wholly different sort. She actually has what others merely wish they had, and she is forever wanting to forget it. You can't do it, in your family people don't do that kind of thing, Hans tells her. What counts is that *I* do it, says Sophie, who would like to knock a lot of things down. Which Anna and Rainer would like to do too. What they all want to knock down, however, are quite different things, because they possess quite different things.

Rainer, who wasn't invited along but figured it out by means of skilful questioning, enters the café, gives a casual wave to all four points of the compass (but receives no response), and promptly starts talking about crime too. This may be contagious. He doesn't want to talk about his love for Sophie as long as this Hans is present. The experience of crime makes you mature, he declares. In Camus's *The Outsider*, which he is currently reading together with Sophie and with her alone, the hero ends up in prison too. Under sentence of death, he hears soft sounds outside, sounds originating in Nature, and becomes sensitive to nuances. That is

important. Because everyday life more often tends to destroy sensitivities than create them. Vienna Actionist artists (you can see it coming) will shortly be destroying their own bodies, we intend to destroy other people's bodies, which affords the greater satisfaction. Whoever would destroy his own body of his own accord, you only get one, demands Hans. An artist. An artist may mutilate himself. Which is fine. I too often feel like tearing myself limb from limb and throwing away the pieces.

I want to lay my whole body down on Sophie and get inside her, thinks Hans. He will do it just the way he does it with Anna, only much better because love will be involved as well.

Sophie scrutinises Hans closely. Rainer wants Sophie to scrutinise him rather than Hans and knocks an ice cream sundae that he is just being served onto the floor. Before he can trample on the colourful scoops of ice cream (because he doesn't like the flavour, and money is unimportant when you're beside yourself), Sophie says: Have you gone crazy! If you want, Sophie, I'll tell Hans to spoon it up again. You're behaving absolutely childishly again today (Sophie). I'll show you who's going to spoon what up (Hans).

The waitress in black and white scuttles about amid the tables and is addressed as an equal by the adolescent higher classes, black and white fade to grey in the process, which is subtler, you need an eye for the differences. Some address her as an equal though they live in twenty-room villas in Hietzing. They come to her with their unimportant problems, school worries in the main, which she then tries to solve or dispel. Every job has its satisfactions if you do it with care, and this one is particularly satisfying because you have contact with people. And you get a good class of people here.

Just bear in mind, Hans, that what matters is the how and not the what.

Rainer says: Murder and assault are not lunacy, they are the logical conclusion if you live a life without an assured financial foundation.

Hans says it's insane, you can't hurt your fellow human beings on purpose.

Sophie answers that if she has understood correctly you should only do it for the sake of violence itself.

Well, the money is of secondary importance, of course. Murder is merely matter that's got in a bit of a mess (Rainer).

Sophie makes some response, and Hans seconds it. He shares her opinion. He says: I agree with Sophie.

Rainer says he should shut his trap because he is unfamiliar with the polarities of Thought involved, neither its perfect autonomy nor its strict dependence. To provoke Rainer, Sophie tells him he should go and do his homework, and then he can think about the lovely things he'll buy with the money they grab. Rainer yells that he doesn't give a damn about the money any more than Sophie gives a damn about money, he is just like Sophie and feels just the same. Sophie goes on: Perhaps a bicycle, some educational books, a building kit . . . and now it's high time he vanished, she's seeing Hans today, not him, he shouldn't go snooping after her.

Hans says he agrees with Sophie.

Rainer establishes a definition: The person who is in charge is never snooping, after all, he is the one who holds the reins. Also, he has written a new poem, specially for Sophie, in which he disposes of Christian thought, which no longer counts any more, once and for all.

Sophie says that Rainer will still be writing poems when he's a respectable civil servant. Hans says that's what he thinks too, Sophie! Sophie can sense Rainer coming very clearly, it is like masturbating before the orgasm. Hans says he shares her opinion. He subscribes to that absolutely.

You illiterate ignoramus, roars Rainer, seeing red. What he also sees (alas) is Hans and Sophie still wrapped in a species of mutual understanding that operates at a deep level that is not his own.

It is shallow. He and Sophie, on the other hand, have depth. Depth does not go down below, it goes within. He says he doesn't give a toss about either God or his parents, whom he hates, right, he hates God too, and because of that I'm freer than you two! He has decided that nothing is of any importance. But they have yet to find out what that Nothingness is that is nothing.

I really do agree entirely with Sophie, says Hans, and now at last I'm going to smash your gob in, Rainer. But Sophie restrains him. Rainer notes that Hans is a strange, disruptive factor in Sophie's life. Not to be confused with a stranger who acquires subjective significance. Because in point of fact Hans is no more than an object as far as Sophie is concerned.

Shit, now I've forgotten my purse, observes Sophie. Hey, will you lend me the money till tomorrow, I offered to pay for Hans. Rainer knows he must not be petty if he is not to appear petty, so he pays up on the spot, not without plainly letting Hans know that *he* is the one who is paying for him.

Sophie gazes out of the window and down a peaceful avenue of villas.

I agree with Sophie, entirely, says Hans.

NOWADAYS THE NIGHT-TIME cries of ow can be heard more frequently than ever by the sensitive distinctly pricked-up ears of the adolescent son and adolescent daughter. And in addition they often hear of Papa's intention to shoot Mother because she has transgressed her marriage vows. But Rainer can see that the only transgression involved is that of a meaningless life. Hers. She has never transgressed. Who would she have transgressed with anyway, the shape she's in these days? Mother's life is one long chain of meaningless years, just as the lower classes are chains of people, none of whom ever stands out as an individual. Generally they remain stuck where they are and never reach the next level. Rarely, but only rarely, one of them makes it up to where there is more room to manoeuvre and develop his abilities. But in the jazz clubs these second class citizens with poor prospects are always the only ones who listen when Rainer delivers a lengthy lecture, on God, say, or on contemporary jazz of the cool school and its structure. Schoolmates invariably skedaddle when they clock Rainer because they know: Here comes another boring speech and I won't get a word in edgeways. The guy's deadly. Beat it. True, you yourself know more than he does, but he never lets you show your knowledge off.

Whenever Mummy utters her low cries of ow into the night, Rainer next morning gives his father the kind of look that prompts the latter to say to witnesses: Just see the way he looks at me! What he wouldn't do to his own father!

At breakfast Anna accuses her mother of having ruined her life, and Rainer prophesies to his father that he (Rainer) will personally ruin his (his father's) life yet.

Rainer has natural leadership qualities, he is a *führer* by nature as anyone can tell right away, but no one takes the trouble to look at him that closely. So the fact that he will be the leader if an assault is made is not questioned. Everyone looks to him, waiting for his suggestions about how to do it, Sophie looks to him the most and burgeoning affection becomes Love. The next step is for Love no longer to be doubted: it is simply there.

Rainer's personal familiarity with horror is one of his strengths. Horror often visits him in a dream, in which he is walking the streets at night, the leaves are falling from the trees, smothering him entirely. Whenever he writes poems he is prompted either by books or by the weather.

Today is what's known as Headmaster's Day, a day without school. On this unaccustomed day off, different people do frantically different things. Rainer leaves the house early and goes to a locksmith's, vaguely wanting to have a second key to Father's pistol case cut from an amateurish wax impression he's taken of it. He does not yet know why he is doing this, but probably it is in order to hide the pistol so that Mummy will not be shot by Daddy, which she has often been told will happen, though the consequences to date have not been worth mentioning. But you never know, you never know . . . One thing's certain: No pistol, no pistol shot. Later on, Rainer will find that the key does not fit and does not lock, because nothing Rainer does ever works, except for mental activity. Because Rainer is Brain become Man just as God is God become Man (Jesus) and Hans is Action become Man, a man who needs a leader though. He only ever thinks when it's too late. Mostly what he does is nonsense. But Rainer shoves his oar in and issues contradictory orders that no one understands and which everyone therefore carries out in a different way from what was intended.

Anna the half-mute goes off to play chamber music, to create a bright cathedral of notes beneath her fingers, sounds that so rarely issue from her mouth in such quantity. In her head, the darkness of absolutely evil deeds. These days, though, her tongue isn't exactly obeying instructions. Anni goes on getting thinner and thinner. Her eyes smoulder darkly in her bewitched face (Hans once read this in a most instructive novel), but sometimes you're terribly afraid when you glimpse the hopelessness of her generation in those Annaeyes, there is no wall behind them so the hideousness outside has free access to the brain and can cause pitiless devastation. Anna plays a Haydn trio with friends of similar inclinations. She is playing the piano part, the clarity of Haydn (in contrast to the unclarity of Brahms or Mahler) soars to the ceiling. Anna's confused state remains down below and makes itself at home in the girl. After her confusion come (in order of appearance) the wish to cause injury, to kill, to take everything away. And an unpleasant pull in the lower abdomen that says Hans and means Hans too. But he's out more and more often, hopefully not with Sophie, but perhaps that's where he is. Sophie never screws, and brother Rainer also views the sexual act as a degradation of the woman and the man. If Sophie did do it, contrary to expectation, he would suddenly no longer view it as degradation but as exaltation to sublime heights. At any rate he still has prospects of promotion, and things still ahead of him which in a different set of circumstances he would unfortunately already have behind him. It's always better to have good things ahead of you than behind you.

Anna trickles off the pearls of the fast movement as though they were Japanese cultured pearls. The violin is playing lousily, Anna's musical ear is whimpering in distress and calling for the violin to practise more. Today they are playing for fun. It is not work. Mother Witkowski is very much with Anna, at a distance.

Anna is finally making the dreams of art and culture she had in her youth come true. She didn't manage it herself because she married this lout of an officer whose handiwork was killing and whose brainwork was the pleasure he took in killing. She had piano lessons for only four years, which is nothing for so large an instrument, practically the Queen of Instruments if it weren't for the organ, which is even bigger. Four years are nothing at all if it's something enjoyable. Otherwise they can be an eternity.

Rainer is at the locksmith's. Then he swots for his exams at a schoolfriend's. Anna busy with her chamber music. Rainer only has mates, no friends. Rainer is at one of his mates'.

As always, their parents hurriedly get on with taking photographs in order to make proper use of the children's absence, carpe diem, it may be your last! Herr W.: Today you're the bad maid who gets a thrashing for the errors of her ways at work and in private. Frau W.: Ow. (She is bruised.) That's what I am anyway as far as you're all concerned, a maid, that's all. I think the suspender belt doesn't fit any more, I've put on weight. The last few times we always played at the girl gymnast taking a shower.

Herr W.: Don't call a serious activity playing. In my case the field of operations is limited on account of oneleggedness but if a person does what he does well you always have to take it seriously.

Frau W.: Do you want me to use any kind of prop, Otti?

Herr W.: Now you've put me off my stride, I have an identity, I'm an amateur photographer. And the embarrassment is all wrong too the way you do it, though you of all people ought to be able to do it. And I can't decide about a prop so quickly because an artist has to wait for inspiration. Which has evaporated now. You hurt my pride as a photographer with your talk about playing just then.

Frau W.: I didn't mean to hurt your pride, Otti.

Herr W.: But you did hurt it, here, I'm going to give you my crutch special.

Which promptly follows. But it only hits the wall, making one of many dents, the spouse having leapt aside in time, in obedience to reflexes which have been sharpened by many similar situations and for once are correct. The dent finds itself in the company of many more of its kind dating from similar attacks at earlier dates, dents which even further disfigure a wall that already has deep rifts.

Strange to say, the day has a second instalment, since the first was so good, and this is known as the afternoon. It takes place after lunch, during the course of which Rainer wordily prophesies to his father that he will yet destroy his (Daddy's) life.

Now the parents, clad in festive garb – Father dressed to the nines as always (he buys a new tie every week and his shirts are murder weapons ironed sharp as knifeblades, after all he's a ladies' man with a reputation to keep) and Mum looking as if she'd been fished out of the garbage, her assorted articles of clothing don't go together at all and didn't even match up in their early days – the parents go to call on a distant aunt, who has always felt Rainer's gaze to be sinister, it is both penetrating and sly, the aunt in question considers him capable of anything. Which would delight Rainer if he knew.

The parents are safely out of the house at last and the children are in it. Today Anna's taking a turn at photography for a change. Last week, in Sophie's room, Rainer saw a photo of her brother at Oxford, dressed in a fencing outfit and with an épée. Today, Rainer draws a boy scout's knife (which was originally a Hitler Youth dagger and is now in retirement) and poses like the photo of Sophie's brother as well as he's able. Ready to thrust, or whatever they call it, this stance, the dagger in one hand, the other cocked at an elegant, graceful angle

aloft in the air. The result is pathetic. Hang on, Anni, I know how we can make it look less pathetic, Father's souvenir bayonet, which he in turn had from his Dad, you wouldn't believe this monster had parents who begat it and gave birth to it once upon a time, but he did, the bayonet is the proof, it dates back to the First World War. Do you know which of our five hundred detergent packs that alarming bayonet is in, asks Anna sceptically (today her glottis is in working order). She looks around and winds on the film. I know, the cardboard suitcase in the third row from the top, the fourth object from the left, we'll be totally overgrown with stuff if this goes on. The rescue parties will dig us out completely smothered. There's enough junk here for five lifetimes.

The case is opened up amid tottering stacks of cartons and the bayonet is extracted from its bed of rubbish. Now the entire performance over again. With a killing edge this long (the blade measures 25 cm) things go twice as smoothly. And so they did. Anna has her pictures home and dry. Rainer's murderous expression fits nicely, because he's thinking of violence. The expression on his face is not meant to be merely brutal. It is meant to suggest the expression of someone who has read Camus and has to kill because of the sheer agony the world causes him. Camus is an existential nihilist but he believes in God, which Rainer also did at one time, erroneously. It still causes him problems, but as it also caused a Camus such problems one is in good company. Camus is a supernihilist, nothing is nothing and thus meaningless. To cling on to Nothingness is just as cowardly as clinging on to God. In my opinion, absurdity in Camus's sense could be equated with Nothingness. Camus views pain as the fundamental principle of worldly existence. Pain and boredom. One is familiar with both from one's own experience. Cf. *The* Possessed. Best of all, read it together with Sophie. Read it with the woman one loves, who differs from other women in that she has become unphysical once and for

all. Anna and Mum are forbidden on pain of death to leave bloodied wads of cotton wool or sanitary towels lying around where the general public might see them. Materials of this kind have to be destroyed or removed, leaving no trace behind. Anna would do this anyway of her own accord. She has to eliminate all traces of her physical presence as it is. Though to herself she doesn't deny that she likes having Hans in her. At times she stops speaking, at times she stops eating again, not even soup crosses her lips, and if she does eat she sticks her finger down her throat afterwards and throws up the soup, which after all has done her no harm, in a high arc. The wretched remains in the toilet bowl are immediately removed, like the bloodied cotton wool. Which befits a process that is on the unpleasant side. Away with it. And then it might just as well never have existed, and it's forgiven.

Rainer practises a curious straddle position, which no one could possibly begin to understand, a few more times and brandishes the bayonet wildly. Anna says: Hey, keep still, I'll blur the picture, it's dark in here as it is. Rainer presents a pathetic picture, and the picture that results looks even more pathetic than the original. The eye of the camera has no mercy on dilettantes, and neither does Rainer.

Presently Rainer and Anna will be going to Sophie's, Anna in order to happen upon Hans, perhaps, and Rainer in order to explain to Sophie why one has to be merciless, to oneself and to others. But especially to others.

Under his leadership and direction a crime is due to take place and hopefully another, and that is only the beginning of his career in crime.

The costly camera is placed just as it was in its box before, so that Papa will not notice that they have been working on the side in their spare time. The twins go out into the public light side by side, where a maple tree (one of many of its kind) is maliciously

fluttering its leaves and where there are other trees, and flowers will soon be out, making the city more beautiful.

Anna spurns ways of making her person more beautiful. She shoots off towards Hans, who is doubtless expecting her already. With him she doesn't need any improvements to her exterior because what lies beneath the outer layer is of greater importance to Hans. Wearing a freshly washed pullover, Rainer is planning similar things with Sophie. They add savour to the distance by conducting a conversation on cultural topics. This makes the distance shorter and shorter.

THEY DAREN'T GO into the bar because they are covered by the Youth Protection Act, which divides humanity into two classes, those who may and those who may not. You can tell what kind of bar it is from the cars outside. They freely give enquirers information concerning the financial status of their owners. You have to be careful, whatever you're up to, or else some professional will come along and chase you off. Anna has a go at the part of the Eternal Temptress because Sophie looks too innocent for it. This isn't a place for kiddies but nonetheless kiddies occasionally walk the beat if they are in need of pocket money for new records. A suit steps up to the seductive promise of Anna's get-up. The suit is not particularly well cut but it's interested in the action in the Big City, which is neither big nor much of a city. He reveals the portal by raising a velvet curtain and sets off for his hotel room, which is supposed to be in the upper middle range and which he pretends is the lower end of the top class. From the cut of the suit you can tell that he is an oaf from the provinces, he thinks you can tell something quite different from it, viz that he is a man of the world with experience in luxurious living.

But he isn't. Because now he falls for Anna's trick.

Anna staggers out of the next gateway, oh God, I daren't go home, my Mum or else my Dad are sure to give me a thrashing because I was supposed to be home long ago. Please help me, I'm a helpless girl, I can't handle my problems on my own.

The avuncular provincial eyes and assesses and examines and tells himself, in novel terms, that he's in luck, in a position to take possession of something young and as yet relatively unused, which he will tell stories about later. Perhaps I've landed myself a completely innocent girl in this dismal Vienna side street, a girl who even

200

has parents and has no notion what's what, so that I shall be able to give her personal instruction, hooray. Schönes Fräulein, all alone, we'll have to do something about that. I have a nice hotel room, very expensive, it even has its own bathroom. Oh, it's really terribly good of you, I've no idea where else I could go, or why, but now I know, if I look at you. Won't you give me a little kiss, my little mouse, by way of a down payment (which is total nonsense since he's the one who'd be paying anyway)? I'll be nice to you, I know exactly how to do it, I'm not just some banging ramrod, you've got yourself a connoisseur of women, sugar, I can prevent conception too if desired. I'll give you your kiss in a moment, though you're not supposed to do that with a perfect stranger.

This disappoints the provincial and dampens his ardour, because it suggests a certain familiarity with physical processes that this inexperienced little slip of a girl didn't initially seem to have, it'll end up with him having to cough up, which he doesn't usually have to do with women since he's been giving quality service for years in market towns and provincial centres. But you wouldn't be here, you'd be in Gänsendorf or Ottenschlag, if you weren't specifically after the amusements of the City. Come here, darling, I can hardly wait for what we're going to do in a minute or so, I hope I can smuggle you past Herr Fischer the night porter, I only took a single room. Which is doubtless a flea-pit, comments. Anna venomously, under her breath. She has her doubts. I could stay at the Bristol any time if I wanted but I don't want to. I'm a machine salesman. The machines bit isn't true, it's ladies' wear. In town you say machines so you don't make an effeminate impression, in the country you often say ladies' wear because the female in question is an easier lay if she gets to choose a stylish dress afterwards.

So you have the total receipts on you, that must be dangerous in this part of the city, with crooks about.

My, but you're brave.

I never have money on me, on principle, says the subhuman, and in spite of himself he reaches into his jacket where the heart is and then across to where other women have a bosom, which Anna, however, does not yet possess. You'll be amazed at the things I can do, drools the clothes salesman, and he turns his attention to Anna's ass, the rudiments of which are there. A woman's beautiful curves and contours are my greatest pleasure, splutters the travelling rep, and he enumerates various details, as if he were trying to sell the lot to Peitel & Maissen. He knows it all from firsthand experience and now he checks up on it because Anni has to fasten her shoelace. Which is a pre-arranged signal. Sure enough, on cue a number of shapes slip out of an entry and slink up silently on gym shoes, making for the next turning, which is unevenly cobbled, with grass and weeds growing untidily amongst the cobblestones, evidence of the neglect of this city. A crime is creeping up quietly. As all crimes do. So that they cannot be identified as crimes too soon.

I can't wait any longer, I've got to step inside that entry with you and feel your rock-hard lips on mine, says Anna, salivating greedily. You've got it, baby, squelches the traveller, his thought mechanism befogged, I won't be tight-fisted, I may be from Linz but I can be generous when it's called for. Lasses like this are still classed as children in Linz on the Danube and the police are careful to protect them, but here in the capital that smells of corruption you can use them and afterwards send them away when you're through.

Here we are, the entry. In we go. And in goes the hand, shoved under the dress. But here comes the Crime of Robbery personified, too. And just as the fellow from Linz is rummaging about under the Annaskirt, his Linz-head is dealt a hard blow by an unknown fist, one that belongs to a worker at that: Hans. True, the fist does not transport him to Dreamland, but it

does interfere notably with the rhythm of Love and knocks him to the ground, which is dirty, sorrows come not single spies and a battalion of them is no better. Hans promptly bounces onto him and leaps up and down on sundry parts of the body, which you can't tell apart in the dark, let's hope some of them are the kind that particularly hurt. Anna bites, scratches and slaps away in true woman's style, all of it aimed at that unfortunate salesman head, women always aim at the head in this kind of situation, any expert will confirm as much. They lack practice at this kind of physical exercise, otherwise they'd know that the skull is especially tough and resistant, because after all it acts as a protective case for Man's brain. The traveller groans out loud with disappointment on finding that instead of loving and banging all he's getting is shoving and bashing. It was a set-up, he realises correctly, but the realisation gets him nowhere. It is no longer possible to yell because Sophie, with great presence of mind and astonishing instinct, has instantly covered his mouth, the bastard had better not bite me shutyertrap, we're prepared for every eventuality and have a knife. Right here. The trader, whose sole familiarity with knives comes from his wife and the kitchen, falls anxiously silent. Where's his wallet. Take it, it's in my inside pocket, my life matters more to me, I prefer it to money. It's the most valuable thing there is. Four to one is cowardly, I'll tell my wife and my boss back home, when I tell them I'll say it was six to one. Ouch. The plump wallet is expropriated and the traveller, who is well and amply fed, is hit, kicked, threatened, abused, spat at and humiliated in every conceivable way, and by girls who could be his own daughters, too, judging by their age, but they are the children of people who have brought them up badly, alas, so that they have become young criminals. Ugh, how nasty, it's enough to make you spit. You don't get this happening in Linz.

Shall I pull his prick out and hurt him, asks Anna, in

quite a state. No, don't, replies her brother, the leader (who else), keeping a genteel distance and directing the action sensitively. Do you think there's nothing that horrifies me? But in Bataille I read about what you can do with this kind of guy's prick, his sister stubbornly insists, starting to fumble about. We can at least do enough damage to make it useless for a while. And we'll be hurting his wife too, long-distance.

Look, we've got the money so let's get out of here, we don't want to get into danger by taking some ill-considered risk.

But the money was supposed to be the least important thing.

Money is unimportant, but it's reassuring to have it.

But I don't want to be reassured, I'm all worked up, it'll only take me a minute to take it out and spit on it. Keep a hold on him. No sooner said than done. Even Rainer helps with the holding, so Sophie won't think he's only doing it for the dough. You little fucker, you wouldn't have thought this would happen to you, would you, you thought something nice was going to happen to you, you swine. It is yanked out and spat on. That's what this guy was going to foist on me. Me. The fellow won't be foisting his wretched little tool on any women in a hurry. I'll bet he's lost interest today. Hey, come on now!

Hans kicks the salesman from Linz and his pecker, which won't be stirring for at least six months, that's for sure, and to think that at first it looked as if he was going to reap more than he'd sowed. He kicks at his neck and at scraps of underpants that glow white in the dark, making the fellow from Linz tip over sideways, shed a little Linz blood, and fall suddenly silent. He won't have sustained any permanent injuries. Still, he won't forget it.

They shoot back into the dark, out into the street which originally spewed them forth, not even the dark city by night can stand ill-bred adolescents such as these.

Shouldn't we piss on him too, asks Hans, turned on by what Anna did, no, we're not going to do anything else now, we're off, puffs Anna, clawing at him. Suddenly she's in a hurry.

Sophie is wearing a simple dark dress and blends in with the courtyard wall. Shudders keep on passing through her, again and again. These shudders are linked to a strange sensation of urgency in her lower abdomen and they recur with increasing frequency. She is unable to interpret the feeling. But it isn't puppy love or loyal friendship. No doubt it is something on the negative side, as the feeling that she shouldn't obey the sensation indicates, you can never rely on sensations. Come on, Sophie, breathes Rainer, and he takes her in his arms. She shakes him off and darts back into the street like a black thread being pulled very rapidly over a smooth tabletop.

To INTRODUCE SOME clarity into their fogged lives, Rainer, Anna and Hans dash off to where clarity is present full-time: at Sophie's villa in Hietzing. It is always a radiantly sunny day there, and there are always young folk radiant with youth. The day is radiant to keep them company, as it were. This spring it is already quite warm, giving promise of a hot summer that will scatter the youngsters in many and various directions once they've passed their exams. Some of them are hoping it'll be the same direction as Sophie takes. Presently Sophie's naked feet will be tripping across the promenade, the asphalt is already warm, indeed hot, and the tennis racket is enjoying the view from its Vuitton bag. Mama will be hysterically wrapped up in silken scarves and kerchiefs to guard against the sun, as usual, because the sun is always bad for her, Mama being blonde and her skin extremely white. Mama will direct the entire operation from the café, constantly hurtling to the telephone with a display of professional nerves. She will say she is meeting Sophie for tea. Obedience is lodged within Sophie like a coil spring, tensing and relaxing painlessly. Like some beautiful, graceful animal: you squeeze its flanks with your commanding thighs but do it no harm or permanent damage. Hans will stay behind in Vienna, clowning around with frisky hairdressers every so often, now that he knows what you can get up to with tarts like that. He is not yet one of those who pine for Sophie and the Riviera because he has never heard of the Riviera. Alas, Rainer and Anna have heard of it. What threatens them is the woods. Which have so often intruded their unpleasant attentions on the siblings. Out where the woods are darkest and most solitary, of all places, Auntie Pussy waits, tempting people with healthy country air, the very people who'd rather be unhealthy than healthy. To think

there are so many others who consider health the most important thing in Life. And they can't go. First the body must be revitalised, before university studies replace the revitalisation process and start on their destruction.

revitalisation process and start on their destruction.

But before that there are still the school-leaving examinations. Which you don't talk about, because that's bad form.

And before that there's Sophie, what a coincidence, you think of Sophie with a tennis racket and there it promptly is, the tennis racket, plus Sophie. Both are sitting in a cream-coloured Porsche being driven by a young aristocrat. Instantly Rainer drowns him in hatred, that hatred of his that was waiting, dammed-up, impatient, to be poured upon something or other. It doesn't matter who's sitting beside Sophie. He must be hated. This is unfair, seeing that the fellow (leaving his background aside) may have honourable intentions. Every one is different from his predecessor. This makes for variety. Sophie flits out of the beautiful car, she too is very beautiful in her tennis dress, she is not sweating (which often happens when you indulge in sundry sports). Sweat cannot get a purchase on Sophie. She is an angel. A bodiless being. Rainer digs his upper teeth into his lower lip. Sophie's white figure leans against the Porsche window and whispers dainty words to the driver, which you cannot hear, even Rainer cannot hear them, though he is the language expert around here. What were you saying to that guy? he promptly asks. Hey, are you crazy, I suppose you think I owe you explanations about everything I do, you must be nuts (Sophie). Whereupon Rainer nervously slaps his thigh muscles several times. This doesn't make them any tougher and he hurts himself the most in the process. Anna makes a half-hearted attempt to grab at Hans's thigh muscles, which afford a firmer purchase than Rainer's, but Hans evades the groping hand and tries to convey to Sophie's eyes, with his own eyes, the news that Love has taken secret root. Also, his eyes devour

Sophie's figure, which is highly visible today. Rainer and Hans are out to scale the heights where Sophie is on offer, they are jostling each other to the abyss, each of them wanting to reach the top first. Speechless, Anna grabs at Hans, to whom, after all, she represents a genuine little peak compared with him, so why does he want to be off climbing the highest mountains right away before he's properly acclimatised?

Flowers that are starting to blossom early are glowing in the garden. The gardener is snipping away at something nascent to perfect its shape. The gravel crunches under the departing Porschewheels. The gravel is sent flying when the machine gets up speed. The rival is rapidly distancing himself, as is right and fitting. Sophie has loaded all her weight onto her standing leg. This is in fact better than standing on both legs at the same time. In this position she is the Eternal Seductress to Rainer and Hans. Rainer prefers Sophie to the Eternal Melody of the Forests, perhaps she will invite him to the Riviera for the summer, because if you're in love you cannot bear to be without the loved one for a single minute, that is exactly how Sophie feels about it too. Hans makes some superficial comment about Sophie's legs, because there is no depth to him and so he cannot make any comment on her thoughts. She looks down at herself and says she never really noticed. Come on in, all of you. The whisky's over there, help yourselves, I'm just going to get changed, won't be a moment. Rainer and Hans, each after his own fashion, one with a great many words and the other in the few he knows, both say she should stay as she is. Anna maintains an embittered silence and keeps a watch on Hans, her property. But the unfeeling property in question is hankering after a new owner who will be in a better position to look after it. Hans sizes up a desk lamp made of chrome steel, doubtless because electric current is his special field, maybe there is some electrical job to attend to here, which will secure him a better footing. Tentatively he moves a biceps into the picture, so that the raw strength that resides in the muscle will be seen and acknowledged by Sophie. Hans is an animal and he wants to waken the animal that no doubt dwells in Sophie.

They are hardly in the room but Rainer's inner tape-deck is humming, spewing out the feelings he experienced during yesterday's assault, doubtless he will conclude with his feelings for Sophie and between now and then there will be at least two hours of deadly boredom. I am your leader and I hope you enjoyed yesterday's operation, still, there's a thing or two we have to improve, and that's what we're going to talk about now. Above all, the timing. I'll tell you why, in detail. Sophie yawns, and Hans says he agrees with Sophie.

. (Anna).

And just think how much money we bagged, what are we going to do with all that money now, what lovely things you can buy with it, and possess, hisses Rainer incautiously and overhastily.

Sophie responds to Rainer's pesky drivel with her patented ear-closing technique. Today she is seeing Hans with newly awakened eyes. Because he has a hard, strong grip Sophie's eyes look for the muscles under his wretched cheap sports shirt, it is cut in an emphatically sporty style with a lot of pockets everywhere and that is why it is forever crying out in torment, it is so impossible, her eyes seek and sure enough they find. What tensed up within Sophie yesterday tenses again today, it is different from the way a muscle tenses because it is more of an idea, in the head. This time the intellectual was fighting a losing battle, even though it was his idea. But he doesn't have a hard, strong grip. Rainer says that an intellectual wearing a black roll-neck jumper doesn't have to deal out such heavy blows because he has other things to offer, things of higher quality.

Anna says nothing, and considers Sophie with the eyes of a rival.

A long procession of tiny beetles is wandering up Sophie's legs and crawling under her tennis skirt, where they go to work in a way of their own, rooting around. The beetles say the others should go and just Hans should stay, and Sophie promptly says it too. She's the master in her own house and she can decide who goes and who stays. She says this right out in the open.

A mixed response, though not a good one, except from Hans. Anna feels it hurting her but at present she cannot express it, she can only write it down, is there a piece of paper handy, grammar school kids always have paper within reach. She is going through a bad patch and is in urgent need of protection and support. The staff have already petitioned the schools inspector for special permission for her to give written replies in her oral exams too, because she is so intelligent and nobody wants to stand in the way of her academic future on account of dry rules and regulations. Inside Anna, something of crucial importance is knotted up, something it may never again be possible to loosen, yet kids in puberty and late puberty ought to be open, not closed off. Honesty plus soap and water suit Youth better than dishonesty and dirt.

But then, Rainer is all the better at it, compulsively opening the sluices of his mouth. What pours out upon his fellows essentially amounts to saying that Sophie can only truly love him, Rainer. Even if he goes now, her thoughts will nevertheless remain with him and go with him, and, that being so, he might just as well stay anyway. Hans had better not start imagining things that aren't the case.

Right, fine, but now beat it (Sophie). I totally agree with Sophie there (Hans).

Help! (Anna.) (What they hear is: croak, croak.)

Take some chocolate with you, chimes Sophie, with certain undertones and overtones. No, we won't take

any chocolate, Sophie, because that's sadism, says Rainer, on the safe ground of his own field. Passion, dryness and grim determination. Dryness because you get sadism when desire has become free and unclouded, as Jean-Paul Sartre says.

Hans, on the other hand, explains that he is really an animal, not a human being, and that is why his manner is distinctly animal. He once read this in a thriller. Hans has read things, but they were the wrong things, simply the kind of stuff you find lying around in a workers' home that has had the pleasure of a workerseducationmovement. But he has read enough to know where the way to the top and the way to the bottom are. The world of books was the only way out. And in a workerseducationhome there are always books. But there is no other world. Only your own. His parents were workers with awareness. Which got them nowhere, seeing that one is dead and the other practically dead.

Rainer bickers. He is more unscrupulous than Hans because he has more to lose than Hans (who does not play the game), that is to say: a future career in the academic and literary world. Hans only stands to gain, and Sophie is even giving him her support! Hans is an unconscious ball tossed about by the elements and by Sophie. Rainer is not a ball in anybody's game. He acts of his own accord.

But still he is obliged to leave and take Anna with him. Please go, both of you. The siblings, pickled in hatred, shuffle out onto the English-style lawn, where they deliberately trample several costly blossoms and grasses and leaves underfoot, beneath soles paper-thin, because the shape of fashionable winklepickers would be spoilt by re-soling. Then they walk to the bus stop, with Rainer holding forth on why he left of his own free will and is therefore stronger than Hans, who stayed behind against his will. Thank heaven that at least his sister doesn't make any stupid objections or interjections.

Anna is silent, appalled at having to leave her Hans behind in an enemy house. Rainer's and Anna's love has been meanly spurned today, which has torn a rift in them both, which will be difficult to patch up or glue together again.

The pain does its job and swells to full proportions as the tram, reeking of unloved average people, takes the two of them back into its body again, it is a womb that the infant always wants to quit as fast as possible. One really ought to have a Porsche. But one hasn't got one, even if one says at school that some non-existent relative or other owns a luxury automobile of that kind.

In Sophie's room a record has been put on, and Sophie demands that Hans sit in that armchair over there and get undressed, yes, completely, and masturbate in front of her eyes, she wants to watch, just the way he always does it at home on his bed-sofa. Hans says he can't do it with her watching. Sophie says she wants him to do it with her watching. Hans flushes red as a tomato, he becomes agitated and stresses the reasons why he can't. He'd better, says Sophie, or else he can go right away and never come back.

Clumsily, Hans undresses. More clumsily than at the WAT when he goes to play basketball. But in the end he does manage to unbutton his shirt. He swears he almost certainly won't manage it, it's too embarrassing, he simply can't do it. It's supposed to be, says Sophie. As embarrassing as possible. That's why I want you to do it.

Hans says he'll do anything she wants and she knows it, but she shouldn't abuse that, it's unfair.

But I like abusing it. You have to take your socks off too, of course, what does it look like if you're naked but still have your socks on, it ruins the overall impression. Hans takes off his socks, revealing his dirty feet.

Sophie perches in a corner, scrutinises the rims of muck between the toes, and says she wants his freedom to submit *qua* freedom. She knows she is causing him

pain, but she is coercing that freedom by torturing him, as it were, into identifying of his own free will with the flesh that suffers the pain, that is freedom, d'you understand? She rolls up into a sort of ball and chews off one fingernail after another.

Sophie says he can always beg her to let him off. If I put pressure on you, your fear and pleas are free, they're there of your own accord. It's your decision and yours alone, got it?

Hans says he'll do it because he secretly loves her. Which is no secret any more now. He eyes his cock with little favour. He'll never get a hard-on. That's for sure.

Now you have to stroke yourself, go on, says Sophie. For the first time she looks neither pale nor tanned but has red blotches on her cheekbones and almost looks alive. She says she wants to see everything, she wants a good view of al! of him, she wants him to sit so that she can see and if necessary switch on the electric light, which he knows all about.

I'm doing it just for love, says Hans, and begins an unskilled tugging and pulling, rubbing and squeezing at his prick, which his anxiety has shrivelled with anxiety to the size of a twopenny banger.

It is a conflict of diverse forces, with Hans in the middle, making a rather powerless, indeed impotent impression just now.

Is that it, asks Sophie. No, that's not it, I can do a lot more, grinds Hans, who is working himself to a slow rage. He looks at Sophie, and instantly the fresh vitality of Youth and Fitness triumph and his member rises as it's supposed to. Youth and Health have won out over Age and Infirmity.

Sophie practically chews a knuckle off.

When he announces for the fifth time that he's doing it for love, Sophie says she doesn't give a toss why he's doing it just as long as he does do it, and she lays the palms of her hands on her throat to cool it off.

Hans works away at himself as if he were trying to jerk a wire through a wall, though all he's jerking off is himself.

Sophie wants him to squirt and tells him so.

Hans doesn't want to mess the brocade of the armchair with his seed. Sophie says he can go right ahead because after all it's her armchair. Well all right then, I'll soil the armchair, puffs Hans in a regretful tone, and he goes ahead and soils it. Pretty soon there'll be sperm stinking of fish all over the room, thinks Sophie, and she gets rid of Hans in a hurry.

FOR ONCE HANS is wearing work overalls when the wages he has earned are paid out to him. He has a book tucked under his arm, a book that never used to be tucked there. For all to see. It is not a worker's book; but then, this worker has already ceased to be one. In his case things do not go as far as in Rainer's. Rainer wants to establish a whole new culture himself. Hans plans to work his way up economically rather than culturally. The economy is more to his taste. Right now he is already a tiny wheel in the machinery. Trotsky addresses him from the pages of this book, which Anna has lent him. Trotsky confides that in a society where worries about one's daily bread have become a thing of the past, where the children (all of them well-nourished) are cheerfully receptive to Science and to Art too, and where even the immense power of the ego will be trying to make the world a better place, Culture will have a far more forceful effect than it ever used to. This doesn't exactly knock Hans's socks off. What knocks Hans's socks off is Sophie's leather armchair. He plans to buy himself one just like it.

Today as always the Kochgasse knocks his optimism for six the moment he sets eyes on it. Any moment, enthusiasm for sport will replace this inappropriate optimism, and set Hans soaring high at basketball. Not long ago Sophie came and watched him play. Not a single loud or nasty word was spoken, the prevailing tone was one of relaxed politeness. Sophie seems a will-o'-the-wisp to him because one moment she's here and the next she's somewhere entirely different, cheering on the team she supports. Should he take her flowers or would an expensive perfume be better or maybe an extra-large bonbonniere? The best thing to do is to ask a woman, since she'll understand another woman's heart's desire better. Anna, in other words. He has to

study later too, so that Sophie can be married and the armchair bought. Sophie is very complicated. The cause of this is her idiosyncratic nature. If you want to be complicated you have to be familiar with all the possible ways.

Rainer, the braggart weakling, has to get lost, hissing and frothing like Coca Cola, whenever Sophie says: Hans, you stay! It is a fresh pleasure for Hans every time the self-appointed leader has to beat a retreat. Rainer (the liar, the bigmouth) said he always goes on purpose so that he can test the tool of his imagination (the bonehead) on him and Sophie, patiently and calmly, as a locksmith tries a key. Rainer said he wants to make a tool of his flesh and Sophie's.

Hans muscles his way through Schönborn Park, behind the Ethnological Museum, swinging the briefcase containing his thermos flask and lunchbox to and fro, high spirits personified. He is not under any pressure right now because Sophie never strays into this area. It would be terrific if the girl stroked him just once or touched him in some other intimate way. But she doesn't. Because her pride is highly developed. Hans for his part no longer kisses women who are not that proud. His interest in Anna is dwindling in proportion to his love of Sophie. Already it has almost disappeared. Nowadays he only gives her hurried kisses by way of a thankyou for sex, which Sophie doesn't yet want to perform. The mental world Hans inhabits is inexact, as are the ideas of Life and values of the fellow-workers surging homeward in front of him, beside him and behind him. Three plane trees are swaying rhythmically in the wind and creaking because they are old and legally protected. Hans wants to protect Sophie for the rest of her life and be out in the open, in the fresh air a good deal. Soon the ice cream parlour will be opening its doors and admitting the surrounding Youth. Hans is already looking forward to licking away at a raspberry cornet and buying Sophie one. Soon summer

will have arrived and it'll perhaps, correction: definitely be possible to get an eyeful of Sophie in a tiny bikini, the steamy mists of the water in the foreground, the steamy vapours of dewy forests in the background, and between them the steamy embrace of two bodies. Hans breaks into a bit of a run. He is running on ahead of himself, filled with a prospect of perhaps getting properly to grips with Sophie next time. If he imagines the place between Sophie's thighs he gets an instant hard-on and can't run or jump so well. No doubt her body is whiter and softer than Anna's, which is darker and harder. But he will never despise Anna in times to come. No, he will be understanding. Once he is studying he will give serious attention to her problems, and will be able to advise and help her, too. From time to time, he and Sophie will take Anna along on an outing in the car and try hard to teach her some sport so that she gets more out of life and develops a more positive attitude. Soon the chestnut blossom will be out, old people take greater delight in that than young people do because young people will see chestnut trees in blossom many more times whereas for old people the time is running out. A young man takes greater delight in it than a girl because he'll be kissing the girl's mouth beneath the chestnut tree and the girl will have to defend herself.

The city has a city smell. It is better than the countryside, which we have fled from. The city smells of adventure, jazz, cafés and exhaust fumes. Hans swings the briefcase round in a circle and this evening he'll swing Sophie round on the dancefloor the same way. The thermos flask is in danger of being broken, Life is good but in a moment his mother will be souring it for him once more with her talk of politics, cramming the embitterment into her rustling stacks of envelopes. Next month she may be getting a betterpaid office job, as a full-time assistant in the accounts department.

There she is. Mother. Dealing the typewriter hammerblows. Badmouthing the *petite bourgeoisie*, who cheered Hitler the loudest. Her son ought to stay away from them. Politically unaware, they enriched their petty profit-mongering egoism at the expense of minorities. Hans tosses everything onto the kitchen bench in an untidy heap and flings off his shoes. The picture of

his dead father goggles at the history-making power of the workers, with misplaced optimism and misplaced trust, from out of the frame where he will remain (as long as there is anyone at all to spare a thought for him), unable to go class-struggling. And serve him right. Morbid altruist. So he crumbled unto dust, with the flames helping along a little, and not even the whereabouts of the grave is known. And if report can be believed, millions of others crumbled along with him and vanished from the face of the earth, without trace, and still their places are being taken by new generations who will disappear in turn because their very existence is of no consequence. No one notes them down or counts them. Hans won't disappear. Hans will achieve his full status and potential at night school. Often Hans will pick up a tennis racket in his leisure time. Sport gives you a particularly strong sense of being alive, which his unknown Papa can no longer experience because he no longer is. Perhaps his Papa would have sent him to grammar school straight off, without approaching it in a roundabout way, if he'd been in a position to do so. Later on, Hans will be a big boss in the financial empire of Sophie's father. Because he'll be marrying the daughter. And he'll earn his advance laurels to the full, so that the father doesn't regret having taken him as a son-in-law. He will have to work hard, but then he will be accepted. Their initial sceptical attitude will have been forgiven once the first child is born, at the very latest.

Not to freeze underground with the millions who were exterminated. But to warm yourself at the fire of

eager sportsmanship and bebop.

At irregular intervals, Hans tosses off articles of clothing, and tells his mother, who is holding forth about the War and the fact that a Wall Street company in America financed the SS, that jeans and every kind of hot music come from America, and that he is going to make a career for himself on the lines of an American-style manager. Still he won't deny his feelings and become an ice-cool careerist.

On the stove, something cheap and evilsmelling is cooking loudly away. The typewriter pauses in horror. Then comes to a full stop.

Hans tells Mother that Man has to achieve his liberation and rebel, and afterwards a life free of obligations can begin, as Rainer is forever saying. Some things he says are spot on, you've got to hand it to him. Then later, when you're older, business life starts exacting its obligations. In business you can discreetly lead the masses. All men are not equal, people differ in colour, shape and size.

Mother says that that concept of freedom is wishywashy, nobody lives in a vacuum, we are determined by society. She ladles some indefinable slop that looks suspiciously like semolina into a bowl and accuses sundry Socialist Party men of treachery. Principally she accuses the notorious Socialist Home Secretary Helmer, who had shop-stewards arrested in the fifties and was responsible for other dirty deeds as well. The past of this shady character is obscured by a thick haze that not even the police could dispel. But Socialist functionaries Waldbrunner (Minister of Energy and informer), Tschadek (Minister of Justice and enemy of the workers) and many other leading trade unionists who dumped shit on their party and its tradition come in for Mother's violent abuse too, without any regard for their status, rank or personal qualities. Not to mention Olah, the secret agent.

Hans says that he is above the vacuum of the petite

bourgeoisie, where you can suffocate if you don't watch out.

Mother saws off bread, wedges thick as doorstops, needless to say, nothing dainty about them, and tells her son, who has somehow or other not turned out quite right, to consider that that very attitude declares him one of the *bourgeoisie*. Even as you appear to adopt a position above their system of values, you recognise that system. It renders you blind to poverty. The mere fact that you speak of 'Man' is a crime. There is no such thing as the universal 'Man', never has been and never will be, there is the worker and there's the one who exploits the worker and those who abet him.

Hans says that Rainer says that it's appalling to imagine yourself a part of a whole. Because you must always remain an individual, completely on your own, and quite unmistakably distinctive. Which is a fortifying thought.

Mummy howls out loud. Not because she has cut herself but because her son is taking the wrong path. Turn back! You are trampling on the wishes and needs of your class, Hans. Nothing is universal. Instead of the unity and strength of your class, you want it split into individual molecules, every one of them isolated from the rest. Mother is like a hornet. Any moment she'll be sploshing semolina around the place and pointing for the fifty-thousandth time to murdered Papa, who did it better. You can see for yourself where it got him. And first he had to undergo inconceivable suffering, which is not to Hans's taste. After all, he wants to be inconceivably happy with Sophie.

Mother says it wasn't her that taught her son this egoism. Nor would his father have taught it him either. And out comes the motherfinger as usual, pointing to the well-loved but now almost forgotten features of that face. Hans says (it's all right if Papa hears this) that Love, to be exact: his love of Sophie, is a better way of tearing down barriers, whatever kind of barriers they

may be, than fighting, no matter who the enemy may be, because his love knows no barriers or bounds.

Mother says she'd like to know why Love always crosses these famous barriers to go up and never to go down. Would he like a fruit yoghurt for afters? There's one left, standing all alone on the window sill, keeping its cool. No, Hans doesn't want a fruit yoghurt such as he ate in his early years, Hans wants a whisky or a cognac. Already he can hear the clink of ice, already he can see a white female hand, which is not a ghost's but quite specifically his Sophie's. It is specific yet unreal, like the concept of the working class. Unreal, like exploitation, which you can free yourself of at any time, after all, if you have the will to do so. It's all up to the individual.

Mother longs for the words, deeds and works of her dead husband, whom she'd still like to have with her in bed at times and whom she'd always like to have around, to help her get her bearings in bringing up her only son. Things aren't easy nowadays, Hansi (that was his name). Your poor maltreated bones have no idea that there are other crosses to bear besides the physical one. No doubt it hurt to die. You poor thing. I think such a lot about our cycling tours and all the things we shared. It was the last time you laughed. Those nights spent in barns, in the biting cold, squeezing up close together. Country milk and country butter from a farmer. Washing in the trough at the well. Discussions in backrooms of pubs with a tobacco haze in the air. And the ones who were going to continue the tradition but our son is not continuing anything, and what has become of the others? They are not in our old party any more. And then the shock, which must have been terrible. Having the life crushed out of your body, which wasn't ready for it. Though perhaps it had been prepared by the frightful pain beforehand, which one would rather endure dead than alive.

Sleep well, Hansi.

And Hansi, who is already a Hans, though he doesn't yet know what wee Hans ought to have learnt, removes a wad of addressed envelopes from their bed and stuffs them into the little kitchen stove behind his mother's back. Where the wad immediately goes up in flames. It's the second time he has done this.

Later, Mother will go on looking for the missing envelopes for a long time, once again unable to imagine where on earth they've got to. THE HIGH ROAD twists through leafy, hilly landscape towards the Danube, but shortly before it, even before Klosterneuburg has been reached, it narrows, and the old Witkowski car has to twist as well, like the road, and inside it Rainer twists about, talking strained stuff about the inner tensions of artists, using the example of Camus to illustrate his point. Rainer doesn't have a licence but he is out driving with the permission of his invalid father, who is staying at home today, relying exclusively on his one leg if he wants to get about. Sophie is sitting in the front, next to Rainer, taking an outing to get some fresh air, which she gets all the time in any case, and Anna is in the back, exuding a pungent smell of sweat without any embarrassment, a smell like that of a frightened animal. But she still occupies a higher cultural position 'cause of playing the piano. It seems that whatever cannot escape via her mouth is making its way out through the pores. Her hopes are pinned on America, that vast land of infinite opportunity. She is applying for a scholarship, for next year. Her English grades are very good, and she is also a rebellious though basically quiet model pupil. In spite of the fact that she never so much as glances at a schoolbook at home. Now, as if on cue, a second frightened animal shows up, which in turn resembles Anna. This animal is on the back of a horse-drawn cart which evidently has wine-growers aboard. It is a dog. The dog is high up on a stack of winegrowers' tools and equipment, with a rope round its neck, and as it lurches about in despair the dog is digging in its toes as hard as it can, as if it were a cat and not a dog which can't extend its claws. The dog intuits that if it loses its balance and falls off the cart it'll be strangled. In its eyes there is naked horror at the brutality of its owners and of the world in general, which can really be a

distinctly entertaining place if you're chasing some little animal, a springy feel in your paws, powerfully aware of the relish of Life. It is still spring. Spring is manifested in the new life all around, no doubt there are eggs all over the place, the deer are pregnant. But you cannot see them because things in a nascent state stay hidden to avoid premature extermination. Already the dog is gone, the brutal country labourers with their lack of affection for animals are gone, and the car with the three of them inside is gone too. It is a morning for playing truant from school, a morning when Hans is busy at work, which can be seen in the fact that he is boring away at the day, uninterested, waiting for evening to come. The schoolkids, by contrast, are interested as they bore away at things, since high school instils the researcher's curiosity in them.

They have already passed the Schottenhof. The road is a silvery-grey ribbon, just as roads are often described in books. Turn-offs would take you to the Salmannsdorf vineyards or to Neustift am Walde. but they are not taken because the party is heading for the Grinzing vineyards. The ribbon of road spirals gently upwards so that you have a view. The view from the Cobenzl, from the house on the Roan or from the Kahlenberg has even become famous. The car is parked and the walk is walked. On the left vineyards ascend the slope, on the right they drop down towards the Danube, which is likewise a silver ribbon, only further off. The air is clear and still so cold that they have to wrap up in their fashionable extralong scarves. Above them are mathematically precise clouds. A breeze raises dust. The vines are not yet flowering, which (according to a Viennese song) will happen later, and elsewhere, to be exact: right beside the Danube when the vines are in flower. Then a thousand violins will play, the song continues and falls silent before its own idiocy. The three of them take the final plunge into the vineyards, beneath their feet the famed loess where vines flourish particularly well. The church belfries in the wine-growing villages are not yet in action because today is only Friday. You can hear dogs barking, hens cackling and their cocks crowing. The area is almost without people. After all, when you take a walk you're after solitude, and if the solitude won't come to you, you must go to it. Today's youngsters often bear solitude within, and without they are forever heading straight into it. The path they are on today is the upper Reisenberg path, which approaches the Grinzing inns with absolute fearlessness. Down below, they will go for a coffee. Old villas in the valleys, hiding behind trees although they are perfectly presentable. Glassed-in verandas with Virginia creeper growing on them, with its cousin the vine working for the villa owner and producing a harvest at a discreet distance. The incredible and utterly crazy beauty of the town elbows its way into the scene so forcefully that even Rainer tries to keep his trap shut, but he fails and promptly praises their surroundings. The air is completely transparent. Like aspic. The aspic would claim in turn that it was as clear as the air above vineyards.

They leave the proper path and, in their usual way, scramble up higgledy-piggledy. Anna stumbles along behind the ill-matched couple. In her brother's eyes they are a well-matched couple, but her brother is the only one who thinks so. He keeps up with Sophie, making an effort. It costs Anna, who is unfit, an even greater effort. To think what a lot of sport people in America go in for. There's not much time left till then. Sophie is simply Sophie. Anna reaches out one tentative hand, then a second, to gain a hold, but she can't get a grip and almost plunges into the void, for she had overlooked the edge of a quarry. Three buzzards are circling high overhead. Or are they hawks. They utter shrill cries. Rainer has certain sensations on seeing this natural landscape which has already been changed by Man's shaping hand and he gives a detailed account

of them. Anna asks in a hoarse croak if they oughtn't to sit down. You're totally unfit, says Sophie, but go on, sit down. Anna would like to go underground in America, to get to know a life different from the one she's already familiar with and start a new one. With the big pond between herself and her parents. And a lot of land too. She knows it's her only chance. She got the good grades for it. Since the mood as they sit there is so friendly, she tries to describe her America plans in detail, including plans for stays in sundry American cities, which she wants to pay for herself by working. She has already worked out an exact itinerary and is only waiting for a definite go-ahead. Today Rainer feels a sort of brotherly affection when he considers his sister, as she displays this unusual enthusiasm in front of Sophie, bright Sophie, like an animal displaying the prey it's killed. For one brief moment he feels that Anna and himself, together, are a wall that Sophie cannot penetrate. But the moment quickly passes. Sophie kicks at the wine-producing slope with the toe of her shoe, again and again, because she needn't care about the state her shoes are in. and abruptly announces that a short time ago their form teacher phoned up Sophiemother to ask if she (Sophie) mightn't like to go to America next year since a scholarship was available. She doesn't want to and she considers it kind of unfair, seeing that Anna's grades are better. But it seems you have to be capable of especially good behaviour when you're abroad because nobody knows you or where you come from. So they decide on a basis of background, which is totally absurd in a levelled, classless country like America, with its liberal-minded, permissive people. But that's the only reason Sophie can think of. Why she was chosen and not Anna.

The latter falls silent, horrified. Which has long been one of her favourite habits. And even Rainer shifts down a gear and asks if Anna can't have the scholarship

if Sophie's declining it anyway. Sophie says no, she asked that too, but they're going to let it lapse this year since there isn't a worthy candidate. Rainer says it's a pity about that nice scholarship. But what he is really thinking is: Thank God Sophie's not going away, now we'll still be a couple and will be able to start university together.

Death is in Anna's white eyes. They become totally transparent, and the cold pours forth from the depths like liquid oxygen. She sinks back. None of the beauty of the landscape can reach her pupils any more. The news has struck Anna dead. The tempting prospect of escape abroad recedes forever. Anna hits her forehead with her fist, but nothing comes out and nothing goes in either.

The Vienna Lovers, with the babbling brook below them and God amidst the violins above them, do not notice this. They do not even notice that this love only travels from Rainer to Sophie and does not make the return trip. Rainer is about to give a brief report on the aforementioned love, or even to slip an arm round Sophie, beside whom he is standing on the brink of the precipice, where vines planted with utter regularity are growing, a synthesis of Art and Nature, Nature being the vine and Art the method of planting, when Sophie says that you have to get *out* of yourself, beside yourself, beyond, because you're normally *in* yourself, all the time. And she spreads two sheepswoolpulloverarms.

What you're also in is my heart, coos Rainer. Anna eyes a busy beetle and stamps on it.

Don't kill creatures, listen to me, admonishes Sophie, because I want to go for the record, I want to hit my limits as fast as I can, for instance by making a bomb. I know the ingredients, I asked my mother the scientist, the chemist.

Anna is far away, Rainer is closer to the loved one and feels himself filling his trousers in panic. He says: Sophie, final exams aren't far off, don't you think we should do it afterwards, so we don't get expelled if they

found out, or don't you think it'd be better not to do it at all? Sophie asks if he's scared.

Rainer says: No, I want to know my limits too, but they're somewhere completely different, in an artistic direction.

Anna says nothing. She also crushes three ants underfoot (one of them busy carrying something, the scrap of worm—or whatever it is—is also turned to fricassee by Anna's sole) plus her own bleeding heart, though that belongs to Hans. They have done enough damage to other people's property by now, and to other people.

Rainer says: Look, honest, I'm not scared, but I don't think it's smart to try something like that with so little time to go before our school-leaving exams, which will entitle us to take any course of study we want.

Sophie says: Down, boy, and listen. We'll have to make it out in the open, of course, so that it blows strangers up, not us, right? Okay so far. You need a broad-necked Erlenmayer retort, the big kind that takes about 500 millilitres. Next, you need two test-tubes, one filled with volatile nitric acid, the other with a 1:1 mixture of potassium chlorate and sugar. Is that clear?

Rainer says it's clear all right but in all probability he won't do it because in his opinion the best time of his life is shortly to begin, student days, which I'm not going to ruin by throwing bombs, I'm not crazy, and anyway you're only joking really. It's not in your nature. It would definitely be in my nature but I'm not going to do it because I'm staying calm and sensible and in future I'm going to be calm and sensible on your behalf as well. What is more, Love is a far mightier explosion in a body than any bomb, it's a dazzling flash straight out of Nature. As you are no doubt aware, you have been in love with me for a long time, even if you aren't admitting it to yourself.

Anna damages an object, to be exact: a vine, by peeling strips off the stem.

Then (Sophie drags on) the two test tubes have to be inserted into the retort, which you have filled with ether, in such a way that their bases touch the floor of the retort. The test tubes are stoppered, and they and the retort are then sealed with wax.

The delightful environs of Vienna are piercing Anna like a white-hot drill, there is no rear wall to offer resistance and so they drill right through and out the back of Anna. Anna cannot find anything else to kill, so she herself is beginning to die off, which is often a slow and painful process. She would rather kill other living creatures, but it's not yet the time of year.

Rainer repeats that he won't do it, no, and in any case he (as Sophie is forgetting) is the leader. He may do it at some later date, he wouldn't rule the possibility out, once his livelihood is assured and he has a good income and needn't give a damn about anything, but not before. Later it will take even more courage because one will have more to lose. But he definitely isn't going to do it now, and neither is Sophie. Nor could Sophie love a man who did anything of the kind, because innocent people might suffer.

Sophie says that is precisely what's so good about it, and anyway nobody is innocent nowadays. Of course you have to throw the bomb so that the bottom of the retort hits the ground or else it won't explode; if it's thrown properly it'll explode instantly at the very slightest impact.

Rainer whimpers like a babe-in-arms and explains why first, second, third, fourth, in the fifth place, and anyway for all kinds of reasons, he can nevertheless not do it. Rainer's reasons are of no interest to Sophie but they are typical. You've driven all this way with the bore, specially for the purpose (and at his wish!), and now all that comes out is verbal diarrhoea. I'll tell Hans to do it. He's sure to.

Rainer calculates (to five decimal places) that Hans has nothing to lose whereas he has a lot to lose, that is to say:

his future, which is mapped out, clear and shining, and includes a doctorate and several literary awards on top of it.

Anna retches, loud and hideously. You're not going to go throwing up again, I just managed to get out of the car in time when you puked the first time back there, her brother squawks bad-temperedly. Something that unappetising is the last thing he needs right now, with Sophie thinking him a coward when in fact he's simply being ultra-level-headed. Who planned the attacks and helped carry them out, anyway, Sophie or him? He did, of course.

Anna does throw up, alas, and Sophie, turning her face away, hands her a tissue. Then they change their ground, away from the vomit. Sophie is saying nothing now, and Rainer is able to explain everything at leisure, at last. He worries at it like a dung beetle shoving a ball of muck about. Once he has become Somebody, unhindered, Sophie will realise what his reasons were and approve. After that they will grow old together, and then later they will often laugh about this stupid plan. Later, with their grandchildren.

Sophie says she finally wants to experience ecstasy. Unfortunately most people cannot go beyond themselves.

Rainer says that to go beyond yourself you need a partner. The intimate loved one. He is the partner and Sophie is the intimate loved one. He says no. And without the partner you're on your own.

A striped cat is slinking up the hillside to keep watch on a mousehole. Anna briefly ponders killing it as well but does not do it because she has been weakened by her spewing. She bites one of her knuckles, practically drawing blood.

Rainer is bawling loudly into Sophie's face. Which Sophie finds in poor taste. Rainer says even if Hans does it, well, fine, it's no reason at all to believe Hans has more courage than he has, because stupidity and courage are usually the very same thing, especially where Hans is concerned. I've hit on a really great course of study, just wait till you see it, Sophie, and you'll like it too.

Sophie maintains a contemptuous silence and kicks pebbles into a ditch. Then she says: Let's be going, then, I have other things to do today.

So you've seen reason at last, you can see my point, Sophie, jabbers Rainer, he knew all along that she'd give in because he's an irresistible lady-killer. It's marvellous with you, for this and that and the other reason, but also because you put up resistance at first and then your opposition crumbles deliciously beneath my hands. Like a little animal that can be calmed down and then gives up the hopeless fight against itself and others and lies still.

Sophie rolls her eyes heavenwards and Anna does the same.

The landscape recedes from Anna endlessly. In the end, nobody can stick her company for long. The clarity of the air is blocked by the mental unclarity in these youngsters, and each impedes the other. Rainer nervously smokes a cigarette. Which makes the air temporarily untransparent.

In the GYM changing room a bomb with a percussion fuse explodes. Numerous new, fashionable dreams of the post-War generation are totally destroyed. Among other things, flared skirts, grey flannel trousers, jeans, socks, knee-length stockings, pullovers, blouses, blazers and the dreaded kilt are destroyed. Someone had waited for a moment when nobody would be injured. Otherwise the injured person would have seen the one who threw the bomb. And nobody claims responsibility for this pupil's prank, which is in fact more than a prank, it is a criminal offence.

It was an irresponsible act, as one newspaper puts it. No wonder nobody claims responsibility.

Sophie transported the bomb in her tennis bag. The headmaster saw her and said hello. But no one stops a Sophie Pachhofen. And no one considers her capable of something like this.

The young Damians, who have nothing else on their minds, cry over their ruined clothing because it will be a long time till they've talked their parents into buying them new fashionable trousers and skirts. And to think that Sophie went to such trouble for unsuitable persons such as these. But she did it for her own sake. The gym changing room, which stank of sweat and floor polish, will have to be completely renovated. The kids who are taking their school-leaving exams will not even benefit from that, since the job is scheduled for the holidays.

Herr Witkowski wants to take his children away from the school because a thing like that has happened there. In two-part harmony they beg and implore him to allow them to stay, and he gives his permission because they'll be leaving school soon anyway and then they'll be dancing to a different tune. Witkowski senior indicates how that tune goes.

Hans (between whom and Sophie Things Are Happening, as everyone knows) bought the ingredients of the bomb, proudly and without raising any objection, in a store where normally only Institute of Technology students buy things. He hummed and hahed so long that he very nearly drew attention to himself. So proud. The mental link between him and Sophie has now been forged and soon the physical will follow. At present he is persuading Sophie that a human being without love is a mean speck of dust.

Something inside Rainer shatters, because some part of a person (usually the heart) always breaks if the loved one is unfaithful. Fear of the real suspicion that may perhaps fall upon his guiltless head cripples many resolutions relating to Sophie, though. Anna feels nothing at all in the aftermath of her shock. Only Hans can break through this paralysis, with his love. But alas, all that he is breaking these days is his vows to be faithful to Anna.

The vineyards of Vienna's 19th District have taken themselves off to an immense distance. Mountains of fear are piling high.

The parents are going out of their minds because they have to buy new clothes.

Some pupils are unfriendly, suspecting their schoolmates. Denunciations and interrogations ensue. Bawling schoolkids all over the place. Blubbing lasses, giggling boys in corridors, toilets and Nature Study rooms.

Without any result.

Boxed ears.

Sophie descends the stairs and climbs into a taxi outside as if she never did anything else all day long.

Once, Anna Witkowski utters an inarticulate scream, and is given permission to go home. Before class is over.

Teachers talk as if they were full of understanding. The one who did it should own up, nothing will happen

to him, we only want to know who it was. When they realise it's not getting them anywhere they roar like oxen.

Rainer Witkowski writes an astonishingly tame essay on *The Outsider* by Camus; but what he thinks is untamed and free, as thoughts always are.

Parents slap girls because they want high-heeled shoes to wear instead of the flat, sensible shoes that were destroyed.

Sophie wears an Adlmüller designed dress, and a radiant sun settles into her hair. But the colour of the sun is nothing compared with the dress.

Anna Witkowski takes leave of her senses. But nobody notices, because there was no sense to that terrible, senseless deed either. And the reactions to it are witless too.

THE ONE WHO pays for the car has the sole right to its use. Herr Witkowski pays for it, and he is driven around by Rainer. It is only rarely that Rainer is allowed to drive it on his own. Whatever their destination, the invalid has a monopoly on the passenger seat, and gives the directions and instructions.

The trusty jalopy will be heading off to the woods for the holidays, too, otherwise an invalid would never get out and about, and after all he needs oxygen as much as anyone else does.

Today Herr and Frau Witkowski say they're going to drive into town to go window-shopping. Shop windows are the gateway to the wide world. And that gateway is wide open when you're in Kärntnerstrasse. Which you only get to from the suburbs twice a year at most. You squeeze up flat against the wall so as not to be crushed by the people making for the famous cafés. Today they are going there because only the best is good enough for Herr Witkowski, he tells his wife that nothing is too expensive for him because when all's said and done you have to pay the price if you want a quality article, and if you don't you end up paying more in the long run. Look at that fridge, and the washing machine, just think of the things we could keep cool or wash with them. But mostly they look at fashion stores. Modern times are making this situation. at fashion stores. Modern times are making this city affluent, which only recently got rid of the occupying forces and which now belongs to itself and its own population once more, even the workers can afford the plentiful luxuries. The moment workers can afford too little they rebel. The last time this was a real danger was 1950. Communists took advantage of supply problems and stirred up gullible people against their very own country.

Rainer trots along after his parents, telling anyone who will listen that he's not with those two old farts. Only recently, Sophie ridiculed him for wanting to buy something nice with the stolen money and claimed that that was why he joined in the robbery. There are so many beautiful luxury goods here, but he doesn't want them and he will tell Sophie, too, that he doesn't want them, at all.

Gaping in wonder, the ponderous little group moves towards the palace at the corner of Annagasse where the czar of fashion, Adlmüller, has his studio and sales establishment. Heavens, what a coincidence! Through the crystal entrance door, as chance would have it, one can see inside, where by pure coincidence one can see the very same Sophie one was thinking of, standing there with her mother, turning in front of a mirror to look at herself wearing her first ever haute couture dress, a school-leaving present. Mama and Papa, there's a rich schoolfriend of mine in this store, says Rainer in spite of himself. The words are out and can no longer be taken back. They have barely slipped out but they are being regretted. Because his parents are already set to tear down the glass barrier between Sophie and themselves. By storming the gates.

The outside world threatens to crash in coarsely upon the crystal happenings in that inside world. The invalid (like a greyhound after a hare) dashes forward on his crutches, with Mother following headlong. They intend to say hello to the schoolfriend and her mother and say that they are glad to see their respective children friends and helping each other with their work and keeping up close contact in their spare time. Rainer clings onto the swaying hips of his disabled father to prevent him from lurching into the entrance, and trips his mother so that she will stay outside, where she belongs.

Enveloped in absolute soundlessness, the Pachhofens glide to and fro in front of the mirrors. Soundless so that noise from the street does not make the business of

choosing difficult. They are prettying themselves with arty things that you cannot properly make out from outside.

Are you ashamed of your own parents, you pissy little brat, whimpers Father, and he makes as if to kick his son out of his way, so he can go and kiss Frau von Pachhofen's hand chivalrously, because he's a fellow-parent. Who knows, maybe one could score with her, as a man.

Intimidated, Mother says: Let's go, quick, we're already attracting attention. Father hisses: You snotty-nosed little sod, is that why we've been supporting you at a time when you should long have been working and paying your own keep, just so you can be ashamed of your own family. At least I saw a whole war through, in a responsible position. But it's got to stop. You're getting too big for us, the two of you, you lousy brats, it's got to stop.

Rainer is chalk-white and cringes, trying to hide within himself from the people around. Any moment Sophie's Mama, or even Sophie herself, is sure to look across. But fortunately the thick glass deters unauthorised persons from casting indiscreet glances inside the salon and making indiscreet noises while they're about it.

A manageress, dressed all in black, is taking thighish strides up and down. The fashion czar himself is weighing things up, saying this dress has this or that plus point, that one has this or that plus point, this dress might perhaps not suit the young lady in this respect and that one might not suit her in that respect.

Outside, Father informs his son that his nose'll be bleeding in a minute, as it has so often before when he's punched in the face.

Please, begs Rainer, despite the impending pain, please don't go in, please.

Let's not go in, then, Otti, I still want to look at some underwear and then we'll go back home where it's cosy,

won't we. The ladies would only detain us with needless chat anyway. And you know what we're going to get up to later, don't you, proposes Mother, and with this unspoken promise she tugs Father away. He swings himself off, foaming with rage. No, one doesn't want to be detained by those two hoity-toity dames, one still has things to attend to today. A great bird flapping from branch to branch.

And so they go, and look at more shop windows, which blur in front of Rainer's grateful eyes. In the sports shop there is a brand new racing bike with a lot of gears. But beautiful, glittering things like that belong in a different world, not Rainer's. Still, the cup passed from him back then, just as in religion it passed from the Lord God.

Thou shalt not go to bed without a kiss, nor without a word, since politeness requires it, grinds Father through his incisors. He is consoled with a wee cup of coffee in the nearby Museum Café, plus a roll, and a decent tip. Everything drains out of Rainer and he collapses in a heap, so he's simply a bundle of humanity that looks dead. How he and Sophie will laugh at this one day, later! But not now, not yet. Later.

On the inside, Rainer has already cut all the ties with his family. This is not apparent yet on the outside.

THOUGH THE PUPILS don't really deserve it there is one more afternoon tea party at the grammar school, before the holidays and the school-leaving exams scatter them in every direction. The girls prepare the tea and the boys see to the organisation. There are stacks of carbonated drinks, stacks of exceptionally repellent colours. The boys dance with the girls, and now and then, at the prompting of a trustworthy teacher, a Mama or Grandma is whirled round the floor. The older generation discuss the abilities of their descendants, and generally they are found to be talented but lazy. Some don't have any abilities at all. Taken together, the schoolkids constitute what is known as a school community.

Anna and Rainer are stunned beyond words to find that they are supposedly part of a school community and not of the adult world.

Sophie has smuggled Hans in. He is a conspicuous foreign body wherever he goes, because as soon as he's got a beer (or several beers) inside him he bleats raucously and even finds that funny. Sophie is wearing very high heels, she is the definition of blonde and won't be caught. Rainer is the definition of stupid and tries to catch her anyway, but without success.

The dishwater tea is ladled into paper cups and sold for small sums that are being saved up for a school-leaving outing. For younger siblings there is a glove puppet show where theatre enthusiasts who buy standing room tickets for the Burgtheater prepare for an acting career. The young ones are young and even enjoy this.

One or two opera productions are discussed by groups of experts, the names Bippo di Stefano and Ettore Bastianini are mentioned, names Rainer is unfamiliar with. Anna, however, is familiar with Friedrich Gulda and his fellow-musicians.

Rainer's disabled father plus supporting mother have arrived. Cautiously (so as not to do still more damage to the cripple) one of Rainer's fellow-pupils offers him tea. Father tells her he doesn't eat out of other people's fleshpots. He still has enough fleshpots of his own. What an odd man, the schoolgirl says to her friend. Don't you think he's weird? Then the girl asks if she should put a chair by the dance-floor for him, so that he can watch the schoolkids' clumsy movements better. He says he's all right standing. Nothing's impossible for God or Witkowski. This is his second favourite expression. This character's off his rocker, he's out of his mind, says the same schoolgirl. Rainer, who has told everybody his father and his cousin take turns driving the Porsche, curls up in a comer like a caterpillar. Why can't one snuff oneself out, so all that's left is a little warm air? Suicide's the thing.

But there's Sophie, and Rainer immediately explains to her at length that Love is not the same as Eros. True happiness is the sense of having wanted the best in Life, even if it's perhaps misinterpreted. Unmoved, Sophie serves a cheese sandwich. Acting the servant is fun if you don't have to be one. Anna would sooner let them cut her hand off than hand someone cheese sandwiches.

Gerhard wants to swirl his idol, Anna, round in a circle and be merry, but Anna shoves him aside because she wants to get at Hans, who's jammed in between two grandmas. For his part, Hans boxes his way resolutely through the crowd in order to tear Sophie from the clutches of a schoolmate she is wafting about with, dancing a good old waltz. Together with that useless parasite, who has never earned a single schilling himself, she opened the Philharmonic Ball last winter. He's not going to be in the Philharmonic, though, he's going to be a high-flying legal eagle. His hold on Sophie is cool and impersonal, which is one of the fundamental

requirements for his later profession: he is holding her with his fingertips, somewhat more firmly at her back, not a hint too firmly nor too loosely.

That's not how you take hold of a lass, you have to seize hold of her in a determined grip, I know how because I have a determined, gripping way. Come on, sugar, you're light as a feather. Hans wants to toss her in the air energetically and yodel yoohoo as he does so, he's so happy today, he fits in well with these future colleagues with their academic educations. He is a man of action. Go away, says Sophie.

That is a setback. Hans pretends he has to do up his fly.

Various schoolchildren assure each other that it's a really lovely party. Telephone numbers are exchanged. Intimate friendships are established, right on cue. An outing is planned, and a visit to a resort in the summer.

Sandwiches are spread.

Huge pieces of cake are handed round on paper plates.

Rainer dives out and ambushes Sophie, and tells her that now is the time for a new phase in their friendship to begin at last, one that's different — he's tempted to say fundamentally different — from all that's gone before. That is to say, they need to establish direct contact with each other at last. This can be done by taking evening strolls together. Every profound conversation will be the discovery of new territory, he promises. They will introduce a new kind of naturalness into their relationship, he assures her. The wonderful thing about Nature is its total consistency, the absence of contradiction.

Sophie contradicts. She says: Let me go, you're crushing my dress, can't you see it's chiffon? You're gradually degenerating, Rainer. Slowly but surely.

For the grown-ups there is even punch to mark the advanced hour. It's a weak punch. Children giggle

because they're allowed a sip for once. Hans promptly gets in line for the alcohol too but is sent away because he is not an adult yet, as he is informed to his astonishment. Hans roars that he's been earning his own money for ages. An uncomprehending face that belongs to a doctor's daughter answers him.

You're not even allowed to smoke a cigarette here. The unavoidable Frau Witkowski hides herself and her teacherblood (she was once a teacher herself!) away in the crowd. What she is also hiding is her ugly pre-War dress, which she has tricked out with a velvet bow and a silk rose of the same colour, each as out of place as the other. Papa is looking elegant, his tie is screaming out loud: here I am, it's impossible to miss it. You can overlook a cripple deliberately, but not that tie.

Anna scratches feebly at the back of Hans's pullover to get his attention. Hans pats her as if she were a horse and asks if she's got the itch again, huh. If she's itchy she'd best scratch herself, hahahaha. Then he utters a high-pitched bray, plunges at Sophie, lifts her up high, and swirls her round in a circle a number of times. Then he tosses her up aloft like a ball and catches her again and addresses her as darling and doll and Sophiedear. There is a great deal of strength in him and now he's letting it out, who has he got it for if not Sophie and Sophie alone.

Sophie laughs slightly and says: Put me down, Hans. Before he can obey the command, Rainer races up from behind, pulls Sophie out of Hans's arms, and says he'll kick Hans in the balls, to which Hans replies that he'd like to see him try. Now piss off, we want to be alone.

The headmaster says in a loud voice that the exams mark the end of a period in Life and will scatter them in every direction. He trusts they will always remember their school. But their schooldays are over and Life is yet to come. It is completely different, but school prepares you for it.

Rainer and Anna tremble with fear. What they are most afraid of is change. Never again in later life will it be as easy to be a leader as here, because not everybody will know you later. Nor what you have accomplished. You'll have to accomplish things all over again. Rainer and Anna are afraid of the unknown.

Anna puts her hand up to indicate that she wants to say something on the subject.

The two young men who are too full of energy will be coming to blows in a moment. A calm and level-headed teacher steps between them and reminds them of discipline and religion. This being the religious instruction master.

Anna is actually hopping a little with excitement at being able to say something. She wants to say that Hans is hers and no one else's. Even if it may not look that way. At close range, Rainer mouths off at Sophie about what he feels for her and has always felt. Pride always prevented him from admitting it. But now it's stronger than he is. And won't be kept back. He thinks she may as well know. The next stage up would be patches of sunlight on the forest floor, rain starting to fall slowly and inaudibly, the smell of resin, Sophie wearing an old raincoat, stroking his hair, breathlessly, tenderly. After all, intellectuals need some physical pampering too. A country-style meal on a checked tablecloth and plenty of serious, profound conversations where even God will be present, in the abstract. This is every grammar school pupil's dream and it is his dream too. After dinner one lies on the bed and goes on reading Camus, whom one has been reading the whole time already. The passage where the condemned man suddenly grasps the world, a world that has lost its interest for him for ever. And he thinks of his mother. But he, Rainer, will think of Sophie. Later on, the camera loses track of them in the woods.

Sophie says that her mother is sending her to Lausanne after the holidays, so that she will be in different

surroundings. Is that definite, bleats Rainer. Yes, absolutely. A boarding school. She's already looking forward to a completely unfamiliar environment and language.

Rainer asks why she wants to go roaming so far off when the good things in life are so close, to be exact: right here. What do you need an unfamiliar environment for? You ought rather to tame the unfamiliar, unknown animal within me. Now I would perform a sexual act, only it degrades the woman. That's why I need taming.

What I did in the gym (Sophie) was more of an event than courtship. Dynamite. Rainer says that no doubt she doesn't want to go away from him and she's just talking. And by way of proof that he trusts her entirely he is now going to confide a few ideas towards an interpretation of *The Plague* by Camus, because that is the next book they're going to read together. She mustn't tell anyone.

Sophie coolly moves him aside with her fingertips and says hello to her dancing partner's parents, who know her and enquire after her plans for the future, whereupon they too are told about Lausanne. They consider this good, likewise the opportunities for sports there.

Anna blows air down Sophie's neck where there is blonde down. Now she wants to say something about her own character for once. She hasn't said this much in a long time. Anna says that her character is one of blind hatred of the whole world. She wants Hans to pick her up like he picked Sophie up back then. Hans tells Anni to go fetch him some bread and wurst. Whereupon she promptly rockets off.

By now Rainer and Hans are each hanging on to one of Sophie's shoulders, listing the reasons why she should leave this dreary school party with them to have a discussion. Rainer hurriedly explains modern music, which is coming from the tape recorder. Sophie shouldn't go to French Switzerland. Hans doesn't say Switzerland till he's been told where Lausanne is.

Sophie slips out of the arms of both. They mean well but grip poorly. She slips out like an evil carnivorous plant that uses a sticky substance to kill insects, and says she won't have them bothering her in any way at all. She's going away so that she doesn't have to see the pair of them any more.

Are those your little admirers, Sophie, smiles the dancingpartnermother, have fun then, dear Sophie.

Anna comes home with the bread and wurst. Hans wolfs the salami, nervously, plucks off the little gherkin, and leaves Anna to polish off the remains of the sandwich. At his invitation. Anna eats and heads off purposefully to the toilet to throw up, hoping it isn't engaged.

Rainer says he may kill himself. This is sure to get Sophie's attention. Otherwise he'll slip through the net and be gone. The world is gently indifferent, says Camus. One has to put its hostility behind one, says Camus. Once one's hope has been taken away, one has the Present in one's hand, whole, one is Reality oneself and all the rest are extras. Which they are in any case.

You never say anything that someone else didn't say before you, breathes Sophie.

Because I already know everything that can be said, see. If Life has expired, Evening is like a melancholy ceasefire, as Camus assures us.

Hans hammers his fist at his skull as hard as he can, making a hollow sound. Nothing witty comes out, just the usual stuff, the foreman's words, to the effect that he has done some wiring wrong and is about to get a kick up the backside.

The disabled father clambers across on his crutches and tells Sophie that she plainly must be his son's little girlfriend, that's lovely, she's a trim little filly, the kind he used to have quite a lot of in the old days and only has occasionally now because with a job you don't have much time. He could show his son Rainer a thing or two

in that line, too.

Anna and Rainer's mother devours the cut of Sophie's cocktail dress with her eyes. Could she run up a chiffon miracle like that on her sewing machine? Or is it organdie? It's not synthetic.

Anna clamps hold of her mother's arm like a pair of pliers. She hasn't taken hold of that arm for months. For a moment the two women are St Mary and St Martha, of necessity, since Mary only had a son, no daughter.

Hans swallows. His Adam's apple bobs. So much saliva and he hasn't even had a beer.

Sophie shakes everything off and absolutely and irrevocably departs.

Sophie leaves two voids behind, one in Hans and one in Rainer, but she does not feel them.

Often a girl in a summer holiday resort will say when her boyfriend has gone back to town: You're leaving, but a great deal remains. A great deal that he has left. But in this case not a great deal remains to profit from. In fact there is nothing left.

Frau Witkowski uses two hands, which is all she has, to cover the nakedness of the velvet bow and the pinned-on flower, but both of them peep out indiscreetly from between her fingers, making a bad impression. Herr Witkowski makes one of these too.

Anna also leaves, unnoticed by anyone, by anyone at all. She doesn't even leave the tiny dent of a metal stiletto heel in the parquet flooring. She leaves nothing whatsoever.

HANS COMES OUT of the works gate and Anna, who is outside, goes up to him. She wants to say something sensible so that he'll see she can be different. She is planning to say that it's good I can't go to America because now we can study for your night school classes this summer. But as so often she says nothing at all, she simply wails stupidly. In front of all these strangers who have been working all day and so have a right to some peace and quiet in the evening, Anna roars out loud and puts her soul, which is almost completely eaten away, into her bawling, ultimately showing that there's good in her. Only those who are not yet totally hardened can cry. Her mouth and face are distorted and ugly. A woman never benefits from this kind of facial expression, she loses. Nonetheless, a perverse kind of pity seizes upon Hans when he discovers this in Anna. Perhaps it isn't pity. Perhaps it is more of a male reflex to protect weak things. This reflex operates when a man sees a woman weeping. He places his arm around this particular weeping woman and leads her away in a hurry so that fellow-workers won't snoop. He says: What's up, Anni? What are you crying for? Come on, there! Anna says she is in despair and lets a whole lot of things burst out of her untidily, mainly fear, hatred, and at the root a touch of envy of Sophie. Hans says that envying someone who ended up on the right side of the tracks through no fault of her own is not nice. Do you begrudge it Sophie? Anna blubs an octave higher. Come on, I'll see you home, we live more or less next door to each other as it is. He tells her to calm down, and gradually she does calm down. Suddenly, out of nowhere, she sees Hans in a completely new light, with the eyes of a love that realises it is the real thing. Hans sees Anna in a completely different light, with the eyes of the male protector who is stronger. Maybe it is also the feeling of friendship likewise realising it is the real thing. It means that you will see it through with your friend, through thick and thin and other rough times.

Through thick and thin Hans walks Anna home. What's up with Annidear, he says time after time, he can't think of anything else to say. Nothing, it's all right, she says. Want to come to supper?

No, says Hans promptly, because he can't stand Anna's parents. But he says it'll soon be Sunday and perhaps they could do something together.

Various worries leave Anna, and an unaccustomed cheerfulness takes hold of her, a mood that even extends to supper, which will doubtless taste revolting. In the very near future there will be a Sunday cycling trip with Hans. Perhaps the trip will represent a new start, on a new basis. The basis does not always have to be material things. Money can sometimes be irrelevant. Feelings are independent of it.

In the Witkowski flat, dinner is being served. Father is grumbling away, without pausing for breath. You're so used to it that you don't even take it in any more. He threatens Mother with sundry appalling kinds of torture that he proposes practising upon her. Mother is flicking through a mail order catalogue, where she comes across a dress that hurts her eyes. It hurts and hurts. It hurts particularly badly because dresswise she disgraced herself so awfully at school yesterday and within herself is still smarting from the blow.

Father asks Rainer if he'll play chess with him afterwards. Rainer says yes, and will in fact play. For supper there's bread and wurst. Plus potatoes in some dreadful sauce. Then the chess match is played. The disabled man utters misleading warnings and advice concerning Rainer's mental state or Rainer himself. Rainer seems not to be concentrating and loses. Father is insanely pleased, seeing that recently he's been beating his lordship the stuck-up grammar school boy with his airs and graces

only rarely. Nevertheless he tells Rainer he'll give him a good wallop if he doesn't make more of an effort when he plays chess with his father. Rainer says that winning is pointless and is dealt the aforementioned wallop.

There is something soft in Anna's features that was not in them this morning. Where has it come from? She is even drying the dishes.

Mother escapes from her failure as a mother into the role of martyr and beseeches Father not to use a prop tonight, it hurts. Father says wittily that he'll think about it (but in the event he hits her more, if anything, not less). Then they go to bed.

Anna eats an apple before she goes to sleep.

Rainer also eats an apple before he goes to sleep, reading Camus on absurdity and obsession.

Lights out. They sleep.

At half past six Rainer wakes suddenly. Unusually, both his hands are damp with sweat. He doesn't weigh up any of the pros and cons. He can hear Mother in the bathroom. He gets up, goes into the hall and fetches the key of the pistol case from Father's bunch of keys, which is dangling from the front door. The case is 8 cm deep, 30 cm long and 15 cm wide, and made of iron. The wallet is lying on it and has to be moved first. The flat is silent, apart from the disagreeable bathroom noises made by Mother, who is always the first to get up. Rainer opens the pistol case to take out the 6.35 mm calibre Steyr-Kipplauf pistol. There are photographs under the pistol, showing his mother's genitals. These genitals make no perceptible impression on him, though it was through them that he first entered the world.

Taking the pistol, Rainer goes over to his sister, who has been sleeping right beside him all night beyond the thin partition wall and is still doing so, trustingly. He shoots Anna in the head, at point-blank range. The shot shatters her frontal bone but merely renders her unconscious, immediately. A few scraps of sound from

Schönberg's op. 33a plus the Berg sonata (only half of which she has committed to memory) quaver through Anna's brain in shock and then, hesitantly, reluctantly, disappear for ever. No more music, ever again.

After firing this shot, Rainer goes out into the hall, where Mother comes towards him, not speaking or making any kind of utterance at all. He knows he has to kill the whole family now so that there will be no witnesses to betray him to the police. Instantly Rainer shoots his mother, also in the head. She collapses without a sound. Her upper jaw is completely smashed but she is not yet dead. Mother lies in a heap on the hall linoleum, her death rattle gurgling. One can't tell if her brain is still functioning or not, probably not. The pistol is now no longer loaded and Rainer puts it aside and fetches the axe from the toilet. It is honed razor-sharp and weighs 1.095 kg. The blade is 11.2 cm long. Oddly enough, Father has been sitting quietly in the living room throughout the murders, wearing a cardigan over his pyjamas. Rainer goes in to his father, with the axe. Father expresses silent astonishment. Rainer wields the axe and strikes out without thinking anything at all. Aiming at the head. Rainer's progenitor instantly caves in beneath the fearful axe blows, bleeding heavily. Bones break, knuckles splinter, tendons tear, veins are severed beyond repair. Rainer aims mainly at the head and neck, which is quite enough. He keeps on wielding his blows till Father has been totally cut to pieces. Then Rainer picks up the axe and goes over to his mother. A parcel of humanity lying gurgling and frothing in the hall. He strikes at her too. He is still not weighing up the pros and cons, or anything at all. He wants to inflict mortal injury, and he does. When he fired that last shot he knew already that he'd go over to the axe to finish the job. Nobody says anything or screams. Mother is lying on her stomach, and in that position she is dealt the death blow. She dies. The whole time, Rainer does not budge a single millimetre. Things lie where they have fallen.

Once she's dead, Rainer goes over to his sister, whom he has already shot in the head (because that was the only part of her body exposed above the blanket), and hacks away at Anna's head just as he hacked at Father's and Mother's heads. Anna's head is smashed to a pulp of bones, blood, tendons and brain matter, with stray teeth showing up palely out of it and a single eye, almost detached. Some time, soon, Anna will die too. And then all three will be dead.

Most of the cuts have been dealt to their heads and necks. Now Rainer goes to the cardboard suitcase and fetches the bayonet out from amongst the heap of toys, the slide projector and the felt. With this bayonet he quite needlessly jabs at the three corpses. In doing so he is methodical, taking one body after another. First Father is stabbed in the neck, chest and navel with the bayonet. Then his dead mother is stabbed violently, mainly in the abdomen. Next he stabs his dead sister with all his might. Now, at last, he is through. The bleeding heaps of humanity are not making a sound. Nor can they be told apart any more. After all, Death the Leveller annihilates all distinctions. The sexes of the bodies can still be just about made out, but nothing else. You have to take your bearings from that if you want to decide which corpse is whose.

Through this absurd action, Rainer is out to preserve his narcissistic belief that he has achieved something extraordinary.

Now he tries to hide his father's body so that it won't be spotted the moment people come in. Panting, he drags the parcel of flesh, dribbling blood, across to the big farmhouse chest, from which he has first had to remove a load of useless junk so that the corpse will fit. There is such a terrible lot of blood that he is unable to hide the other carcasses. His nerves won't take it any more. And Rainer fails in his task.

He takes off his blood-soaked pyjamas and takes a shower. Then he stows the weapons in a briefcase and leaves the house at an early hour, to establish an alibi. He takes his pyjamas along too. He drives over to a schoolmate's to revise for the exams together and borrow money for petrol from him. He is planning to throw the murder weapons off a bridge, into the Danube, but doesn't dare because there are so many passers-by near the river, quite pointlessly so early in the day. So the arsenal ends up in the boot, together with his pyjamas, which go under the spare tyre.

After revising for the exams and borrowing 500 schillings out of a cigar box, he drives off with his schoolmate to Ketlassbrunn in Lower Austria. There they call on a priest who used to be the school catechist.

Here they are, already in Ketlassbrunn. The priest is surprised and pleased to see them. He invites the two young students to lunch at an inn, where they eat roast pork and dumplings. Afterwards at the Catholic youth hostel there is a seminar with a professor from Vienna, on the subject 'Man as Cosmos', and 'Crime and Punishment'. As always, Rainer tries to show off by asking questions on these subjects. When they take their leave, the priest shakes their hands and gives them some pastries. Then the schoolmate is taken home. It's been an eventful day, he says, and he enters his flat, which smells of vanilla sauce.

Once again Rainer drives out to the mighty Danube, that great symbol. It is now 7 p.m. He drops the murder weapons into the river near Berger's, the seafood restaurant. The bloody pyjamas are left in the car.

Then, from a public call-box, Rainer phones a girl he hasn't seen for months. She works as an au-pair for a couple who are both doctors, downtown. Their parents met in her home town out in the woods. Renate, the girl, is invited to go dancing at the Picasso Bar. She does in fact dance with Rainer at the Picasso Bar. Rainer drinks two Campari and sodas, Renate drinks a Martini and a Fanta lemonade. Rainer gives a rambling explanation of the structure of the modern music which

is coming from the loudspeakers. Then he stops explaining and takes Renate home.

Next, Rainer drives to the parental flat, where his mother (with forty serious and countless lesser injuries), his sister (with twenty-six sharp-edged deadly injuries, not counting the smaller ones) and also his father (completely pulped, in the carved farmhouse chest) have been decaying the whole time. The three bodies received way over eighty axe wounds, all told, not counting the stab wounds. The heads have been totally smashed in. He used both hands to strike, so the blows would be forceful. Rainer can't spend the night along with this frightful carrion. It gives him the creeps.

He enters his home, which is no longer a home, and switches on the light for a moment, so that people will think the terrible sight is a shock to him. He switches the light off again right away and goes to the police station, where he announces that his mother is lying in the hall, murdered, come and help me find the killer. One policeman runs back with him immediately. Such indescribable amazement, to find two corpses, which you can't tell apart at first, so mutilated that you don't know which is the mother and which the daughter.

The policemen are staggered. Rainer is lying on a stretcher, pale and half unconscious. The doctor gives him a sedative. But his pulse is astoundingly regular, considering the shock, thinks the doctor.

Where are your pyjamas, and where is your father? asks the inspector. My pyjamas must be around somewhere, I took them off this morning and left the house early. I've no idea where my father is.

The bodies are totally unrecognisable with brutal injuries like these, says the policeman, nauseated, although he has seen a thing or two in his line of business. The corpses of the mother and the sister have not been moved. Now the sight of them moves the soul.

But soon the question is raised: where are Rainer's pyjamas and where is Herr Witkowski. Both of these bodies are female.

Was the father the one who did it, maybe? But presently the bloodstained fatherremains are retrieved from the chest. Remnants of his brain that weren't put in the chest are on the floor beside it.

Now the only mystery left is the pyjamas. The question is asked again. This time with a hard-edged suspicion behind it.

When the inspector asks where are your pyjamas for the hundredth time, they must be somewhere, Herr Witkowski, Rainer finally answers: They're stained with blood and you'll find them under the spare tyre in the boot of the car.

Now you know everything. I am at your disposal.