The Unguarded House

by

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CHAPTER ONE

WHEN his mother left the electric fan running at night, it kept him awake, although the rubber blades made only a very slight noise: a flapping whirr and sometimes a click when the curtains got caught in the blades. Then Mother got up, swearing softly to herself, pulled the curtains out of the fan and pinned them between the doors of the bookcase. Mother's bedside lamp had a green silk shade—a watery green, flecked with yellow—and the glass of red wine standing on the night-table looked as though it were ink, a dark slow poison which Mother drank in small sips. She read and smoked and occasionally took a sip of wine.

Lying as still as a mouse, so that she would pay no attention to him, he watched her through half-closed lids and followed the cigarette smoke as it rose to the fan: white and grey layers of smoke which were sucked up, absorbed and spewed out by the soft green rubber blades. The fan was nearly as large as those in the warehouses; it had a peaceful drone and cleansed the air in the room within a few minutes. Then Mother pressed the button on the wall near her bed, not far from where hung the picture of Father—a young, smiling man with a pipe in his mouth, far too young to be the father of an eleven-year-old boy. Father was as young as Luigi in the ice-cream parlour; as young as the nervous little new school-teacher; far younger than Mother, who was as old as the other boys' mothers. Yes, Father was a smiling youth who for the past few weeks had also appeared in his dreams, looking quite different from the picture—a tragic, huddled figure sitting on inky black blots, as on a cloud, without a face, and yet weeping as one who had already been waiting a million years in a uniform without badges of rank or medals, a stranger who had suddenly broken into his dreams, completely different from what he would have liked him to be.

The main thing was to keep still, hardly to breathe, not to

open his eyes, for then he could recognize by the noises in the house how late it was; if no sound came from Glum, it was half-past eleven; if nothing could be heard of Albert, it was eleven. But usually he could still hear Glum's heavy, peaceful tread in the room overhead or Albert in the next room, whistling softly at his work, and Bolda often came downstairs at a late hour to cook herself something in the kitchen. Slouching steps, an abruptly switched-on light, and yet she usually ran into Grandmother whose deep voice boomed out in the parlour: "Well, you greedy slut, what are you doing here in the middle of the night fumbling about, brewing yourself some more of your muck?" And Bolda would laugh and say in her shrill voice: "Yes, you withered old bitch—I'm still hungry. Is it any concern of yours?" Another shrill laugh from Bolda and a dull expressive "Bah!" of disgust from Grandmother. But often they only whispered together and from time to time he would hear laughter—Bolda's shrill laugh, a sinister laugh from Grandmother.

But Glum, pacing up and down upstairs, would be reading his strange books: *Dogma* and *Moral Theology*. Punctually at ten he put out the light and went into the bathroom for a wash—a rush of water and a bang as he lit the gas under the geyser—then Glum returned to his room, put out the light and knelt by his bedside to pray. He always knew when Glum sank heavily to his knees and, if all were quiet in the other rooms, he could hear his muttering. For a long time Glum murmured up there in the dark and when, at last, he stood up and the steel springs of the mattress squeaked, it was exactly half-past eleven.

Everyone in the house—apart from Glum and Albert—had disorderly habits: Bolda might still come down to the kitchen after midnight to brew an infusion of hop leaves which she carried in a brown paper cornet, and Grandmother often went into the kitchen at night, long after the clock had struck one, made herself a whole plate of beef sandwiches and returned to her room with a bottle of red wine under her arm. In the middle of the night, too, she might suddenly realize that her cigarette case was empty—a pretty pale blue porcelain cigarette case which held two packets of twenty. Then she would wander round the house, grumbling softly to herself, looking for cigarettes: slouching, gigantic Grandmother, with the bright corn-coloured hair and rosy cheeks, even first to Albert, for he was the only one who

smoked the brand of cigarettes she liked. Glum smoked a pipe and Grandmother did not like Mother's brand—"weak women's trash" or "it makes me feel ill when I see that yellow straw muck"—while Bolda never had any except a few crumpled, spotted Egyptians which she kept in her cupboard and gave to the postman or the electricity man—cigarettes which aroused Grandmother's irony: "They look as if you'd fished them out of the holy-water stoup and dried them, you old slut. Nun's cigarettes—bah!" And sometimes there were no cigarettes in the house at all and then Uncle Albert had to get dressed in the middle of the night and drive into town to buy some. Or Albert and Grandmother produced their fifty pfennig and one-mark pieces and Albert had to go to the automatic machine. But Grandmother was never satisfied with ten or twenty cigarettes. It had to be a packet of fifty. Bright red packets with the words: TOMAHAWK, PURE VIRGINIA. Long, snow-white, very strong cigarettes. "They must be quite fresh, my dear boy." And she kissed Albert in the corridor when he came back and murmured: "Ah, if you weren't here, my boy, if you weren't here. No son could be better to me."

Then at last she went to her bedroom, ate her thick white bread, well-buttered meat sandwiches, drank her wine and smoked.

Albert was nearly as orderly as Glum. From eleven o'clock onwards no sound came from Uncle Albert and anything that happened in the house after eleven could be attributed to the women—Grandmother, Bolda or Mother. Mother seldom got up, but she read late into the night and puffed away at very flat cigarettes from a yellow packet marked MOSCHEE—PURE TURKISH TOBACCO and very occasionally she took a sip of wine and turned on the fan every hour to pump the smoke out of the room. But Mother often went out, or brought visitors home, and then he was carried over to sleep in Uncle Albert's room. He hated these visits although he liked sleeping in Uncle Albert's room. The visitors came so late—two o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock in the morning, sometimes five. And then Uncle Albert slipped away in the morning and there was no one to have breakfast with him before he went to school. Glum and Bolda had already left the house, Mother slept until ten o'clock and Grandmother never got up before eleven.

Although he always resolved to remain awake, he usually fell asleep just after the fan had been turned off. But when Mother read very late, he woke up twice and three times, particularly when Glum had forgotten to oil the fan. Then it grated on the first turns, crackled its way slowly up to speed before settling down to a monotonous hum; but the first squeaks woke him up with a start and he saw Mother lying in the same position as before—on raised elbows, reading, a cigarette in her left hand, and the wine in the glass had not decreased. Sometimes Mother read the Bible or he saw the small brown leather missal in her hand, and, for reasons which were not clear to him, he felt ashamed, tried to go to sleep or coughed to catch her attention, for it was late and everyone else in the house was asleep. Mother immediately jumped up when he coughed and came over to his bed. She laid a hand on his forehead, kissed him on the cheek, and said quietly: "Do you need anything, dear?"

"No, I'm all right," he would say, without opening his eyes.

"I'll put the light out now."

"No—go on reading."

"Are you really feeling all right? You don't seem to have a temperature."

"No, I'm quite all right, really."

When she pulled the blanket up to his throat, he was amazed how soft her hand was. She went back to bed, switched off the light, letting the fan run in the dark until the air was quite fresh, and, while the fan was still humming, she asked him: "Wouldn't you like to have the room upstairs, next to Glum?"

"No—let me stay here."

"Or the living-room next door? We could clear it."

"No—really, no."

"Or Albert's room perhaps. Albert could have another one."

"No."

Until suddenly the speed of the fan slowed down and he knew that Mother had pressed the button in the dark. A few more squeaking turns and there was silence, and very far away in the darkness he could hear the trains and a hard clatter and crash as the single goods trucks were shunted. In his mind's eye he could see the notice: GOODS STATION EAST, where he had once been with Welzkam. Welzkam's uncle was fireman on the engine which had to shunt and couple the single trucks into a train.

"We must tell Glum to oil the fan."

"I'll tell him."

"Yes, do that, dear. But you must go to sleep now. Good night."

"Good night."

But he could not get to sleep and he knew that Mother was awake too, although she lay there without a sound. Darkness and silence. . . . From afar and almost unreal came the bumping of the goods trucks and out of the silence came words—words which disturbed him—the word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker, the same word that constantly appeared on the wall, in the corridor of the house where Brielach lived. And the next word which Brielach had picked up and now constantly used: IMMORAL. He often thought of Gäseler too, but he was so far away and he felt neither fear nor hatred when he thought of him, only a feeling of annoyance, and he was far more afraid of Grandmother who constantly flung this name at him, wormed it out of him, pestered him with it, although Glum shook his head so emphatically.

Later he sensed that Mother had fallen asleep, but he could not always get to sleep. He tried to conjure the picture of his father out of the darkness but he could not capture it. Thousands of silly images came into his mind from films, magazines and picture books: Blondie, Hopalong Cassidy and Donald Duck, but his father's picture never came. Brielach's Uncle Leo came, the baker came, Grebhake and Wolters came, the two boys who had committed an immodest act in the bushes: flushed faces, open flies and the bitter-sweet odour of fresh sap . . . was immoral the same as immodest? But Father never came, the man who in his pictures looked far too carefree, serene and young to be a real father. A characteristic of a father was the BREAKFAST EGG and Father did not look like the BREAKFAST EGG. A characteristic of a father was ORDERLINESS, a virtue which Uncle Albert possessed to a certain degree, but his father did not represent ORDERLINESS. ORDERLINESS was getting up early, the breakfast egg, work, the paper, coming home and sleep. None of this corresponded in the least to his father who now lay in his grave far away on the outskirts of a Russian village. Did he now, after ten years, already look like the skeleton in the Health Museum? A bony, grinning frame, private soldier and poet, a bewildering combina-

tion of attributes. Brielach's father had been a sergeant-major—sergeant-major and motor mechanic. Other boys' fathers had been major and company director, sergeant and book-keeper, corporal and newspaper editor, but none of the boys' fathers had been private soldier and poet. Brielach's Uncle Leo had been a gunner sergeant-major—gunner sergeant-major and tram conductor. A flashy coloured photograph on the kitchen sideboard between SAGO and SEMOLINA. What was SAGO? A mysterious word that conjured up pictures of South America.

Later the catechism questions came to the fore: a spate of figures, each connected with a question and an answer.

Question 11: How does God treat sinners who have the will to repent? Reply: God freely forgives every sinner who has the will to repent. And the bewildering verse: "IF THOU, O LORD, SHALT OBSERVE INIQUITIES, LORD, WHO SHALL ENDURE IT?"

No one would prevail. According to Brielach's considered opinion all grown-ups were IMMORAL and all children immodest. Brielach's mother was IMMORAL, so was Uncle Leo, probably also the baker and Mother who had to listen to whispered reproaches in the parlour: "Where are you always flying off to?"

There were exceptions according to Brielach: Uncle Albert, the joiner who lived downstairs, Frau and Herr Borussiak, Glum and Bolda, but first and foremost Frau Borussiak with her warm husky voice and the wonderful songs which rang out into the courtyard above Brielach's room.

In the dark it was good to think of Frau Borussiak. It was consoling and without danger: she often used to sing "Green was the Land of my Youth," and when she sang it, he could see nothing but green. A green filter passed before his eyes and everything turned green, even now, in bed in the dark, when he thought of Frau Borussiak, heard her sing and saw her through his closed eyelids. "Green was the Land of my Youth."

And the song about the Vale of Woe was beautiful: "Star of the sea, I greet thee." And at each 'greet' everything was green. At a certain point, a little later, he fell asleep, somewhere between Frau Borussiak's voice and the word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker: an Uncle-Leo-word hissed out in the warm, dark, sweet-smelling baker's cellar—a word whose meaning, thanks to Brielach, was now quite clear. It had something to do with the union of men and women and was closely related to the

Sixth Commandment; it was immoral and led to thoughts of the verse which bothered him so much: IF THOU, O LORD, SHALT OBSERVE INIQUITIES, LORD, WHO SHALL ENDURE IT?

Sometimes he fell asleep at Hopalong Cassidy—a picturesque horseman whose adventures were rather childish, just as the guests whom Mother always brought home with her were childish. Nevertheless, it was good to hear Mother breathing. Her bed was often empty, sometimes for days on end, and then Grandmother would whisper to her reproachfully in the parlour: "Where are you always flying off to?" And Mother never replied.

There was always a risk waking up in the morning. If Albert was wearing a clean shirt and a tie when he woke him, everything was in order and there was a proper breakfast in Albert's room with plenty of time, and he did not have to rush and could go over his prep once more with Albert. But if Albert was in his pyjamas, his hair uncombed and lines on his face, then the hot coffee had to be gulped down quickly and a rapid letter of excuse would be written to teacher: *Dear Herr Wiemer: Please excuse the boy for being late today. His mother had to go away and I forgot to wake him punctually. My apologies. Respectfully. . . .*

It was bad when Mother brought home visitors. Silly laughter which he could hear from Albert's room, a restless night in Albert's huge bed, and sometimes Albert did not go to bed but took a bath between five and six in the morning. Rushing water and splashing next door. He fell asleep again and was dead tired when Albert finally woke him. A drowsy morning at school and in the afternoon, as compensation, the cinema or the ice-cream parlour or a visit to Albert's mother. BIETENHAHN, the key to the Biegerwald. The fishpond in which Glum caught fishes with his bare hands, only to let them go again; the room over the cow-stall; or playing football for hours with Albert and Brielach on the hard, close-cropped turf. FOR HOURS, until one was tired and hungry for the bread which Albert's mother baked herself, and Uncle Will who always said: "Put some more butter on it. . . ." A shake of the head . . . "More butter on it." . . . another shake of the head . . . "Still more butter" . . . And out there Brielach did something which he seldom did at home—he laughed.

There were many stations between which he could fall asleep: Bietenhahn and his father, Blondie and immortality. The flapping

whirr of the fan was a friendly sound because it meant that Mother was there. Pages of her book being turned over, Mother's breathing, the striking of a match and the short, tiny gurgle when she drank a sip of wine, and the mysterious delayed current, long after the fan had been turned off; the smoke driven away by the fan and he lost consciousness somewhere between Gäseler and "If you admit your sins".

CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS best of all in Bietenhahn where Albert's mother kept a café for trippers. Albert's mother baked everything herself, including the bread. She did it because it pleased her and in Bietenhahn he and Brielach could do whatever they liked. They could go fishing or wander through the Brertal, take out their canoe or play football FOR HOURS behind the house. The fishpond stretched far into the wood and they were usually accompanied by Albert's Uncle Will, a brother of Albert's mother. Will had suffered since his earliest youth from a malady which went by the name of 'night sweats'—a curious term which made Grandmother and Glum laugh. Bolda also tittered when 'night sweats' were mentioned. Will was nearly sixty, and at the age of ten his mother had once found him perspiring heavily in bed. The boy was still bathed in sweat on the following morning. In her anxiety she took him to the doctor, for there was a superstition that night sweats were a sure sign of consumption. Young Will's lungs were perfectly sound, but, as the doctor said, he was a little weak, a little nervous, and the doctor—he had been lying now for forty years in a suburban graveyard—had said fifty years ago: "Coddle the child a little."

Will had enjoyed this coddling throughout his life. "A little weak, a little nervous," and the night sweats became an income which his family had to provide. For some time Martin and Brielach used to feel their foreheads of a morning on their way to school and tell each other that they, too, were sometimes quite moist. Brielach, in particular, sweated often and heavily in the night, but Brielach had not been coddled for a single day since he was born.

His mother had borne him while the bombs were falling on the city, in the streets, and finally on the house in whose cellar she was screaming in travail. She lay on a dirty air-raid bunk,

greasy from the boot polish which the Army issued to its soldiers, her head on the place where a soldier had put his jackboots. The blubbery stench had made her vomit far more than her actual condition, and when someone laid a used face towel under head, the smell of wartime soap was a relief which almost made her weep. The sickly-sweet scent of artificial perfume on this towel appeared to her as something above price.

When her pains came upon her she was helped by her neighbours. She was sick over the shoes of the bystanders and the best and most cool-headed helper was a fourteen-year-old girl who boiled water on a Primus stove, sterilized a pair of scissors and cut the umbilical cord. She carried out the instructions from a book she should not by rights have read—and yet with kindness and praiseworthy courage, this girl carried out what she had read at night in the book with the red, yellow and white pictures long after her parents had gone to sleep. She had severed the cord with her mother's sterilized sewing scissors, and the latter looked on in suspicious admiration of her daughter's knowledge.

When the 'All Clear' sounded they heard the sirens very far away as wild beasts in the cover of a wood would hear the sound of huntsmen's horns. The ruins of the house which had collapsed overhead caused these strangely sinister acoustics and Brielach's mother, who had remained alone in the cellar with her fourteen-year-old helper, heard the screams of the others when they could not get out through the rubble-filled corridor.

"What's your name?" she asked the girl, whom she had never seen before.

"Henrietta Schedel," replied the girl, taking a brand new cake of green soap from her pocket, and Frau Brielach said: "Let me smell it." And she smelled the soap and wept for joy while the girl wrapped the newborn baby in a blanket.

She possessed nothing in the world now except her bag with a little money, her ration cards, the dirty towel which some kind person had left under her head, and a few photographs of her husband. One showed him in civilian clothes as a motor mechanic and he looked very young and was laughing; another as a tank corporal, also laughing, a third as a tank sergeant in battle-dress with the Iron Cross, second class, again laughing; and the very latest, which she had received only a week earlier, showed

him as a tank sergeant-major with both Iron Crosses—and he was still laughing.

Ten days after her confinement, without having been consulted, she found herself in an eastbound train; two months later in a village in Saxony she learned that her husband had been killed.

At the age of eighteen she had married a good-looking tank corporal whose body now lay mouldering somewhere between Saporoshe and Dnepropetrovsk. She was now twenty-one, the widow of a handsome sergeant-major, had a twelve-week-old baby, two towels, two scarves, a little money and she was pretty.

The baby boy, whom she had had christened Heinrich after his father, grew up in the belief that 'Uncles' went with mothers.

His earliest years stood under the sign of an uncle called Erich who wore a brown uniform. He came into the mysterious category of uncle and a second no less mysterious category of Nazi. Something seemed to be wrong with both these categories. He began to realize this as a four-year-old but was never quite clear on the subject.

However, he never forgot Uncle Erich. Uncle Erich suffered from a malady which was called ASTHMA—gasping and groaning all night, the pathetic cry of "I'm suffocating," cloths soaked in vinegar, strange-smelling infusions and the odour of camphor remained in the child's memory. And an object which had belonged to Uncle Erich went with them from Saxony back to their home town—a cigarette lighter. Erich remained in Saxony but the lighter went with them and the odours remained in Heinrich's memory.

A new uncle appeared whom Heinrich associated with two odours: Yankees—this was the smell of Virginia cigarettes—and wet plaster. Subsidiary odours of this uncle were: the smell of melted margarine in the frying pan, the smell of potato chips—and this uncle, who was called Gert, was not so far in the distant past as the one called Erich who had remained in Saxony. Gert was by profession a paver and this word conjured up the smell of wet plaster, not unlike wet cement, and with Gert went that constantly repeated word which remained in his mother's vocabulary after he had gone—the word SHIT, a word which, for some strange reason, his mother was allowed to use but never he. Gert, too, apart from these odours and this word, left an object

behind as a souvenir: a wrist-watch which he gave to Heinrich's mother, an army wrist-watch—eighteen jewels, a mysterious sign of its quality.

At this time Heinrich Brielach was five and a half, and he brought home food because he shopped for nearly the whole building on the black market. Armed with a little money and a good memory, this good-looking boy, who resembled his father, went out at midday and procured whatever was to be had—bread, tobacco, cigarettes, coffee, sweets and sometimes great rarities such as margarine, butter and electric light bulbs. As a result of his highly successful errands he was looked upon as a leader by the whole building, for he knew all the black marketeers and what they dealt in. He was considered by the black marketeers as tabu and anyone who was caught cheating the boy was ruthlessly boycotted and had to hawk his wares in some other part of the town.

His intelligence and alertness not only earned him a daily commission to the value of a loaf of bread but also a skill in arithmetic which he would never have acquired at school. The third-year pupils were doing sums which he had mastered long before he ever went to school.

"How much does a quarter of coffee cost if a kilo costs 2 marks 30?"

The solution of such problems was a daily occurrence for him since there had been very bad months when bread could only be obtained in quantities of 50 and 100 grammes, tobacco and coffee being sold in even smaller quantities, requiring a knowledge of fractions unless one wanted to be cheated.

Gert disappeared very suddenly. His odours remained in the boy's memory; wet plaster, Virginia tobacco, potato chips fried with onions and margarine; his legacy was the word SHIT, which was forthwith incorporated in his mother's vocabulary and one material object—the army wrist-watch. On Gert's sudden disappearance, his mother wept, which she had not done when Erich left, and a little later another uncle appeared who was called Karl. After a short time Karl laid claim to the title of father although he had no right to it. Karl was a civil servant and did not, as Gert had done, wear an old army tunic, but a real suit. In a clear voice he announced the beginning of a 'new life'.

Heinrich always called him, in retrospect, 'new-life Karl', for he uttered these words several times each day. The smell associated with Karl was the smell of soup which was issued at a favourable price to state employees. The soups—whatever they were called, whether they were savoury or sweet—all smelled of preservative and a lot of other things. Every day Karl brought home in an old army mess-tin half his portion and sometimes more when it was his turn to get the left-overs—a perquisite which Heinrich could never quite grasp. But whether the soup tasted of sweet biscuit flour or synthetic oxtail, it invariably smelled of preservative and yet it was delicious. Since Karl usually carried the mess tin, a canvas cover was sewn over it and the handle wrapped in grey stocking wool; he could not carry the soup in his brief-case because the trams were crowded and the soup slopped over and made Karl's brief-case dirty. Karl was friendly and temperate, but his appearance had unpleasant consequences for he was as firm as he was temperate and he forbade any dealings on the black market. "I can't afford to encourage it as a civil servant . . . and besides, it undermines morality and the national economy." Karl's firmness came in a very bad year—1914. Short rations, when there were any rations at all, and Karl's supplementary soup ration did not make up for the bread which Heinrich had procured every day for the house. Heinrich, who always slept in one room with his mother and Karl as he had with Mother and Uncle Gert and with Mother and Uncle Erich, had to turn round when Karl sat with his mother near the wireless with the lights dimmed. When he turned over he could clearly see the picture of his father in the uniform of a tank sergeant-major taken just before he was killed. During the reigns of these various uncles his father's picture had hung on the wall. But when he turned over again he could still hear Karl's whispering without catching the actual words. And he heard his mother's giggles and at the time he hated them for giggling.

Later there were quarrels between his mother and Karl about some mysterious thing called 'it'. "I'll get rid of 'it'," his mother always said. "You shan't get rid of 'it'," Uncle Karl invariably replied. Only later did Heinrich understand what 'it' was. His mother went to hospital and Karl was irritated and distraught and merely said to him: "You can't help."

Corridors in the hospital that smelt of soup; many, many women in a large ward and his mother with a sallow face, but smiling, 'although she was in such pain'; Karl standing scowling beside her bed. "It's all over between us, you've got rid of it. . . ."

That mysterious 'it', and Karl had left even before his mother came out of hospital. Heinrich remained for five days in the care of a neighbour who immediately reinstated him as her black-market messenger. But now there were new faces and new prices and no one bothered any more whether he was cheated or not. Bilkhager, from whom he had always bought bread, was in gaol, and white-haired Grandpa, who had always been good for tobacco and sweets, was also in gaol, because he had been caught trying to slaughter a horse in his house. Everything now was different, more expensive and more bitter. He was pleased when his mother returned from hospital, for the neighbour complained the whole day about her loss of weight and kept talking of food—fairy tales about chocolate, meat, pudding and cream which bewildered him, because he could not imagine what they were.

His mother was silent and thoughtful, more friendly than before, and she took a job in the kitchen where the soup was cooked for the state employees. Now there was a two-pint pot of soup and what remained over was exchanged for bread or tobacco. His mother sat with him alone at night by the wireless and was quiet and thoughtful, and if she spoke it was always to say: "All men are cowards."

The neighbour died—a withered remnant, a dark, haggard, gluttonous skeleton, who felt obliged to mention ten times a day that in the old days she had weighed more than two hundredweight. "Look at me, just look at me. I used to weigh more than two hundredweight. At one time I was even 230 pounds. And now look, I've shrunk to a mere 144." But what were hundredweights? A measure of weight which conjured up pictures of potatoes, flour and sacks of briquettes. Two hundredweight of briquettes filled the little barrow he had so often trundled to the goods yards to pinch coal. Cold nights and the whistle of the 'minder' who had climbed up the signal pole to tip him off when the police were coming. The truck was heavy when it was loaded with two hundredweight—and the neighbour had weighed more than this!

Now she was dead. Asters on a bare mound of earth. . . .

Dies irae, dies illa, and when her furniture was fetched by relations, a photograph remained lying on the steps—a big yellowing picture showing the neighbour standing in front of a house called 'Villa Elisabeth'. Vineyards in the background, a tufa grotto in which stone dwarfs played with little barrows, in the foreground the neighbour, fat and fair-haired, and at the window a man smoking a pipe; and over the house gable the words 'Villa Elisabeth'. Naturally; her name was Elisabeth.

Into the vacant room came a man called Leo, wearing the uniform of a tram conductor—a blue cap with a red band. And what Leo called 'his halter': a purse, a wooden box for the rolls of tickets, a little sponge in an aluminium holder and a ticket punch. A lot of straps, a lot of leather and Leo's very red, very clean, unpleasant face. . . . Songs which Leo whistled and the wireless constantly blaring. . . . Women in tram conductress's uniforms laughing and dancing in Leo's room. Shouts of 'Prosit'.

The woman who had previously weighed more than two hundredweight and whose picture of the 'Villa Elisabeth' had been left behind had been quiet. Leo was noisy. He was the best client for the soup, which he paid for with cigarettes after haggling about the price. Sweet soup was his particular favourite. One evening, when Leo brought tobacco in exchange for soup, he suddenly put down the pot, looked at Mother with a smile and said: "See how they dance today. Have you danced in the last few years?"

Leo danced quite crazily. He flung his legs in the air, waved his arms and let forth great howls. His mother laughed and said: "No, I haven't danced for a long time." "Well, you should," replied Leo. "Come over here." He hummed a tune, took Mother by the hand, pulled her off the chair and danced with her. Mother's face altered completely. She suddenly smiled and looked much younger. "Ah," she sighed, "I often went dancing in the old days."

"Then come along with me, I belong to a dance club," said Leo. "You're a beautiful dancer."

And his mother actually went to the dance club and Leo became Uncle Leo and once more there was an 'it'. Heinrich listened attentively and soon realized that this time the rôles had been changed. This time his mother said what Karl used to say:

"I'm going to keep 'it'," and Leo said what his mother used to say: "You must get rid of 'it'."

By this time Heinrich was in his second school year and he had long since known what 'it' meant. He had learned it from Martin who, in turn, had learned it from his Uncle Albert: that through the union of men and women children were born, and it was clear that 'it' was a child and now he only had to substitute child for 'it'.

"I'm keeping the child," said Mother. "You must get rid of the child," said Uncle Leo. "I'll get rid of it," Mother had said to Karl. "You shan't get rid of it," Karl had replied. That his mother had had union with Karl was now clear to him, although at the time he had not thought in terms of union but something else which did not sound so respectable. So one could get rid of children. So the child on whose account Karl had left had been done away with. And yet Karl had not by any means been the worst of the 'uncles'.

The child arrived and Leo threatened: "I'll put it in the Institution if you give up your job." But Mother had to give up her job, for the soup which was distributed at a favourable price to the state employees was stopped, and soon there was no longer a black market. No one was keen on soup any more and things appeared in the shops which had never existed on the black market. Mother wept and 'it' was very small and was called Wilma after Mother. Leo was angry until Mother found work with a baker.

Uncle Albert came and offered Mother money which she did not take, and Uncle Leo shouted at her and Martin's Uncle Albert shouted at Leo.

Uncle Leo's special odour was shaving lotion. Leo was red-faced, red from cleanliness, and had pitch black hair. He spent a great deal of time manicuring his fingernails and always wore a yellow muffler with his uniform. And Leo was a miser. He never spent money on children and in this respect he was different from Martin's Uncle Will and Martin's Uncle Albert, who were always very generous. Will was not the same kind of uncle as Leo, and Leo was not the same kind of uncle as Albert. Slowly the uncles fell into their different categories: Will was a real uncle, whereas Leo was an 'uncle' such as Erich, Gert and Karl had been: uncles who had union with Mother. But, again,

Albert was a different kind of uncle from Will and Leo; not a real uncle like Will, who was in the nature of a grandfather, but also not an uncle who had union.

Father was the picture on the wall: a laughing sergeant-major who had been photographed ten years before. Although he had once looked upon Father as old, he now considered him as young, growing closer in age every year: he was slowly growing up towards Father, who was now only a little more than double his age. In the beginning Father had been four times, five times as old as himself, and on another photo which hung next to his, Mother was eighteen. Did she not look almost like a girl about to take her first Communion?

Uncle Will was nearly six times as old as himself and yet in comparison with Will he felt old and experienced, wise and tired. And he enjoyed Will's friendliness as he enjoyed the friendliness of a baby, the affection of his little sister who was growing up so fast. He looked after her, gave her her bottle and warmed the bread and milk, for Mother was not at home in the afternoon and Leo refused to do anything for the child. "I'm not a nurse," he said. Later Heinrich bathed Wilma, put her on the potty, and took her with him when he went shopping and fetched Mother in the evening from the bakery.

Martin's Uncle Albert was quite different from Will. He was a man who knew about MONEY. A man who, although he had MONEY, knew how dreadful it was when the price of bread rose and margarine was scarce, an uncle he would have liked—not an uncle who had union and not an Uncle Will who was only good to play or go for a walk with. Will was good but one couldn't TALK to Will, while one could talk to Uncle Albert ALTHOUGH he had MONEY.

For various reasons he liked going OUT THERE. Mainly because of Uncle Albert, then because of Martin, who as regards money was like Uncle Will. He quite liked Grandma although she was mad. But he also went for the football and the food in the refrigerator, and it was so simple to leave Wilma in the pram in the garden, to play football and to be rid of Uncle Leo for hours on end.

It was appalling, however, to see how MONEY was spent OUT THERE. He was given everything out there, and they were nice to him and it was not only because of the MONEY that he had

a dark presentiment there would be a disaster one day. There were things which had nothing to do with MONEY: the difference, for example, between Uncle Leo and Uncle Albert, and there was the difference between Martin's shock at the word Mother had used to the baker—and his own slight shock at hearing on his mother's lips for the first time a word which he had previously only heard used by Uncle Leo and a tram conductress. He found the word hateful and it offended his ear, but he had not been as shocked as Martin had been. These were differences which had to do only partially with MONEY, differences understood by Uncle Albert alone and which made him see clearly that he must not be TOO GOOD to him.

CHAPTER THREE

FOR several minutes she had felt that someone was staring at her from behind with the obstinacy of a conqueror type who was certain of being listened to. There were differences: she could sense at once when someone looked at her from behind with the spaniel eyes of a humble suitor. But this man was sure of himself. His glance would have no trace of melancholy and she busied herself for a whole minute trying to imagine him: dark, smart, a trifle snobbish. Perhaps he had laid ten to one that he would go to bed with her within three weeks.

She was tired and it was no effort to ignore this unknown suitor completely, for she was looking forward to the week-end with Albert and the boy in the country with Albert's mother. It was already autumn and there would be few customers out there. It was wonderful just to listen to Albert when he argued over bait with Glum and Will. And she would take books with her to read while the children, Martin and his schoolmate, played football and perhaps she would let herself be persuaded to go fishing with Glum and allow him to explain everything to her about bait and casting, the different hooks and the vast patience required.

She continued to sense the stranger's glance and at the same time experienced once more the soporific effect of Schurbigel's voice. Whenever a lecture had to be given on some cultural subject Schurbigel was always in the chair. She hated him and regretted the lax politeness which had made her accept his invitation. It would have been far better to go to the cinema with Martin and eat ice-creams later; to read the evening paper over coffee while Martin amused himself choosing gramophone records, which the girl in the ice-cream parlour put on for him only too willingly. But now she had already spotted a few acquaintances and it would obviously end in a wasted evening,

hastily prepared sandwiches, uncorked bottles, coffee—"or do you prefer tea?"—cigarettes and Albert's dead-pan face when he had to talk to her guests and give them information about her husband.

It was too late. Schurbigel was speaking, and then Father Willibrord would introduce her to people and the unknown admirer, whose glance lay heavily on her neck like the beam of a lamp would appear. The best thing was to doze off and, in this way, store up a little sleep.

She was always doing what she did not want to do, and it was not vanity that drove her to it. Neither vanity inspired by the fame of her husband who had been killed, nor the wish to meet such dreadfully interesting people. It was that feeling of swimming which enticed her to drift, to let herself relax, to the point where everything was more or less meaningless: to see sequences out of bad films and to dream of unconnected material thrown away by the cutter, unsuccessful shots with indifferent actors and bad lighting. She struggled desperately against her weariness, pulled herself together and listened to Schurbigel—a thing she had not done for a long time. The glance, too, still focussed obstinately on her neck, tired her, while the urge to turn round could only be checked with a great effort, and she did not want to turn round because she knew the type exactly without having set eyes on him. Intellectual petticoat-chasers were anathema to her. Their lives were determined by reflexes and resentments, mostly images taken from literature, hovering between Sarthe and Claudel. They dreamed of hotel bedrooms like the hotel bedroom they saw on the films in certain highbrow cinemas. Films with dim lighting, metallic dialogue, 'poor in treatment but exciting', pregnant with existentialist music: wan men bending over wan women while the cigarettes—an effective trick—burned away wildly on the bedside table in thick smoke spirals. "It is wicked what we are doing, but we must do it." Fade out, and in the increased darkness the crazily smoking cigarettes on the bedside table. Cut while the 'inevitable' takes place.

The better she got to know such suitors, the more she loved her husband and, although she had the reputation of being a tart, she had not really slept with another man for ten years. Rai had been different. His complexes had been as genuine as his ingenuousness.

Now she let herself be lulled to sleep by the drone of Schurbigel's voice and for a while forgot the stranger's obstinate glance on the nape of her neck.

Schurbigel was tall and heavily built; the degree of melancholy in his face increased from lecture to lecture, and he gave a great many. With each lecture, too, his reputation increased as did his belly. He always reminded Nella of a monstrously intelligent, monstrously sad, constantly expanding balloon, which would burst, leaving nothing except a handful of concentrated evil-smelling gloom.

His subject was a typical Schurbigel subject: *The Position of the Creative Artist in Relation to Church and State in the Machine Age.* His voice was pleasant—oily—intelligent, palpitating with hidden sensibility, full of endless melancholy. He was thirty-four, had many supporters and few enemies, but the latter had managed to discover Schurbigel's doctor's thesis in an obscure central German university library; this thesis had been written in 1934 and bore the title: *Our Führer in Modern Poetry.* On account of this, Schurbigel began each of his lectures with a few remarks on the satirical perfidy of youthful stentors, sectarian pessimists and flagellant heretics who were incapable of understanding the conversion of an intellectually mature man. But his tone remained friendly even to his enemies, using a weapon which maddened because it took the wind out of their sails. Schurbigel practised forgiveness and he forgave everybody everyting. On the platform, his gestures were those of an amiable hairdresser entirely devoted to the good of his clients. As he spoke he seemed to be giving friend and foe alike hot towels, to be spraying them with fragrant cooling lotions; he massaged their scalps, fanned them, dried them, soaped them, long and vigorously, with an extraordinarily fragrant and expensive soap, while his oily voice uttered incredibly intelligent things. Schurbigel was a pessimist but not to excess. Words such as *élite*, catacombs and desperation floated like light buoys in the intelligent unruffled stream of his speech, while he practised his secret hairdresser's arts on his imaginary clients: gentle massage, hot, cold and lukewarm towels and frictions. It was as though he were conferring upon his audience all the benefits to be found in a fashionable hairdresser's catalogue.

In actual fact he had grown up in a suburban barber's saloon. The "unbelievably talented child" was quickly discovered and

advanced. But the podgy little boy never forgot the stultifying drabness of the dirty little saloon which his father had kept: the snipping of the scissors—the flash of nickel in the grey half-light—the mild hum of the electric clippers, the quiet chatter, the smell of various hair tonics, soaps and scent sprays, the clink of small coins in the cash register, the discreet handing out of packages, the strips of paper on which the shaving soap slowly dried so that fair, black or red hair seemed to have been caught in dry sugar icing; and the two warm, dark wooden cabins where his mother worked—artificial light, cigarette smoke, the dreary scandal during which, at a certain point, the voices grew shrill. When there were no customers in the shop, his friendly, very gloomy father came into the back parlour to smoke a cigarette and hear his vocabulary. Schurbigel had a sensitive ear and he soon grew depressed. His father had never learned the proper pronunciation of Latin words; he persisted in saying *genūs* instead of *genŭs*, *ancilla* instead of *ancīlla* and when his son conjugated the verb *titillare* a foolish grin appeared on his face, for his associations were all of rather a smutty nature.

Now Schurbigel gratified his audience with a mysterious pomade, anointing their ears, foreheads and faces. Then he whipped off the barber's overall, gave a curt bow, picked up his notes and left the platform with an inscrutable smile. The applause was loud and long, but restrained as Schurbigel preferred it. He did not like loud hand-clapping. He stuck his right hand in his trouser pocket and toyed with a small box of glucose pills. The clear yet respectable tinkle of the pills calmed his nerves and with a smile he took the outstretched hand of Father Willibrord, who whispered to him: "Magnificent, simply magnificent." Schurbigel said good-bye for he had to leave immediately to open the Oberland session. He was an expert on modern painting, modern music and modern poetry. He loved the most difficult themes because they lent themselves to bold concepts and audacious interpretations. Schurbigel's audacity was as great as his goodwill. For choice he openly praised all those whom he knew to be his enemies and found fault with his friends. He seldom praised a friend and thus acquired a reputation for incorruptibility. Schurbigel was incorruptible. He had enemies but he himself was never hostile.

After the war Schurbigel had discovered the fantastic lure

of religion (Saul of Tarsus was frequently quoted as an example). To the surprise of his friends he became a Catholic and a patron of Catholic artists. His great advantage was that he could claim to have rendered a service to the arts some ten years earlier—the discovery of Raimund Bach, whom he had at that time hailed as the greatest poet of his generation. As editor of a big Nazi paper, he had discovered him, had got him published, and so he could begin every lecture on modern poetry with the phrase—and here even his enemies were silenced—"When in 1935 I was the first to print a poem by our poet Bach, who was killed in Russia, I knew that a new era had begun in German poetry."

With this publication he had acquired the right to call Nella "my dear Nella," and she could do nothing about it although she knew that Rai had hated him as she herself now hated him. He had acquired the right to drink wine and tea at her house one evening every three months, when he would bring with him half a dozen untidily dressed youths; the photo "The poet's widow with her husband's discoverer" was trotted out at least every six months.

Nella was relieved to see him go. She hated him but found him comical. When the applause died away and she was fully awake, she felt that the glance was no longer focussed on the nape of her neck but was now on her face. She looked up and saw the man who had tried so hard to catch her eye coming towards her with Father Willibrord. He was still young and, contrary to the fashion, very discreetly dressed in a dark grey suit with a neatly knotted tie. His face was sympathetic, with a trace of that ironical intelligence to be found among editors who have gone over from political leaders to serials. It was typical of Father Willibrord's naïveness that he should take seriously people like Schurbigel and this stranger who now slowly came towards her, waiting to be introduced.

The young man was dark, as she had imagined him, but was by no means the type of intellectual petticoat-chaser she had envisaged. To bewilder him even more she smiled. Would he fall for this little twitch of the muscles? He did, and as he bent down to kiss her hand she saw the thick, black, well-parted hair.

"Herr Gäseler," said Father Willibrord, "is working on an anthology of poetry and would like to discuss with you, my dear Nella, which of Rai's poems he should include."

"What did you say your name was?" she asked, and by his face she saw that he had mistaken her surprise for emotion.

Summer in Russia, a foxhole, an insignificant little subaltern who had sent Rai to his death. Had Albert's slaps fallen on these dark, immaculately shaved cheeks ten years before?

". . . I hit him in the face so hard that for a moment I could see the mark of my fingers on his dark cheeks, and I paid for this slap with six months in the military prison in Odessa." Alert, rather anxious, suspicious eyes. . . . Life cut short . . . Rai's life, mine and the boy's life through the vanity of a little black-haired Lieutenant who insisted upon his orders being carried out; three-quarters of the beautiful film which had been made now had to be cut and relegated to the lumber-room from which she had to rebuild in pieces dreams which had been destined not to be dreams. The leading actor flung out and the rest of the cast—the boy and Albert—forced to make a new, bodged film. The producer had handed over for a couple of hours to a junior deputy who had had other ideas as to the rest of the film. The leading actor flung out! Hers, Albert's, the boy's and Grandmother's lives ruined on account of this little duffer who stood there obstinately taking her bewilderment for emotion. Oh, little, handsome, intelligent bungler with your suspicious look, compiler of anthologies, if it's you—although you seem to me too young—but if it's you, you shall play the lead in the third reel and have a melodramatic end: a mythical figure in my boy's thoughts, the bogey man in Grandmother's memory, charged with a ten years' old bitter hatred. You'll feel as giddy as I do now.

"Gäseler," he said with a smile.

"Herr Gäseler has been writing the leader for two weeks in the *Messenger*. Don't you feel well, my dear Nella?"

"No, not at all well."

"What about a drink. Would you care for a cup of coffee?"

"Thank you," she replied.

"Are you coming with us, Father?"

"Yes."

But she still had to shake Trimborn by the hand, to greet Frau Mesewitz and she heard someone murmur: "Poor Nella's getting old." She wondered whether she should telephone to Albert and ask him to come round. Albert would recognize him and spare her a lot of difficult questions. Although everything

seemed to contradict that it could be he, she was almost certain that it was. He looked twenty-five, but he could easily be twenty-eight and would therefore have been at the utmost nineteen at the time.

"I wanted to write to you," he said, as they went down the stairs.

"It would have been pointless," she replied.

He raised his eyebrows and his ridiculous offended look irritated her even more. "I haven't read a letter for ten years. I chuck them all, unopened, into the wastepaper basket."

She stopped at the door, shook hands with the priest and said: "No, I must go home, I don't feel well. . . . Ring me up if you like, but don't give your name on the telephone. Do you understand? Don't give your name."

"What is the matter, my dear Nella?"

"Nothing. I'm at the end of my tether, I'm so tired."

"We should so much have liked to see you in Brernich next week. Herr Gäseler is lecturing there. . . ."

"Ring me up if you like," she said, leaving the two men standing there and running off.

At last she was out of the bright lights and could turn off into the dark street where Luigi's ice-cream parlour lay.

She had sat there a hundred times with Rai and it was the most appropriate place to patch the film together, to put the strips which had become dreams into the projector. Lights out, a pressure on the button and the dream, which had been intended to be reality, flashed through her head.

Luigi smiled and immediately found the record he always played whenever she appeared: Savage, sentimental primitiveness, hectic and captivating, and she waited eagerly for the place where the refrain rang out boldly before descending into unpredictable depths, while she obstinately ran the first reel of the film that had been no dream. . . .

It had begun here, yes here, where things had changed so little. Into the brickwork above the shop window had been inserted a gaudy glass cockerel—green as the heath and red as a pomegranate, yellow like the flags on the ammunition trains and black as coal. And the sign which the bird held in its beak, the area of four bricks in show-white glass with red letters, read: "HÄHNELS, ice cream, 144 different varieties." The cockerel had

long since recovered his pristine splendour and cast his bright lights on the faces of the customers, over the bar, into the furthermost corners and on her, turning her hands a pallid yellow as she had once seen them lying on that table. The first sequence began.

A young man came to her table, his dark grey shadow fell on her hand and before she could look up at him he said: "Take off that brown jacket, it doesn't suit you." Then he stood behind her, calmly raised her arms and removed her brown Deutsches Mädchen jacket. He threw it on the ground, kicked it into a corner of the ice-cream parlour and sat down beside her. "Naturally, I owe you an explanation——" and she still could not see him for a second grey shadow fell on her hand, which was stained a sickly yellow from the cock's breast feathers. "Don't put that thing on any more, it doesn't suit you." Later she danced with the one who had come in first, over there in front of the bar where there was a little space and she could see him plainly: strange that in his smiling face the blue eyes remained serious and seemed to be looking over her shoulder at something very far away. He danced with her almost as though he were dancing alone, barely touching her with his hands, light hands as she learned later when he slept at her side, hands which she often took and laid on her face. Pale grey nights when his hair was no longer black, but seemed pale grey like the light from outside and she listened nervously for his breathing which she could never hear and could hardly feel when she held her hand before his mouth.

A carefree life had begun from the moment the dark grey shadow had fallen on her yellow-tinged hands. The brown Deutsches Mädchen jacket remained lying in the corner of the ice-cream parlour.

A yellow patch on her hand, just as it had been twenty years before.

She found the poems beautiful because it was he who wrote them. But far more important than these poems was the man who read them to her with such indifference. Everything was so easy for him, so obvious, even his call-up which he was afraid might be postponed. But there remained the memory of the two days when he had been beaten up out there in the casemate.

Damp, gloomy vaults from the year 1876 in which an astute

little Frenchman now grew mushrooms. Bloodstains on the damp dingy concrete, beer and the belching of S.A. men, the dull chant rising as from a grave, the vomit on the walls, in the corridors, where today whitish, unhealthy-looking mushrooms grew in horse manure and overhead, on the roof of the casemate, the beautiful green turf grew, the rosebed where children played and knitting mothers called: "Take care!" and "Don't be so rough!" Today old pensioners stuffed tobacco into their pipes, six feet above the sinister grave where Rai and Albert had endured two long days of mortal terror. Fathers with holiday faces playing hopscotch, grandpas buying sweets, the fountain and the cries: "Don't go too near!" and the old custodian who went his rounds in the morning to remove the traces of suburban youth's nightly debauchery. Paper handkerchiefs stained with lipstick and synonyms for love traded with branches in the sand in the moonlight. Early risers among the old pensioners, fidgety dotards who came out early in the summer to look at the custodian's booty before it disappeared in the dustbin, giggling at the bright paper handkerchiefs and the red lipstick stains. WE WERE YOUNG ONCE TOO.

And down below the grave in which mushrooms now grew, teeming white above brownish manure and yellow straw, where Absalom Billig was murdered as the first Jew in the city—a black-haired smiling youth whose hands were as light as Rai's. He could draw as no one else had ever been able to draw. He could draw prison warders and S.A. men: "GERMAN TO THE CORE"—and the S.A. men, GERMAN TO THE CORE, trampled him to pulp down there in the vaults. . . .

A new record, a tribute from the small dark barman to her fair-haired beauty. She pushed her hand forward a little on the table until it lay in the light of the red throat feathers: two years later her hand had lain there on the table when Rai told her that Absalom Billig had been murdered. Absalom's mother, a haggard little Jewess, who had telephoned from Albert's house to Lisbon, to Mexico City, to all the shipping companies—never losing sight of small Wilhelm Billig who had been so christened in honour of Kaiser Wilhelm. And then the surprise: In the Argentine, far away in the Argentine, someone had taken up the receiver and spoken to Frau Billig of visas and currency. . . .

Two copies of the *Völkisher Beobachter* sent to the Argentine

as printed matter with twenty 1,000-mark notes in them. Rai and Albert became artists in Papa's jam factory. . . .

Mushrooms now grew there. Children played and mothers called out: "Take care!" and "Don't be so rough!" and "Don't go too near!" when the fountains were playing. And the roses bloomed as red as her hand now that it lay in the light of the red throat feathers, the throat feathers of Hähnels' heraldic cockerel. And the film ran on and Rai's hands grew heavier, his breath more audible, and he no longer laughed, and a card came from Frau Billig: "Many thanks for the greeting from our dear Fatherland." And a second consignment of printed matter was posted, two numbers of the *Stürmer* with ten 1,000-mark notes. Albert went to London and from London soon came the news that he had married, a crazy and beautiful girl, wild yet religious, and Rai remained as designer and statistician in papa's factory. What could we do for our new varieties? HOLSTEGE'S CHEAP STRAWBERRY JELLY.

Inky blue breast feathers of the cockerel and the film ran on: grey, peaceful, weary dramaturgy until in London the crazy beautiful girl died and for months no news came from Albert. She had written him letters for which he now sometimes reproached her: "Come back. Rai no longer laughs since you've been away. . . ."

And the film grew grey and dark, with subtle light effects which increased the tension. Albert returned and the war came: an odour of barracks' canteens, crowded hotels and in the churches people prayed fervently for the Fatherland. No accommodation to be found and the eight hours' leave was over even before their embraces were complete: embraces on plush sofas, on a dark brown divan, in filthy beds, in cheap brothels whose days were numbered. Jackboot marks on the blankets. . . .

A tempestuous ringing of bells and a meagre breakfast in the early morning while the skinny landlady put the notice back in the window: ROOM TO LET. A cardboard notice which swung between the curtains and the window and the leering retort of the brothel mother whom Rai grumbled at the high price: "THERE'S A WAR ON AND BEDS ARE BECOMING RARE AND EXPENSIVE." Shy women in the parlour who had submitted to 'the inevitable' for the first time outside the marriage bed, ashamed and at the same time enjoying the semi-whoredom of this experience.

Here were conceived the abecedarians of the year 1946, thin, rickety war-children who would ask the teacher: "Is heaven the black market where one can get everything?" Tempestuous bells, iron beds and lumpy grass-wrack mattresses which after 2,000 nights of war would still be a coveted object, until the abecedarians of the year 1951 were conceived.

War is always a good subject for dramatic art because the monstrous event lurks in the background: Death, who takes over the treatment, stretching it like the hide on a drum until it begins to throb at the least touch of the fingers.

"Another lemonade, Luigi, very cold please, and a lot of the bitter spirit from the little green bottle." Cold and bitter as those farewells at tram stops or outside the barrack gates. Bitter as the dust that rose from the mattresses in the brothel quarter: fine powder, sublime filth, which trickled from the tears in the carpets and between the rails of line 10, line 8, line 5 on the way to the barracks where sweltered despair. Cold as the room from which I had to fetch his pack, the room where the next tenant was already settling in: a respectable fair-haired reservist sergeant-major's wife. Westphalian accent, an unpacked sausage and a nervous face, which mistook my bright pyjamas for those of a whore although I had enjoyed 'the inevitable' as legitimately as she would do. I was married by an eager Franciscan one sunny spring day, for Rai did not wish to enjoy 'the inevitable' before we were married. Don't be afraid, my good reservist sergeant-major's wife. . . . Yellow lumps of butter in grease-proof paper, a face scarlet and puckered with shame, eggs that rolled over the dirty table. . . . Oh, Sergeant-Major, who used to sing bass at high Mass, what have you done to your wife? Master tinker with pigs, cows and chickens, *dies irae* singer in the Mass for the Dead, for whom Verdun after ten years was a mere yarn to be related over the early morning beer. You respectable father of four children at school and, with your fine bass voice, a pillar of the church choir, what have you done to your wife who, tonight, must swallow the bitter dust from the mattress, and who will return home feeling like a whore, carrying the abecedarian of the year 1946 in her womb. He will be fatherless, for you, gay singer and cheerful teller of Verdun yarns, will lie dead in the sand of the Sahara, killed by a hand grenade, for you are not only a good bass, but also fit to be sent overseas. . . . A weeping red face and

the egg rolling off the table on to the floor; sticky egg-white and dark yellow yolk, the broken shell and the room so cold and filthy and my suitcase, empty except for the bright pyjamas and a few toilet articles, far too little content to convince the good woman that I was no whore. And then the book on which could be read clearly: NOVEL. She took my wedding ring for a deception which did not hoodwink her. The father of her child will be a master-tinker, but mine will be concieved by a poet. But that makes no great difference.

"Thank you, Luigi. Put on the record once more—you know the one I mean." Luigi knew. Savage primitiveness ringing out boldly at the right moment, a melody that died away into the abyss, died only to rise again. The lemonade was as cold as the room, as bitter as the dust, and the blue light from the cockerel's tail feathers now lay on my hand. . . .

And the drama continued to grip in this dark favourable light. 'It gives atmosphere.' Again the bitter smell at the edge of the parade ground; already many soldiers wore medals, money flowed and rooms became even scarcer. Ten thousand soldiers, five thousand of whom had visitors, and, in the whole village, only 200 rooms, including the kitchens where the 1947 crop of school children would be begotten by demedalled fathers on wooden benches, or wherever a place to beget could be found: In the heather or on a pine needle floor where one lay despite the cold, for it was January and rooms were scarcer than soldiers. Two thousand mothers and three thousand wives had arrived, and three thousand times 'the inevitable' had to take place somewhere because 'Nature demands her right,' and the school teachers of the year 1947 must not stand before empty class desks. Despair and bewilderment in the eyes of the women and the soldiers until the mayor had a brilliant idea. Six barrack huts with 240 beds stood empty and the whole seventh wing of the artillery company's quarters next to the firing range, and there was room in the cellars and the horseboxes were empty. Good clean straw which naturally had to be paid for. Barns were sequestrated, requisitioned omnibuses travelled to little towns fifteen miles away. The mayor over-rode all laws and conventions, for the division was under orders for some unknown destination and 'the inevitable' had to take place once more unless they wished the barracks of the year 1961 to be empty. And the 1947

school children could be conceived. . . . Small, puny boys whose first civic activity would be stealing coal. And they were well suited to this; they were lithe and lean and frozen, and they already knew how to estimate the value of things, to shin up on to the coal trucks and throw down what was already doomed. Oh, you little thieves will one day be good citizens. . . . Yes, you are already good, you children conceived on divans, on wooden kitchen chairs, in air raid shelters or in No. 56 Mess of the artillery company, in horse boxes on fresh straw, on the cold forest floor, in corridors and canteen back rooms where the plump proprietor hired his parlour as a brothel for married people. "Nothing to be ashamed of, we're all human!"

"Cigarettes, Luigi, and another lemonade, even colder if possible . . . and more of the bitterness from the green bottle."

My child was also conceived in that cold January, not in a parlour, not even in the quarter of ill fame. We were lucky. We found an enchanting little private brothel—the country cottage of an industrialist who that particular week-end was too busy to visit his mistresses. He had left the two girls to get bored while he got rid of his cannon. A little villa among the pine trees on a green meadow, and two understanding girls who slept together in one room and left us the other; honey-coloured curtains, honey-coloured carpets, honey-coloured loose covers and a Courbet on the wall. "Is it genuine?" "But of course!" Honey-coloured telephone and breakfast with the two beautiful girls who waited on us so charmingly. Toast and eggs, tea and fruit juice, and everything, even the napkins, so honey-coloured that the whole place seemed to smell of honey.

A sudden flicker and the film broke. A dark grey flicker and a bright yellow spot, and once more the hum of the spool in the projection room. The lights went on. Whistles from the audience. But the whistles were pointless, for the first reel of the film had been shown to its end.

Nella looked round, sighed and lit a cigarette as she always did when she left the cinema. Luigi's lemonade seemed lukewarm, the alcohol had evaporated and it tasted flat like very weak vermouth. And now came the film which had been put on the spool instead of the other. The bright coloured cockerel up there in whose green back feathers her hand now lay—almost the same cockerel except that his colours were a little more garish. Another

man behind the bar but still 144 different varieties of ice cream. And a different leading character, the boy who had been conceived in the honey-coloured house. Had she even really known the man who had caused the break in the film? "Aren't you too young to be the one who figures in my mother's liturgy of revenge?"

She pushed her glass aside, stood up and walked past Luigi until she remembered that she had to pay and smile at him. He took the money, gave a mournful smile of gratitude and she left the ice-cream shop. She suddenly missed the child whom she often forgot for days on end. It would be good to hear his voice, to stroke his cheeks, to know that he was there, to feel his light hand and watch his light breathing, to assure herself of his existence.

The taxi drove her fast through the dark streets. She stole a glance at the face of the driver. It was a calm, serious face, half hidden by his cap.

"Have you a wife?" she asked suddenly, and the dark head nodded, turned round to her for a moment and she saw a surprised smile on his serious face.

"And children?" she persisted.

"Yes," said the driver, and she envied him.

She suddenly wept and the image in the driving mirror grew blurred.

"*Mein Gott*," said the driver, "why are you weeping?"

"I'm thinking of my husband who was killed ten years ago."

The driver turned round in surprise, looked away again but took his right hand off the steering wheel and laid it for a moment lightly on her arm. She was grateful that he said nothing: "You must turn to the right here," she said "and drive right to the end of the Holderstrasse." The image outside the window was blurred and the taxi meter ticked and there was a click each time the figure changed, groschen after groschen. She wiped the tears from her face, saw the church appear in the headlights and thought that her new men friends had less and less in common with Rai: buffaloes with rugged faces who uttered in all seriousness words like Economy and, without a trace of irony, discussed subjects like The People and Reconstruction and the Future. Hands of men who, with or without a future, grasped champagne bottle necks. Men who were hard and cloddish, weighed down with

deadly earnest, compared with whom each little crook was almost a poet before he capitulated in gaol.

The taxi driver nudged her arm gently and the meter jumped up another groschen. She gave him a big tip and he smiled at her as he sprang out of the car to open the door. But she was already outside. She realized how dark the house was. No light in Glum's room, not even the usual yellow shaft of light that fell onto the garden from her mother's room. She could not read the note which had been pinned on the front door until she had opened it and switched on the light. *We've all gone to the cinama.* All was underlined four times.

She sat in the dark, in the hall, under Rai's portrait. It had been painted twenty years before and showed him as a smiling youth writing a poem on a packet of noodles. Absalom Billig had painted on the packet: Bamberger's Egg Noodles. Rai was laughing in this picture, he looked as carefree as he had always been and the poem on the noodle packet still existed in Pastor Willibrord's files. The blue had faded and the egg-yolk coloured letters had faded. Bamberger's Egg Noodles. Bamberger, who had been unable to get away, had been gassed, and Rai smiled as he had smiled twenty years before. In the darkness he looked almost alive and she recognized the strong, almost pedantic twist of his lips, that twist which had made him say at least three times a day: "Order, order." The order he meant when he married her before going to bed with her, when he forced her father to give his consent and mumbled the marriage responses over their joined hands in the dusk of the rococo Franciscan church before the two witnesses, Albert and Absalom.

The telephone rang and she went to the third floor which she liked visiting least: the so-called reality. She let it ring three or four times before going into Albert's room. She recognized Gäseler's voice although he did not give his name but asked softly: "Who's speaking?"

She gave her name and he replied: "I only wanted to hear how you were. I'm so sorry you felt ill."

"I'm better," she said, "I'm better, and I'm coming to the lecture."

"That's fine. Can I give you a lift in my car."

"Yes."

"Shall I call for you?"

"No, it's better we should meet in town. Where?"

"Friday at midday," he said. "In the square by the head office of the Trustees Bank at twelve o'clock. Are you really coming?"

"Yes, I'm coming," she said, and she thought: 'I'll kill you . . . I'll cut you to pieces, destroy you with a terrible weapon. With my smile that costs me nothing. A tiny muscular movement of the lower jaw, a mechanism that it is only too easy to set in motion. I have more ammunition than you had for your machine gun and it will cost me just as little as your machine-gun ammunition cost you.'

"Yes, I shall be coming," she said, hung up the receiver and went downstairs again to the hall.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE dentist opened the door of his consulting-room and said: "Sit down, please, Frau Brielach." A boy about the same age as her own son sat at the piano strumming in obvious boredom. "Go outside for a few minutes," said the dentist. The boy disappeared very quickly leaving the music score open above the yellowing keys. She looked at the title and read wearily: ETUDES 54. The dentist sighed behind his black polished desk, rummaged in the card index with his long fingers, took out a white slip and said: "Now, don't be afraid, I have the estimate here." He looked at her with a sigh and she stared at the picture hanging on the wall behind him: "Uncle in the Sunshine." The painter had used a great quantity of bright yellow ochre to make the sunshine, the vineyards and the pretty village housefronts appear sunny, but it was so much yellow used in vain. Uncle did not look in the least sunny.

The dentist took a packet of tobacco from a drawer, opened the silver paper end and, still sighing, rolled himself a thick cigarette. He pushed the tobacco and the cigarette papers towards her but she shook her head gently and said: "No thank you". She would have liked to smoke but her mouth hurt. The dentist had painted her gums with a tingling solution and tapped on her teeth with a nickel-plated hammer. Shaking his head, he had firmly massaged her tender gums with his long, beautiful fingers—still shaking his head.

He laid the white slip down, took a deep puff and said abruptly: "Don't be afraid. It will cost 1,200 marks."

She stared at "Uncle in the Sunshine" and was too weary even to be afraid. She had reckoned with 500 or 600 but had he said '2,000' it would have been as bad as '1,200'. Fifty marks was a great deal of money but any sum over 150 was unattainable and from 200 to 2,000 and over it hardly mattered how high the figure. The dentist inhaled deeply; he smoked very fresh, sweet-

smelling tobacco. "I could do it for eight—perhaps for seven hundred, but then I couldn't guarantee it. At my price I guarantee it would look perfect. I'm sure you know the cheaper dentures—they have such a bluish tinge."

Yes, she knew them, and found them appalling. Luda, the woman from the sweet shop, wore one of these artificial dentures, and when she smiled, it had a bluish-white gleam and looked so obviously false.

"Make an application to the Health Service, and perhaps another to the Assistance Board. If you're lucky, they'll give you something. I've made you out two other estimates—for eight hundred, because if you apply for the expensive one, you'll get nothing. If you're very lucky you'll get altogether five hundred marks. Too many people's teeth are falling out. How much then could you pay a month?"

She was still paying eight marks a week for the expenses of Heinrich's first Communion, and Leo grumbled as it was. In addition to this she would not be able to go to work for some time. She would not leave the house without teeth, she would lock herself in, wrap up her face and slip out of an evening with a scarf round her head to the dentist. A woman without teeth was a hideous sight. No stranger would be allowed to come into the room. She would not even show herself to Heinrich. Certainly not to Leo. Thirteen teeth out! Luda had only lost six and she looked like an old hag.

"Incidentally," said the dentist, "I must have at least three hundred marks on account before I can begin, plus the money from the Assistance Board and the Health Service as soon as it's authorised. In this way, nearly half the bill will be paid. Have you thought out how much you could pay a month?"

"Twenty marks perhaps," she said wearily.

"My God, that would take more than a year before you'd paid in full."

"It's no use," she said. "I can't even find the advance."

"You must have it done," he said. "You must have it done quickly. You're a young, pretty woman and if you wait it'll be more difficult and more expensive."

The dentist was certainly not much older than herself and as a young man he had obviously been handsome—dark eyes and very fair hair—but his face was tired and sallow and his hair was

thinning on top. He toyed idly with the estimate. "I can't help it," he said softly. "I simply can't help it. I have to pay for everything in advance—the material, the dental mechanic and all the overheads. I can't do it. I'd like to make you a set at once because I know how dreadful it is for you."

She believed him. He had given her a few injections in her gums and used sample ampoules for which he had not charged her, and he had a sure, gentle touch. The prick was painful in the terribly receding gums and the liquid from the ampoule formed a hard pouch which only dispersed very slowly. But half an hour later she had felt marvellously well: gay, young and without pain. "That's quite natural," he said to her when she told him, "it's made of hormones and certain chemicals that are lacking in your body. Wonderful stuff, quite harmless, but expensive when you have to buy it."

She stood up, buttoned her coat and spoke softly because she was afraid of bursting into tears. Her mouth hurt so terribly and the hopelessly high sum was in the nature of a death warrant. Within two months at the latest her thirteen teeth would fall out and then her life was at an end. Leo hated nothing more than bad teeth. He himself had immaculate, white, healthy teeth, which he brushed with great vigour. As she put on her cloak she murmured to herself the name of the disease, which sounded like a doctor's fatal diagnosis: PYORRHOEA.

"I'll let you know," she said.

"Take the estimate with you. That's the right one . . . and here's the other in triplicate. You need one for each application and the third you keep so that you'll know the amount."

The dentist rolled himself another cigarette. His assistant came in and he said to her: "Bernard can go on with his practice." Frau Brielach put the papers in her coat pocket. "Don't lose heart," said the dentist, smiling, and his smile was as wan as the sunshine illuminating uncle.

Leo was at home and she did not want to see him. He had such radiantly healthy teeth and for months he had reproached her for the halitosis against which she struggled in vain. His hard, well scrubbed hands tested her body from day to day and his eyes were as hard and uncompromising as his hands. He would laugh if she asked him for money. He rarely gave her a present . . . only when he was in a sentimental mood and happened to have money.

The staircase was dark, empty and silent and she sat on the landing trying to picture the baker's teeth. They were certainly not good. She had never paid much attention to them but remembered that they were greyish in colour.

She looked through the mullioned window pane into the courtyard where a hawker stood with a barrow full of oranges. He placed the big ones from the crate on the right and the small ones on the left. Then he made a foundation with small oranges, laid the medium sized as the next layer with the very largest on top in little decorative pyramids. A small stocky boy was stacking the crates near the dustbin. In the shadow of the wall a pile of lemons was rotting, greenish yellow and whitish-green in the bluish shadow making the boy's cheeks appear violet. The pain in her mouth ceased and she longed for a cigarette and a cup of coffee. She took out her battered grey pigskin purse which had grown shiny and black. It had been a present from her husband who lay rotting somewhere between Saporoshe and Dnepropetrovsk. He had given it to her thirteen years ago and it came from Paris: a present from the laughing sergeant-major in the gay photograph, the laughing motor mechanic, the laughing bridegroom who had left her little—a battered purse, a souvenir of his first Communion and a yellowish dog-eared pamphlet. "All the Motor Mechanic needs to know for his Master's Certificate." He had left behind a child, a widow and the once grey, now shiny black pigskin purse—a present from Paris—which she refused to part with.

Strange letter from his Company Commander: *Drove his tank on a reconnaissance in force and did not return from the operation. We know for certain that your husband, who was one of the company's most trusted veterans, did not fall into Russian hands. He died a hero's death.* No watch, no pay book, no wedding ring, and not a prisoner. What was he? Shrivelled to nothing, burned to a cinder in his tank.

The letters she wrote to the Company Commander were returned after six months marked: "Killed in action for Greater Germany." Another officer wrote: *I regret to inform you that we have no eyewitness of your husband's death still serving with the unit.* A calcined mummy somewhere between Saporoshe and Dnepropetrovsk.

The stocky youth in the courtyard wrote on the blackboard with a piece of chalk: 'Six extra large oranges for one mark.' The

father, who had red cheeks like his son, rubbed out the 6 and replaced it with a 5.

She counted the money in her purse: two 20 mark notes which could not be touched, the boy's household expenses for ten days, and over and above this 1 mark 80. The ideal thing would have been to go to the pictures where it was dark and warm, and the time passed so painlessly—time which was otherwise so hard. . . . Hours like cogwheels turning slowly, slowly, obstinately reducing time, until there remained aching joints, a leaden brain, and the evening lust which was a burden. Her terror of bad breath and her loose teeth, lack-lustre hair and a complexion which ruthlessly coarsened. . . . The cinema was as good and restful as she had found church as a child—a beneficent rhythm of songs, words, of rising and kneeling; a relief from the stinking harshness of her parents' house where a meat-eating father had tyrannized a pious mother. Her mother had tried to hide the varicose veins beneath her stockings when she was no older than she was now—thirty-one. Soothing as was almost everything outside the home—the pleasant monotony in Bamberger's noodle factory, where she weighed and packed noodles . . . weighed and packed noodles in cartons . . . weighed, weighed, packed . . . fascinating futility and cleanliness. Deep blue cartons, blue like the depth of the Atlantic, yellow noodles and pillar-box red coupons for 'Bamberger's bright picture gallery'. Gaudy printed cards figuring all the old German sagas: Siegfried with hair like fresh butter, cheeks like peach ice cream and Kriemhild with a skin as soft as pink toothpaste, hair like margarine and a cherry-red mouth. Yellow noodles, deep blue cartons and pillar-box red coupons for 'Bamberger's Bright Picture Gallery'. Cleanliness predominant, giggles in the canteen of Bamberger's noodle factory and in the evening the ice-cream parlour with its pink lights. . . .

Or dancing with Heinrich, who got Sunday leave every fortnight. . . . The laughing tank corporal, who would soon be going overseas.

1 mark 80 was enough for a cinema but it was now too late. The morning performance began at eleven and had long since started, and she had to be at the bakery by one o'clock. The boy in the courtyard opened the green iron gate and his father pushed the barrow out. Through the open gate she could see the street: motor car tyres and the sinewy legs of the cyclists. She walked

slowly down the stairs and tried to imagine how much the baker would pay to gratify his melancholy desire. His body was thin. But he had a thick bloated face and sad eyes. When he was alone with her, he stammered out words in praise of love, a hymn to the beauty of physical love, in a dark hoarse voice. He hated his wife and his wife hated him, hated all men—but he, the baker, loved women, appreciated their bodies, their hearts and their lips. But sometimes his melancholy broke its bonds, and she listened to him while she weighed the margarine, melted the chocolate, whipped the cream or, with a small spoon, shaped fondants and pralines from the mixture he had cooked. While she decorated the little tarts with a chocolate pencil, making small designs which he found enchanting, and gave faces in chocolate to the little marzipan pigs, he continued to stutter his praise of her face, her hands and her tender body.

In the bakery everything was grey and white. Every shade between the black of kitchen lead, the black of coal, to the white of flour. Hundreds of shot shimmering greys with only an occasional dash of red or yellow—the red of cherries, the strident yellow of a melon or pineapple juice. Nearly everything ranged from white to grey: Countless greys, and among them the baker's face: a childish, colourless, round mouth, grey eyes and grey teeth, between which a pale pink tongue could be seen when he spoke, and he never stopped speaking when he was alone with her.

The baker yearned for a woman who was not a whore. Since his wife hated him and all men, he had only enjoyed the pleasures afforded by the brothel, pleasures he obviously found insufficiently romantic and which left his desire unsatisfied—the desire to have children.

When she rebuffed him by uttering harsh things about love—Leo-words—he would recoil, and she saw how sensitive he was.

These words came out more or less involuntarily as a violent reaction against his gentleness. They were Leo-words which had been whispered and shouted at her daily for years like oaths, words that lay dormant in her and only broke out when she uttered them in the face of the baker, to cure his admiration.

"No, no," he would say, "don't say that."

Leo would say: "Well, what's wrong with your mug?" and she did not want to go home now to hear this jibe and see his immaculate, white, healthy teeth.

She would not go home until Leo had gone on to his shift. As a precaution she had sent the little girl to Frau Borussiak; it was unwise to leave Leo alone with his daughter. Frau Borussiak was a pretty woman, four years older than herself, with wonderful snow-white teeth, a woman who combined two virtues: piety and friendliness.

Frau Brielach went into the café opposite the dentist's, sat down by the window and took a packet of cigarettes from her coat pocket: TOMAHAWK. Very long, white and strong. . . . 'The Virginian sun ripened this tobacco.' She did not feel inclined to read the magazines and while she stirred her coffee she decided that she could quite well ask the baker for an advance. Perhaps he would advance her 100 marks and she resolved to refrain from using Leo-words in order not to offend the baker.

Perhaps she would listen to the baker: the price would be toleration of his pathetic, greedy tenderness. Between trays of cakes and half-decorated marzipan pigs he would whisper hymns into her ear; between little piles of coconut flour, over rum babas with sugar icing, he would smile happily at her, and she would feel the moist happy kisses of a man who loathed venal love and had been deprived of conjugal love since his wife hated men. A thin beauty with close cropped hair and hard burning eyes, her hand always on the cash register like a captain at his wheel. She had a hard little hand adorned with baroque jewellery, cool green stones, simple but costly, hands like Leo's. A slim boyish goddess who, ten years ago, had marched arrogantly at the head of the girls in brown Deutches Mädchen jackets, singing in a clear, beautiful, proud voice: "With feathers in our caps" or "Onward, little drummer boy". Daughter of the landlord of the Red Hat where her father drank half his wages away on a Friday. Now she looked like a horsewoman, with the legs of a sixteen-year-old and the face of a forty-year-old trying to look thirty-four; cool yet amiable withholder of conjugal rights who drove the dark, sad man in the cellar to hymns of despair.

Frau Brielach raised the cup to her lips and looked outside. On the other side of the street she could see the dentist busy with his drill; above the half-length curtains he swung the arms of the yellowish, scratched drill. She saw his fair hair against the dark shadow of the wall, and the stoop of a man who has debts. The coffee did her good and the TOMAHAWK was delicious.

She knew that the baker was a better man than Leo. He was good and capable and had more money, but to break with Leo and to go and live with him would be terrible, particularly for the children, and there would be trouble with Leo regarding the paternity allowance for Wilma which he paid her through the Court, but which she secretly handed back to him. "Did I want it then? No, you must admit." The baker had a free room upstairs, where his assistant had lived before he deserted, and the baker did not want to engage another. "You've saved me the trouble," he said.

She was now afraid of her son who had changed towards her during the past three weeks. His glance had suddenly altered and he no longer looked her in the eyes. She knew that it was since the day Leo had accused him of dishonesty. He was a handsome little urchin who hated Leo and was hated in return. To be alone with the children would be the best thing. She regretted having to give Leo his conjugal rights and secretly envied the baker's wife who could afford to hate men. She would get by alone with the boy. She was often terrified when she realized how intelligent he was—good at sums and calculation and with a far better grasp of economy than she had ever possessed. A clear brain, a shy face and a pair of eyes that had avoided hers for the past week. The baker had a room free. . . .

The best thing to do would be to return to Bamberger's noodle factory—yellow, ever such clean noodles, deep blue cartons and pillar-box red coupons: Siegfried's butter-coloured, Kriemhild's margarine-coloured hair, and Hagen's eyes as black as Etzel's Mongolian beard, black as mascara; Etzel's round grinning face, yellow as weak mustard, and then the rosy-skinned ones: Giselher and the man with the lyre, in a russet-brown jerkin, so handsome, much more handsome than Siegfried, she had thought. And the people . . . and the red and yellow flames round the burning palace, like a mixture of butter and blood. . . .

In the evening, the harsh pink light on the ice-cream parlour. Yellow banana ice for 15 pfennigs, or with Heinrich in his tank uniform at 'The Wasp', where the shrill flashing trumpets held sway: laughing corporal, laughing sergeant, laughing sergeant-major, burned to a cinder in a tank between Saporoshe and Dnepropetrovsk, a mummy without a pay book, a watch or a wedding ring. Nothing returned, not even taken prisoner.

Only Gert had laughed: a frail little paver who could still laugh even when the 'inevitable' took place in the night. He returned from the war with seventeen wrist-watches and he did everything with a laugh: weighing plaster and laying flagstones, and when he embraced her, and in the darkness she saw his face above her, he laughed, sometimes sadly, but he laughed. But then he went off to Munich—"I can't stay so long in one place"—Heinrich's best friend and the only one with whom she could sometimes speak about her husband, without it causing her pain. . . .

The dentist opposite opened the window and leaned out for a few moments, smoking one of his thick, hand-rolled cigarettes. 300 marks down and how much a month? She would talk it over with her boy who knew how to do sums and calculate. It had been his idea to open a credit account for goods. 150 marks which he had squeezed from the household money and saved without hurting her: shoes and socks, handkerchiefs and scarf: skimped potatoes, uneaten margarine, undrunk coffee, and meat off the menu.

She felt relieved when she thought of the boy. He would find a way. But 1,200 marks would depress him too. "You should have looked after your teeth," Leo would say. "Drink a lemon every day like I do and clean them, going through the motions of brushing his teeth vigorously. "My body is all I have, and therefore I must do something for my body." Bamberger's noodle factory no longer existed: that was twelve years ago; Bamberger had been gassed, he, too, was a calcined mummy. A mummy without a factory or a banking account—deep blue cartons, such clean yellow noodles and pillar-box red coupons. What was the name of the worthy sympathetic figure with the brown beard and ruddy face, a face like spun candy sugar? Dietrich of Bern.

She need not worry about Wilma, who had been with Frau Borussiak since ten o'clock.

She seldom thought of Erich. It was so long ago—eight years. A distraught, panic-stricken face in the night, a hand clutching her arm . . . bloodshot eyes and the S.A. uniform which hung in the cupboard. Timid caresses and outspoken avowals in exchange for cocoa, chocolate and the terror he aroused when he came into her bedroom at night . . . trousers over his pyjamas and barefooted so that his mother would not hear. The half crazy look and she knew that what she did not want would happen, after

Heinrich had been dead a year. She did not want it but she said nothing. And Erich, who would perhaps have gone had she said something, did not go. In amazement he accepted her passiveness, and she had the paralysing conviction that it was unavoidable: he took it for what—with no grounds—he expected, he took it for love. His stertorous breathing in the dark after he had turned out the light. . . . And although it was dark she saw his pathetic figure against the lighter blue of the night sky, as he stood beside the bed taking off his trousers, and there would still have been time to say 'go', and he would have gone, for Erich was not like Leo. But she did not say it because she had the paralysing feeling that it had to be—and why not with Erich who was so good to her?

Erich was good in the same way as the baker was good, and that bright night, as he gasped for breath, he had murmured: "You're so beautiful."

No one had said that to her except the baker, who as yet had not received the slightest reward.

She lit her last TOMAHAWK. She had finished her coffee. The dentist had closed his window and was waving his drill again: 300 marks down and the wonderful expensive injections, after which she had felt so well and young. HORMONES, a word which would bring a hateful grin to Leo's face.

The café was still empty. A grandfather was reading his paper and at the same time feeding his grandchild with cream; he held the spoon to the child who snapped at it like a fish.

She paid for the coffee, went out and bought three oranges with the pocket money Heinrich had doled out to her: half the money for the bread he did not have to buy because the baker gave it as a present. But why had he not been to the bakery for a week to receive the large loaf of bread?

She let the tram pass and started to walk. It was not yet half past one and Leo would still be at home. Perhaps it would be better to tell Leo what was the matter. He would hear about it anyway, and perhaps he would arrange an advance—but were there not young pretty women with gleaming white healthy teeth, given them free by Nature, teeth that did not have to be replaced?

She passed the house where Willy had lived. A serious handsome boy, the first who had ever kissed her. . . . A blue sky and, very far in the distance, music from the open air restaurant. Fireworks behind the town, gold rain falling from the balustrades

of the church steeple and Willy's clumsy kisses: "I don't know whether it's a sin," he said later. "No, no, I don't think so. Not kissing, 'the other' is a sin."

'The other' happened later with Heinrich. Wet bushes whose branches hung round his face . . . pale green-framed, white, deadly earnest face . . . and in the background the outlines of the city church steeples, past which the rain clouds scudded and the nervous, desperate waiting for the vaunted pleasure which never came. Disappointment, too, in Heinrich's damp, green-branch-framed, serious face. The cast-off tank tunic whose pink tabs were mud-stained.

Heinrich, burnt to a cinder somewhere between Saporoshe and Dnepropetrovsk, and Willy, the serious, unsmiling, chaste bill-poster drowned in the Black Sea between Odessa and Sebastopol, swimming in the Black Sea, a corroded skeleton, lying peacefully on the bottom of the Black Sea in seaweed and mud. Bamberger: destroyed in a gas chamber and burnt to ashes—ashes without gold teeth, and Bamberger had such large gleaming gold teeth. . . . .

Berna was still alive. She was lucky and had married the butcher, who suffered from the same complaint as Erich. All women should be advised to marry sick men who did not have to join the army. Did vinegar bottles, camphor and bronchial infusions still stand on Berna's night table? Did damp cloths still lie around and did the butcher still breathe so stertorously, a mixture of passion and asthma? Berna had managed to keep her figure. She stood behind the counter, cold-bloodedly and professionally cutting up a leg of veal. Berna's ruddy cheeks now had a bluish network of veins, yet her firm little hands used the thin knife skilfully . . . the soft brown of liver sausage and the tender pink of juicy ham. When things were difficult, Berna had sometimes given her a lump of mutton suet as big as a cigarette packet. A little hard lump of suet at the time when Karl was enthroned and the black market was forbidden. But it was a long time since Berna had greeted her and Willy's mother cut her, and when her mother-in-law came she heard what the others never said: "Your way of life. There's a limit, you know."

Leo had already left. She was relieved not to see his cap and halter in the cupboard. Frau Borussiak stood in the doorway

smiling, with her finger to her lips. The little girl was asleep on her sofa. She looked so pretty when she was asleep. A wealth of tawny hair and her usually puckered little mouth smiling in her sleep. The honey jar stood on Frau Borussiak's table with the spoon beside it. Wilma had inherited only Leo's remarkably square forehead. Frau Borussiak was friendly and good, and only very seldom did she murmur gently that it was better to put some order into one's life. "You must find a good husband. You should have kept him." She meant Karl, although she had cared little for Karl with his hoarse, whining voice and his references to a new life. In her eyes his chatter, care for outward appearances, pedantry and piety all contradicted the dark greed of his hands, the whispered endearments in which lay a trace of obscenity—something that made her afraid. Pharisaical voice which now prayed in church; at Heinrich's first Communion she had heard this 'new life' voice rising above the booming organ.

Frau Borussiak handed her the child, carefully wrapped up in a blanket. Her neighbour sighed, suddenly plucked up courage and said: "Why don't you finish with that chap?" Her pretty pink cheeks flushed and grew dark, almost mottled with rage. "There's no love there." But she said no more. Once more she grew nervous and shy and whispered: "Don't take it amiss . . . but the children. . . ." She did not take it amiss, thanked her with a smile and carried the child to her room.

The laughing tank sergeant-major whose picture hung between the door and the mirror, twelve years younger than she. The idea of having slept with him now seemed almost improper—as though she had seduced a child. In the picture he looked as young as the baker's assistant, a scamp with whom she would have been ashamed to have an affair. He was far away and dead and his leaves had been too short—just long enough to sire a child, but too short to leave behind a memory of conjugal orderliness. Letters, the numbers of leave trains, hasty embraces at the edge of the parade ground: heath, sand, camouflaged huts, the smell of tar and the uncertainty, the terrifying uncertainty that lay in the air, in the air and in Heinrich's face which still lay pale and serious above hers. Strange that in real life he had not laughed very much, but smiled in all his photos so that he remained smiling in her memory . . . and from the music hall behind came dance music . . . and further off marched a company

of soldiers . . . marching, marching, marching to the Rhine . . . and later Heinrich said what Gert always said: "Shit!"

And of an evening the second embraces in the bedroom where the large bright picture hung: the gentle Virgin Mary riding on a cloud in the sky, holding the pretty Infant Jesus on her arm, and Peter in his proper place at her right hand—bearded and friendly, grave and humble, the Pope's tiara beside him, with a certain indescribable air so that everyone knew that it was Peter. Enchanting angels below, with raised arms and wings like bats and fat, chubby limbs. Later she had bought herself the same picture, only smaller. *Raffael pinx* stood beneath it, but the picture vanished, was reduced to dust the night she lay in the cellar in the boot-polish stained bunk and bore the child which had been conceived under the picture of the Virgin. She had seen the picture above Heinrich's face, a serious N.C.O's face, a face no longer afraid of the ensuing pleasure; somewhere in the distance on the heath the bugles had played: "Leave until dawn," and what had been 'in the air' and also in the face of Heinrich who listened, full of hatred, to the tanks rolling past during the night. Burned to a mummified cinder between Saporoshe and Dnepropetrovsk: victorious tanks, victorious gas chamber for Herr Bamberger . . . no pay book, no wedding ring, no money, not even the watch on which his pious mother had had engraved: 'In memory of my first Holy Communion.' Photographs of a laughing corporal, a laughing sergeant, a laughing sergeant-major who in real life had been so serious. . . .

The catafalque called Tumba; candles in the little Saxon Diaspora chapel; the dry sour face of her mother-in-law: "Do not sully the memory of my son!"

She, as a twenty-one-year-old widow, to whom a year later Erich offered his asthma, his heart and packets of cocoa. A nervous, good-natured little Nazi with bronchial trouble; camphor, vinegar bottles, strips torn from linen shirts and the dull patient gasps in the night. It did not help at all: she had to look in the mirror which hung next to Heinrich's picture. Her teeth were still white and looked firm but when she touched them they were terrifyingly loose. Her lips were still full, and had not grown thin and sour like Berta's. She was still pretty—the attractive wife of the laughing sergeant-major in the photograph; a doll with a firm slender throat who triumphed over the

younger tram conductresses. 1,200 marks for thirteen teeth, and the receding gums could no longer be made good. She had already made up her mind to yield to the baker and to leave Leo to his young female colleagues. His clean-shaven face with the square forehead, his coarse red hands and polished nails and the ponce's self-confidence in his eye. . . . The baker must wait a little, his sallow face should twitch a little longer—perhaps a room, money and a teacher's post for the boy when he left school in three years time would come of it.

Carefully washing her skin with face lotion, mysterious dirt appeared on the cotton wool. She powdered herself lightly, made up her lips and tidied her hair which was beginning to lose its lustre. Only two men had ever noticed that she had beautiful hands—Heinrich and the baker. Even Gert had not realized it, although he often made her stroke his face for hours on end like a child. The baker's passion flared up as soon as he saw her hands. He was a lyrical, love-crazed fool uttering folly upon folly among the countless greys in his bakehouse.

She gave a start when her son appeared in the doorway. He had the face of his father, of the laughing corporal, the laughing sergeant, the laughing sergeant-major—a handsome face just as serious as his father's had once been.

"Haven't you gone yet, Mother?" he asked.

"I'm off now," she said. "It doesn't matter much if I'm late occasionally. Are you coming to fetch me again today?"

She observed him carefully, but no frown appeared on his face and he said "yes" without hesitation.

"Warm the soup up for yourself," she said. "And here are two oranges—one for you and one for Wilma. You can let her sleep."

"All right," he replied. "Thank you. What about the dentist?"

"I'll tell you about that later. I must go now. So you'll fetch me?"

"Yes," he repeated.

She kissed him and opened the door. "I'll be there for sure," he called after her.

CHAPTER FIVE

MARTIN stood still, opened his shirt and felt for the string to which the house door key was attached. When he first put it round his neck in the morning the key was cool and lay chafing near his navel, but soon it began to get warm and then he no longer felt it. In the dusk he had already caught sight of the white notice hanging on the door, but he still hesitated to switch on the light to find out what message it bore. He bent forward and the key on the string began to wobble hard until it missed his left ear and hit him on the right cheek. He let it lie there for a moment and then with a jerk swung it back into position again. He felt for the light switch with his left hand and for the key hole with his right, listened eagerly and came to the conclusion that no one was at home.

The slip of paper obviously said that Albert had also had to go out. When he thought 'no one', he excluded his grandmother, who was certainly there. She was always there. To think 'no one is at home' meant 'Grandmother is there, OTHERWISE no one'. The OTHERWISE was decisive, a word his teacher hated, just as he hated ACTUALLY, GENERALLY and IN ANY CASE, words which were more important than adults were prepared to admit. He could even hear Grandmother muttering as she paced up and down her room. Her heavy footsteps made the glasses in the showcase tinkle. From the sounds he could picture Grandmother and the huge antiquated mahogany showcase which was old and therefore valuable. Everything that was old was valuable. OLD CHURCHES, OLD VASES.

Because a few of the parquet floor blocks were loose the showcase always rocked a little and the glasses tinkled monotonously when Grandmother walked up and down. Grandmother must on no account hear when he came home. She would call him in and stuff him with rich food which he did not like, such as pink slices

of meat. She would question him on the Catechism and ask the inevitable GÄSELER questions. He pressed the automatic light switch and read the note which Uncle Albert had written: *Had to go out all the same.* 'All the same' was underlined three times. *Back at seven. Keep me something to eat.* That Albert had underlined the words 'all the same' three times showed the importance of these words which the teacher hated and had forbidden his pupils to use. He was glad when the light went off again, for there was the risk that Grandmother would rush out, see it, pounce upon him, stuff him with food and question him: pink meat, sweets, caresses, the game of Catechism and the Gäseler questionnaire. The least she would do would be to rush into the hall and roar: "I've passed blood again." And then she would wave her urine glass and weep big tears. Her urine made him feel sick. He was frightened of Grandmother and glad when the light went off again.

Outside the gas lamps had already been lit. They cast a yellowish-green reflection through the thick glass panes of the porch on to the wall, throwing his shadow, a small grey shadow, against the dark door. His finger was still on the light switch and then occurred what he always waited for eagerly: his shadow leaped out of the light like a dark, very swift beast, black and powerful, sprang over the banisters and the silhouette of his head fell on the panel of the cellar door; he set the key on its string in motion and saw its small grey shadow swinging. The automatic switch ticked softly and the light went out; he repeated the performance twice, three times because it was so lovely to see the small black swift beast, his shadow, leap out of the pale green light, his head falling always on the same panel of the cellar door and the gentle grey swinging of the string round his throat. And then he heard Bolda's footsteps upstairs. She shuffled through the hall; water was running in the bathroom and he realized that this was the time Bolda came downstairs to cook herself *bouillon* in the kitchen.

The important thing, now, was to enter the house as quietly as possible so that Grandmother should not hear him. He carefully turned the key in the front door, using both hands to open it, took a big step to avoid a loose floor board and stood at last on the thick russet runner before bending forward to close the door again very softly.

He held his breath and listened nervously for noises from Grandmother's room. She had heard nothing and continued to pace up and down the room making the glasses in the showcase tinkle, and her muttering was like the wild monologue of a prisoner. The I'VE PASSED BLOOD hour had not yet arrived—the terrible, periodical performance carrying the yellow stuff in triumph through the hall from room to room, spilling it carelessly, as carelessly as she spilled her big tears, and Mother would say: "It's nothing to worry about, dear. I'll send for Hurweber."

And Uncle Albert said: "It's nothing to worry about, Grandma. We'll phone for Hurweber."

And Bolda said: "It's nothing to worry about, Betty dear. Call the doctor and don't distress yourself so."

And when Glum, on his return from church or from work, was received with the waving urine glass, he would say: "It's nothing to worry about Grandma. The doctor will come."

And he himself was obliged to say: "It's nothing to worry about, Granny. We'll send for the doctor."

For a whole week every three months this performance was repeated; it was a long time now since it had last happened and he had a presentiment that it was bound to take place this evening about this time.

He held his breath and was pleased when Grandmother went on muttering, pacing up and down, and the glasses in the showcase continued to tinkle.

He slipped into the kitchen and, in the dark, removed the slip of paper in his mother's writing which always lay on the edge of the table among the blue checks of the waxed table cloth. He was pleased when he heard Bolda's footsteps. Bolda did not signify the danger that Grandmother would rush out and scream: "I'VE PASSED BLOOD." Bolda and Grandmother had known each other too long, and she was an uninteresting audience.

Bolda came down the stairs in her felt slippers and switched on the hall light—she was the only one who was not afraid of Grandmother—and when she switched on the kitchen light and discovered him, he quickly put his finger to his lips to warn her. Only a swift cluck came from Bolda's lips. She came over to him, ruffled his hair and said in her guttural dialect: "Ach, you poor boy. You must be starving."

"I am," he replied in a whisper

"Would you like a cup of *bouillon*?"

"Oh yes, please." He admired Bolda's long, smooth, pitch-black hair, watched her paper-white, wrinkled face, heard the 'whoof' of the gas jets and stood at her side as she took three or four Maggi cubes out of the box.

"And a nice new roll and butter, eh?"

"Oh yes," he said brightly."

She took off his satchel and cap, stuck the key back into his shirt. It slipped down to his navel and was a little cold against the flesh. He took his mother's note from his pocket and read it: *I have to go away again.* 'Have' was underlined four times. Bolda took the slip of paper from his hand, studied it with a frown and threw it in the rubbish pail beneath the sink.

The smell of *bouillon* gradually permeated the room—a smell which Uncle Albert called 'common', Mother 'nauseating', Grandmother 'quite filthy' . . . a smell which made Glum wrinkle his nose but which he himself liked. He liked Bolda's *bouillon* for a particular reason which no one had yet discovered. It was the same *bouillon* they cooked at Brielach's, smelling of onions, suet, garlic and that indeterminate odour which Uncle Albert called 'the barracks'.

Behind the gas stove pipe was the handleless green cup in which Bolda allowed her special concoction to grow green and thick until it was an almost slimy, steaming concentrate—lukewarm, incredibly bitter wormwood tea, which made the mouth water, burnt the throat and warmed the stomach. It left a very bitter taste in the mouth which flavoured the food one ate later: bread soaked in gall, soup spiced with gall and—long after one had gone to bed—an agreeable bitterness which trickled from the corners of the mouth, round the gums and mingled with the saliva on the tongue.

'A cup of wormwood tea every week,' was Bolda's motto, and anyone who felt ill or had a stomach ache had to drink some from her green, handleless cup. Even Grandmother, who found everything that Bolda ate and drank quite disgusting, even Grandmother secretly enjoyed a cup of this highly concentrated bitterness. Every week Bolda took dried greenish-grey leaves from a crumpled brown paper bag and brewed a new potful. "Better than brandy," she would mutter, "better than doctors. Wormwood tea and a good chorale are better than all over-eating,

over-drinking and chain smoking." She often sang, although she had an appalling voice; it was a caterwauling attempt to capture the rhythm and melody which never succeeded. Her ear seemed to be as unmusical as her voice, for presumably she thought that she was singing in tune and she finished each verse with a triumphant grin. Even Glum, who was seldom ruffled, suffered everything patiently and would tolerate the 'I'VE PASSED BLOOD' performance for a week without a murmur, was finally forced to say: "Bolda, you're really getting on my nerves."

But now Bolda's *bouillon* was hot, the rolls were buttered and he took the big yellow cup with the handle and followed Bolda in his stockinged feet upstairs past the huge oil painting of Grandfather—a morose lean man with a very bright red face, his hand, resting on a green table, holding a lighted cigar. Below it was the copper plate: *To our honoured Chief on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the company from his grateful staff.*

It always seemed as though the greyish, beautifully painted ash would fall at any minute on the gleaming table. Sometimes he dreamed it had fallen but when he woke from his nightmare next morning and went to see whether it had really happened, it was still there. Yes, it was still there, far too long, greyish-white, painted with great realism, and the fact that it was always still there brought relief and a new nightmare, for had it finally fallen everything would have been all right. His watch chain, and the smart silver-grey tie with the light bluish pearl were realistic enough to touch. And every time they passed it Bolda said: "Karl Holstege was a good man," and by this she meant to suggest that Grandmother was not such a good person as her husband had been.

Bolda's blue skirt always smelled of soap suds, and it was always covered with soap stains far above the hem, for her main occupation—an honorary one—was to scrub the floors of various churches. 'Not for money.' She scrubbed three churches—the Parish church, where she splashed triumphantly twice a week through huge foaming soap-sud pools from the main door to the altar rail, then reverently rolled up the carpet in front of the altar and with a smaller cloth, very clean, with even more foam, glided round the altar like a dark angel on a cloud. In addition to this she cleaned the church in the park and the convent chapel which Uncle Albert often visited—a dark chapel with a black rood

screen behind the Communion bench, lined with a bright blue curtain, which partitioned the church and behind this gloomy double barrier for ever and ever and ever . . . the nuns with far more agreeable voices than Bolda sang the chorale which she thought was singing. Four days cleaning a week, for four whole days Bolda, a dark haggard angel with a snow-white wrinkled face, hovered round the foam-flecked clouds on the flagstones of the church. Sometimes when he visited her, he thought that her scrubbing brush was like a rudder and her blue skirt like a sail with which she was trying to ascend once more to heaven on the cloud which had fallen to earth. But the cloud remained earth-bound and merely moved slowly over the flagstones from the main door to the altar rail, and then, more reverently and with whiter foam, around the altar.

It was cosy in Bolda's room although it smelt of soap flakes, over-cooked swedes and cheap *bouillon*. Her sofa, according to Mother, smelled of a convent waiting-room, and this word contained an allusion, for he knew that Bolda had once been a novice. Her bed, also according to Mother, looked like Tarzan's lair in the jungle, but the light from the street lamps fell into Bolda's room, turning everything a greenish-yellow, and when he had drunk the *bouillon* and eaten the two buttered rolls she opened the drawer and brought out 'the unavoidable', which he now only took with a smile to please her, a sticky lump of malt sweets.

He lay on Bolda's sofa as soon as he had finished eating, popped a sweet in his mouth, half closed his eyes and watched the greenish-yellow gas lamps. Bolda never put on the light when he was with her. She sat at the window by her little bookcase which contained two different types of reading material—prayer books and cinema programmes. Each time she went to the cinema she paid a groschen for the programme, took it out later, studied the stills and reconstructed the whole film accurately as she explained it to him. She would close her eyes to collect her thoughts, only opening them occasionally to let the stills refresh her memory; she described the whole film to him, sequence by sequence, with slight distortions. She tapped her fingers on the leading characters when they cropped up in her tale, and everything was dark, harsh and weird as murder, baseness, profligacy, fornication, but also generosity and innocence. Wonderful men and wonderful women 'chasing' each other and Saint Paul on the

road to Damascus struck by the lightning flash from God. St. Paul could be seen on the programme, bearded and fiery, and St. Maria Goretti, treacherously murdered by a sensual swine. What was a sensual swine? Obviously it had something to do with IMMORAL and IMMODEST. But usually they were films about beautiful women who became nuns—films about nuns seemed to be very popular—but he could not always see them for when there was a picture of a nun on the poster there was never a white U certificate slip.

But today Bolda did not seem inclined to tell him the story of a film. She squatted by the window in the yellowish-green light of the street lamps and rummaged in the prayer book shelf until she appeared to have found the right volume. Luckily it was not one with notes, otherwise she would have sung for an hour: it was one without music and her peaceful murmur of the prayers was pleasant. From behind, so small and dark-haired, she looked almost like Brielach's mother. As twilight fell the light grew greener, and Bolda's dark furniture seemed to glow like the bright wing cases of a beetle, and, sooner than he expected, he heard Mother below, cars pulling up outside, Mother's laugh coupled with the laughter of others—strangers. He hated the strangers' laughter, hated their faces even before he had seen them, hated the chocolate and the presents they brought with them, the words they uttered and the questions they would ask.

"Say I'm not here and don't put on the light, he whispered to Bolda.

Bolda interrupted her prayer: "Your Mother will have a fright if you're not there."

"We can pretend we didn't hear her come home."

"Never tell lies, my son."

"Let me stay for a quarter of an hour?"

"All right, but not a minute longer."

Had Mother arrived home alone he would have run out, in spite of the danger that Grandmother would start her antics.

But he hated all the people who visited Mother, particularly the fat one who always spoke of Father. Flabby hands and 'exquisite candy'. The light grew greener and Bolda darker until her hair was darker than herself: the thick inky blackness of her hair upon which only the tiniest speck of green light fell; long,

dry, smooth hair and Bolda's muttering, and in the darkness what always cropped up in the darkness: GÄSELER and IMMORAL and IMMODEST and the word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker—and the Catechism questions which rippled out of the night: WHY ARE WE ON EARTH?

Everything was immoral and much was immodest and Brielach had no money and calculated for hours how he could economize.

Bolda's mumbling by the window, the dark Indian squaw and the room filled with the play of greenish-yellow lights and the alarm clock on the shelf above Bolda's bed, the gentle tick of the alarm clock while below the noise grew louder—a persistent, disturbing noise—giggling women, laughing men, Mother's footsteps, the squeaking coffee mill—"Or would you prefer tea?"—until suddenly the wild roar echoed from the hall: "I've passed blood—I've passed blood."

There was a breathless silence downstairs and he almost found satisfaction in Grandmother's act of violence. Bolda shut her prayer book, turned to him with a resigned shrug of the shoulders and, laughing heartily to herself, whispered: "She timed that perfectly. Oh, you should have known her earlier, she's not such a bad woman."

"I'VE PASSED BLOOD!"

This seemed to have cast a spell on Mother's guests who were unused to this outburst, but then a subdued murmur started below. He heard Mother's voice telephoning for the doctor from Albert's room. And Grandmother fell silent, for as soon as the doctor had been sent for, she knew she would get what she wanted: THE INJECTION. A strange, mysterious nickel and glass instrument, tiny and clean, far too clean. . . . A dragonfly creature with a humming-bird's beak—a transparent humming bird which filled its belly from the little glass tube and bored its pointed beak into Grandmother's arm.

Grandmother's voice, which could roar and boom like an organ, now rang out from Mother's room. She was talking to the guests.

Bolda switched on the light and the green enchantment was over—finished the black magic, the joy of squatting on Bolda's convent waiting-room sofa and hearing her mumble her prayers. "Can't be helped, my boy, you must go downstairs now. You

can go straight to bed. Don't be afraid, you're certain to be sleeping with Uncle Albert."

Bolda smiled for she had found the right magic formula: Sleeping with Uncle Albert. He smiled at Bolda and she smiled at him and he made his way slowly downstairs. Like the shadow of a gigantic wild beast, Grandmother stood in the doorway of Mother's bedroom and he heard her say, quite softly, in her booming organ voice: "Ladies and gentlemen, would you believe it, I've passed blood!" Some tomfool replied from inside: "My dear lady, the doctor has already been sent for."

But now she had heard him. She turned round abruptly, rushed back to her room and brought out the urine glass like a precious tribute, and he—standing on the third stair—had to take it: "Think, my dear, I've done it again."

And he dutifully said what he was bound to say in these pathetic moments: "It's not so bad, Granny dear, the doctor's coming."

And she replied what she always replied in these pathetic moments, slowly taking back the glass, as soon as she saw that he had duly appreciated the dark yellow brew: "You're a good boy, my dear, thinking of your Granny," and he was ashamed because he harboured no kindly thoughts of his Granny.

She strode back to her bedroom like a queen. Mother came rushing out of the kitchen, kissed him and by her eyes he could see that she had been crying during the course of the evening. He loved his mother and her hair smelled so good, and he loved her although she could be as ridiculous as the people she always brought home with her.

"It's annoying that Albert had to go out. He wanted to have supper with you."

"Bolda looked after me."

Much head-shaking and laughter as was the custom when he had shared Bolda's food. Another woman, fair-haired like his mother, with Bolda's dirty brown apron round her waist, a stranger who was cutting up hard-boiled eggs on the kitchen table, smiled foolishly at him and Mother said what she always said on these occasions, something which he hated her for: "Would you believe it, he likes such common food—margarine and that sort of thing." And the woman made the inevitable remark: "How sweet!"

"How sweet!" came the chorus from all the other foolish women who came out of Mother's room. And even a couple of men did not find it ridiculous to repeat this nauseating 'How sweet!' He considered all the people who visited Mother of an evening foolish—and some of these ridiculous men had found the masculine alternative of 'How sweet!' They said: 'Delicious'—and he had to shake hands with them and accept chocolate, toy motor cars and, when at last he was allowed to slip away, he heard them whispering among themselves: "A fantastic child."

Oh, the green darkness up there in Bolda's room, on her convent waiting-room sofa, or Glum's room with the great map on the wall. . . .

He returned to the kitchen where the foolish female was now cutting up tomatoes and he heard her say: "I love little snacks like this." Mother uncorked bottles, the kettle was boiling, pink slices of ham lay on the table beside a cold chicken—pallid flesh with a greenish gleam and the unknown fair-haired woman said: "A chicken salad—how delightful, my dear Nella."

He gave a start. People who called Mother 'my dear Nella' were more frequent than those who addressed her as Frau Bach.

"Can I go up to Uncle Albert's room now?"

"Yes, dear," replied his mother. "Go now and I'll bring you up something to eat."

"I don't want anything more to eat."

"Are you sure?"

"No," he said, and was suddenly sorry for Mother who looked rather unhappy and he added softly: "No, really not, thank you."

"Oh," said the visitor, who was now scraping the flesh from the chicken bones with a knife, "I've heard that Albert Muchow lives with you, my dear Nella. I'm so eager to meet the whole circle that knew your husband. It's heavenly to be admitted into a real artistic set."

It was pleasant in Albert's room. It smelt of tobacco and clean linen which Albert always piled carefully in the chest of drawers—snow-white, green-striped, russet-striped, newly-washed shirts which smelt marvellous. They smelt as nice as the girl from the laundry who brought them. Her hair was so fair that it was almost the same colour as her skin; she looked beautiful in the daylight and he liked her because she was always friendly and never ridiculous. She usually brought him advertising balloons

which he could blow up and he and Brielach could play with them for hours on end in the room without being afraid of breaking anything. Huge, tough but pretty balloons on which were written in chalk: 'Let Buffo do your washing.' On Albert's table there was always a sheaf of drawing paper and the paint box stood in the corner beside the tobacco tin.

But over in Mother's room there was laughter, and he was annoyed and wished he could have brandished a urine glass and gone shrieking through the house: 'I've passed blood!'

Another evening spoiled, for Albert would have to join the party. When Mother was at home and had no visitors, they always sat in her room and sometimes Glum came in for half an hour and told stories, or Albert sat down at the piano and played or, what was even better, Albert took him out for a late-night-drive, or went with him to eat ice-cream. He loved the harsh garish reflections thrown by the great cockerel into the ice-cream parlour, the noisy gramophone music, the cold ices, the acid venomous green lemonade, with lumps of ice floating in it. He loathed the stupid men and women who found him 'sweet' and 'delicious' and ruined his evenings.

Pursing his lips, he opened the lid of the paint box, took out a long thick brush, dipped it in water, and stirred it vigorously for a long time in the black. A car pulled up outside and he immediately heard that it was not Albert's car but the doctor's. He laid the brush down, waited until the bell rang, ran down into the parlour; for now something which he always found exciting was sure to happen. . . .

Grandmother rushed out of her room like a maniac, shouting: "Doctor, my good doctor, I've passed blood again." And the shy little black-haired doctor smiled, pushed Grandmother gently into her bedroom and took the leather case out of his coat pocket: it was as big as the joiner's cigarette box in Brielach's house. Carefully unbuttoning Grandmother's sleeve he rolled it up, and each time he shook his head in admiration at her snow-white fleshy arm which really was as white as Uncle Albert's shirt. And invariably the doctor murmured: "Like a young girl's. The arm of a young girl." And Grandmother smiled and stared triumphantly at her urine glass which stood either on the table or on the tea trolley.

Martin was always allowed to hold the ampoule which Mother

could never bring herself to do. "It makes me feel sick to look at it," she said. And when the doctor had sawn through the neck of the ampoule, Martin held it quite still so that the doctor could say what he invariably said on this occasion: "You're a good, brave little fellow." And Martin watched the little humming bird's beak enter the pale liquid as the doctor pulled the plunger and filled the hypodermic with the colourless liquid whose effect was so tremendous. . . . Indescribable happiness, oblivion, and beauty on Grandmother's face. . . . .

He never felt sick or in the slightest bit afraid when the doctor stuck the humming bird's beak into Grandmother's arm. It was almost like a bite—and the soft, white skin sank a little as if a bird had pecked a rind, and Grandmother did not take her eyes off the lower shelf of the tea trolley where the glass stood, while the doctor softly pressed on the plunger, injecting Grandmother with endless happiness—and then a tug as he withdrew the beak from her arm, and the strange, eerie, rather sinister sigh of happiness from Grandmother. He stayed with her, after the doctor left, and although he was afraid, his curiosity overcame his fear. And now something happened that was terrible—as terrible as what Grebhake and Wolters had done in the bushes . . . as terrible as the word Brielach's mother had used to the baker in the cellar . . . terrible but also beautiful and mysterious. In no other circumstances would he voluntarily have remained with Grandmother, except after her injection. She lay on her bed and suddenly a bright wave seemed to issue from her, making her young, happy and at the same time wretched, for she sighed deeply and even wept, but her face was radiant, almost as smooth and beautiful as Mother's face. It smoothened out, the eyes lit up. Happiness and peace radiated from it while the tears flowed and suddenly he loved Grandmother—loved her great, broad radiant face which at other times terrified him. And he knew what he would do when he was grown up and unhappy . . . he would let himself be stabbed in the arm by the little humming bird which injected happiness into Grandmother in the shape of a small quantity of colourless liquid. Nothing disgusted him any more, not even the glass which stood on the lower shelf of the tea trolley. Then he laid his hand on Grandmother's face, stroked her left cheek, then her right, and then her forehead and held his hand for a long time over Grandmother's mouth to feel her warm,

peaceful breathing. And finally his hand came to rest on Grandmother's cheek and he no longer hated her. . . . A wonderfully beautiful face transformed by a thimble full of pale colourless liquid. Sometimes Grandmother did not sleep and with closed eyes she would say gently: "You're a good boy." And he was ashamed of hating her ALL THE SAME. As soon as she fell asleep he could examine at his leisure her room which, at other times, he could not do because he was filled with fear and disgust—the big, dark showcase, costly and old, full of glasses of all shapes and sizes, crystal bowls, little fragile schnapps glasses and glass figures—the milky blue-eyed doe, the beer jugs. . . . And later, his hand still on Grandmother's face, he looked at his father's photograph. It was larger than the one which hung over Mother's bed and, in this, Father was even younger. Very young and smiling, with a pipe in his mouth and his very dark hair standing out harsh and thick against a bright sky. . . . White clouds in the sky, rolled-up wads of cotton wool. And the picture was so sharp that he could see the raised pattern of flowers on the metal buttons of his father's cardigan. And his father really seemed to be standing there, looking at him with his small dark eyes from the dusky corner between the showcase and the tea trolley. And he could never make up his mind whether his father was sad or gay in this picture. Father looked very young, almost like the boys in the upper classes at school. He certainly did not look like a father. Fathers looked much older, more solid and serious. Fathers personified THE BREAKFAST EGG, the newspaper and a particular way of taking off a coat. Just as Uncle Albert bore little resemblance to other boys' uncles, Father was quite unlike the fathers of other boys. That Father was so young made him feel proud, but also unhappy, because it seemed as though he had no real father . . . just as Mother did not seem to be a real mother. She did not smell like the mothers of the other boys; she was more frivolous and younger, and never spoke of the commodity from which other people lived, which definitely seemed to preoccupy the mothers of the other boys—Mother never spoke OF MONEY.

Father did not look happy, he invariably decided, but he did not personify the word which normally applied to other fathers. Father did not seem to have WORRIES. All fathers had WORRIES . . . all fathers were older and looked just as unhappy as his father

but in a different way. . . . Upstairs on Glum's map, which covered the whole wall, there were three, thick, black spots. The first was the place where Glum had been born, the second was the place where they lived and the third was the place where Father had been killed: Kalinowka.

He forgot Grandmother although his hand still lay on her sleeping face. He forgot Mother and her stupid guests, forgot Glum and Bolda and even Uncle Albert. At his leisure, he studied his father's picture in the dusky corner between the showcase and the tea trolley.

He was still sitting there when his mother fetched him. Albert had been back a long time. He went with her without saying a word, undressed, lay down in Albert's bed and said his prayers. IF THOU, O LORD, SHALT OBSERVE INIQUITIES . . . and when Albert asked him if he was tired, he said "yes", because he wanted to be alone. When the light went out, he was no longer disturbed by the futile laughter from the next-door room. He closed his eyes, conjured up his father's picture and hoped that he would come to life in his dream, just as he was there, young and carefree, laughing perhaps . . . as young as he was in the picture, even younger than Uncle Albert. He would go with Father for a walk in the zoo, take long walks with him along the Autobahn, light his cigarettes and his pipe, help him wash the car and see what was wrong when it stopped. Yes, ride with his father for miles across the endless plain. . . . He liked to murmur quietly to himself: WE'RE RIDING TOWARDS THE HORIZON, and he repeated the word 'horizon' slowly and ceremoniously. He hoped and prayed that his father might come like this into his dreams, riding, driving a car . . . horizon.

The picture was very vivid as long as he lay awake, and he saw all the objects which had belonged to Father, the wrist-watch, the cardigan and the notebook in which he jotted down his poems. He made a desperate but fruitless effort to dream of his father. But he never came. The room was dark and he lay there alone, and when Uncle Albert came over to look at him, he pretended to be asleep in order to remain alone and undisturbed. And as long as Albert was in the room he kept the picture firm behind closed eyes—a laughing youth with a pipe in his mouth who did not look like a father.

He wandered through lands whose names he murmured

softly to himself: France, Germany, Poland, Russia, the Ukraine, Kalinowka. Later he wept in the dark and prayed for the dream which was never accorded him. Uncle Albert had been present when his father was killed and he sometimes spoke of GÄSELER and the village and the war which he called A BASTARD WAR. But none of that helped and his father never came to him in the dream as he so ardently wished.

He imagined the earth in which Father lay to be the colour of Bolda's hair. Inky black darkness had swallowed up Father's figure, trapped him like fresh, sticky asphalt, holding him in thrall so that he could not come into his dream. The utmost he could achieve was that Father's face wept, but even weeping, it did not come into his dream.

He could have Father's face with him in the dark only when he had been able to study the picture at his leisure in Grandmother's room. And it happened only when the 'I've passed blood' performance took place, the doctor was sent for, and Grandmother had been injected with happiness.

He repeated all the prayers he knew and at the end of each prayer added the plea: "Send me Father in my dream. . . ."

But when his father really came he was not as he had wished. He sat under a big tree with his face in his hands and although his face was hidden he knew that it was his father. He seemed to be waiting for something, something for which he had waited an eternity. He looked like someone who had sat there for A MILLION YEARS covering his face because he was so sad, and each time Father removed his hands from his face he gave a start although he knew what was coming. Father had no face and it seemed as though he wanted to say: 'Now you know'. Perhaps Father was waiting under this tree for his face. And the earth was as black as Bolda's hair and Father was alone without a face and although he had no face he looked incredibly sad and tired and when he began to speak he always expected that Father would speak of Gäseler. But Father never mentioned the name, never a word about Gäseler. . . .

The loud burst of laughter from some ridiculous female in the next-door room woke him and he wept into the pillow for rage, hatred and disappointment because the dream of his father had now been broken. Perhaps he would suddenly have got a face and spoken.

He wept long and bitterly until the laughter in the room faded and in his next dream he saw the fair-haired woman in the kitchen. Instead of eggs and tomatoes she was cutting up giant ampoules, glass balloons whose content the smiling doctor pumped into gigantic syringes. Bolda glided slowly in with snow-white face and coal black hair, steering a cloud of soap. Smooth faced, as smooth as Grandmother after the injection . . . Bolda sang beautifully, marvellously, even more marvellously than Frau Borussiak. And Bolda rowed up to heaven clenching in her teeth what looked like an entrance card to Heaven—the film programme with the picture of St. Maria Goretti. . . .

But Father, for whom he was still waiting in his dream, never returned and finally he was dislodged by the foolish laughter in the next-door room. And the egg slicer superseded Bolda, swam through the air as though through water, crying: 'Sweet, sweet, sweet,' until the dark organ booming voice of Grandmother rose in the background. A wild ominous roar: 'I've passed blood.'

CHAPTER SIX

HEINRICH slowly realized what it was: a feeling of walking on ice, on thin ice over a pond of unknown depth. The ice had not yet broken and help was at hand, for everyone stood smiling on the bank, ready to leap to his aid should it break. But this did not alter the fact that it would break and that the depth of the water was unknown. The first rift in this ice had shown itself, a harmless crack, when he witnessed Martin's horror at the word Mother had used to the baker. It was a hateful word for the union of men and women. But he DEFINITELY found 'union' far too beautiful a word for an act he did not consider very beautiful—bright red faces, groans. Before Leo had become his uncle, he had seen him with the conductresses . . . when he had taken in the soup and had not knocked. The wild scream of terror from the girl and Leo with his baboon face ."Shut the door, you little brat." And later in the day Leo hit him hard on the head with the ticket punch and said: "I'll teach you, my boy, what DECENCY means. Can't you knock?" After this the door was always locked, but probably the same thing took place when Mother went over to Leo. 'Union' was a beautiful word for something he found odious. But perhaps things were quite different with people who had money. The word which had originated with Uncle Leo was hateful, but more expressive. Martin's horror showed how deep the water ran below the layer of ice. It seemed to be bottomless and cold and no one could be sure of not falling in. It was not only the money and the difference between what Martin always found in the refrigerator at home and what he himself had to buy daily, looking after every pfennig—bread, margarine, potatoes and, for that filthy Leo, an egg . . . very seldom one for Wilma, himself or Mother. It was the difference between Uncle Albert and Leo, the difference between Martin's horror at the word and his own light shudder of disgust that Mother had adopted it.

The difference between Martin's mother and his own was actually not so great, and he was prepared to accept that it was only a difference of money. And perhaps, perhaps, the ice would never break.

But in school, too, he walked on this thin ice; the chaplain, for example, had almost fallen out of the Confessional when Martin had repeated the remark Mother had made to the baker. And Martin had had to say five paternosters and five extra aves because of this word which he had merely overheard. The chaplain's gentle, friendly voice speaking of the Immaculate Virgin . . . the Uncle-Will-voice speaking of salutary grace, purity of heart and a chaste soul . . . the wonderful voice and kindly face of the chaplain who had contrived that his mother should get money towards his first Communion, although she was IMMORAL. But did the chaplain know Uncle Leo's clean, red, baboon face that always smelt of after-shaving lotion. Certainly not the face of a chaste soul. . . .

He walked on ice over a pond whose depth would not be known until the ice broke. His mother had changed. She had uttered the word, but even before that she had changed and become hard. He remembered her as being gentle, friendly and silent at the time she had patiently laid vinegar towels on Uncle Erich's chest in the night: when she had smiled at Gert and spoke with Karl before 'it' had been done away with. Her face had grown hard in hospital.

The ice had already broken round the edges of the pond in harmless shallows where it could easily have frozen over again. The story of Will's night sweats, for example, only made him laugh. He smiled at it as he did at Will's conversation about books and films: dreamy mumbling, bubbles out of the mouth of a spirit which rose from the bottom to the layer of ice, using the same theatrical effects as were to be seen in the ice-cream parlour fountain.

Real were the price of margarine, which continued to rise, and the calculations he had to make for Mother. Mother could not reckon or save and the whole household economy fell upon his shoulders. Real were Uncle Leo's naked face which used Uncle-Leo-words in comparison with which Gert's harmless legacy of 'shit' was a mild and gentle expletive; the photographs of Father, with which he could cope, and the face of Mother which grew

harder, the mouth thinner, using more frequently Uncle-Leo-words, going dancing more often with Leo, singing Uncle-Leo-songs and doing what certain women did in films—the women on the posters which bore a slip 'X' CERTIFICATE.

The cinema was beautiful and warm. It was good to be there. No one saw you, no one could speak to you and you could do something there which you could do nowhere else: FORGET.

The teacher said the same things as the chaplain: their words bubbled alien and wantonly to the layer of ice on which he walked, but did not penetrate through to him. Eggs were dearer, bread rose five pfennigs a pound and Leo, the swine, grumbled at the scantier breakfast, the smallness of the egg, and accused him of THEFT. That was very real. HATRED of this ape who was stupid into the bargain and had to be convinced by being shown the accounts. But the word THEFT remained. And Mother—he had watched her carefully—had FOR A MOMENT believed LEO, only for a MOMENT, but a moment was too much. He had to save because they constantly went out dancing and Wilma had no clothes. THEFT. He could not tell anyone. Martin would not understand and he was too shy to mention it to Uncle Albert. He would do so later, for Uncle Albert was the only one who would understand what it meant to be accused of theft. His revenge had been severe. For a fortnight he had refused to do the shopping. Let Mother do it or let Leo do it himself and, lo and behold, after a week there was nothing to eat in the house. Gross mismanagement. Howls from Mother and gnashing of teeth from Leo until they had implored him, yes implored him, to start again, and he relented, but he did not forget the MOMENT . . . his mother had suspected him.

Such things he could only discuss with Albert in Martin's house. Later, when he went on holiday with Albert to his mother's and Will looked after Wilma, there would be an opportunity of discussing the monstrous word THEFT with Albert. Mad Bolda was a good woman, but you could not discuss money with her and Martin's mother only differed from his own in respect of money. But there was something else: She was beautiful . . . in a way more beautiful than Mother. She was like the women on the films who understood nothing about money. It was embarrassing to mention money to Grandmother because she immediately produced her cheque book. They all gave him money, Albert,

Grandmother, Will and Martin's mother, but these gifts did not make the layer of ice any more stable nor did they remove the uncertainty as to the depth of the water. Of course he could buy Mother something: red leather gloves and a bag, such as he had seen a woman on the films wearing; he could buy Wilma something. He could go to the cinema, eat ice-cream, build up a reserve for the household accounts. He could ostentatiously buy Leo nothing and refuse to let him profit by the improvements on the menu—but it was not enough money for him to buy the house and all that went with it, the certainty of no longer skating on thin ice . . . And, above all, he would never be able to buy the difference between Uncle Albert and Uncle Leo.

What the teacher and the chaplain said, corresponded to Karl's favourite expression: 'A new life.' A fine expression which conjured up a picture which he knew would never materialize. Mother's face had grown plumper and harder. She was growing away from Father, becoming older than Father, much older, while he himself was growing up towards Father. Mother was now old. She seemed age-old to him and yet she had still looked young when 'it' had been done away with in the hospital and Leo had danced with her for the first time. And her hand had grown heavier, the hand she used to lay gently on his forehead before she went over to unite with Leo.

He was left with the child that had not been done away with. Wilma was now almost two and for some mysterious reason was always grubby. Leo hated dirt. Leo was always clean. Like his distinguishing odours—the smell of shaving lotion and beeswax. He had raw red hands, polished finger nails and his weapons were the ticket punch and the nail-file. A stupid pointed piece of steel with which he rapped little Wilma over the knuckles. Every morning Heinrich heated water to wash Wilma and he changed her nappies as often as he could. But for some mysterious reason Wilma always looked dirty and grubby although she was so pretty and bright. It was heartbreaking.

When Leo was on late shift he was alone with Wilma for an hour because Mother went to the bakery at half past twelve. From the day the little girl had been left alone for the first time with Leo she screamed whenever she saw him. Terrifying screams when he threatened her with the heavy nickel ticket punch to quieten her. She yelled and crawled over to Heinrich, clambered

up to him and would not be pacified until Leo had left and he had whispered repeatedly: "Leo's gone, Leo's gone, Leo's gone." But even then she still wept and Heinrich's hands were damp from her tears. In the afternoons he was usually alone with her and then she was quiet and did not cry. It was the same when Mother went dancing with Leo. Then he would notify Martin, who would come over only when Leo was out—he had the same fear of Leo as Wilma—and they bathed the little girl, gave her food and played with her. Or he could leave Wilma in Martin's garden while they played football. Of an evening he lay in bed with Wilma, murmured his evening prayers and thought of his uncle. Wilma, sucking her thumb, quite clean, slept at his side and he only took her over to her cot when he was ready to go to sleep. In the next-door room Mother and Leo united. He heard no sound but he knew what was happening. When he reflected which Uncle he liked best, he always hesitated between Karl and Gert. Karl had been friendly and pedantic. He was the 'new life' Karl, the 'new deal' Karl, the Karl whose distinguishing odour was the odour of soup for the state employees; Karl who had bequeathed them the canvas cover of the pot which Wilma now used as a toy-box.

Karl, however, could be generous like Gert who came home laughing at night with all his tools in a jam jar—trowels, spattles, ruler and spirit level. He planked down on the table his daily wage, which he had taken in provisions—bread and margarine, tobacco, meat and flour and, occasionally, what had become so rare and expensive and tasted so wonderful, an egg. Mother had laughed most during the Gert era. He had been young, black-haired, with a 'couldn't-care-less' and 'hang-your-hat-on-the-peg' air. Sometimes he had heard Mother laughing as she lay in the dark in bed with Gert. And he had not found this unpleasant as he had found her giggling with Karl. He had such a pleasant memory of Gert that even the idea that he united with Mother did not make him repulsive. There was a dark green patch on the sleeve of Gert's overcoat where his Sergeant's stripes had been, and in the evening he did a thriving trade in plaster and cement which he sold by the pound. He spooned plaster and cement out of paper bags by the pound as today one weighed out flour.

Karl was different but also nice. He was the only uncle who ever went to church. Karl had taken him along, explained the

liturgy and the prayers, and in the evenings after supper would put on his glasses and begin to talk of his 'new life'. Karl did not go to Confession or to Communion but he went to church and knew everything about it. He was thoughtful, pedantic but friendly and brought home presents of sweets and toys, and whenever he said "We'll start a new life," he ended with: "I'll bring some order into our life, Wilma, order." Part and parcel of this order was that Heinrich should call him 'Father' instead of 'Uncle'. Erich—strange smelling infusions, warm towels dipped in vinegar and the lighter which still functioned . . . Erich had remained in Saxony. Gert failed to appear one day and they heard nothing of him for a long time until, months later, he wrote from Munich: 'I had to leave. I'm not coming back. It was fine being with you. You can keep the wrist-watch.' The smell of wet plaster stuck in his memory and the word 'shit' remained in Mother's vocabulary from Gert. Karl had left because 'it' had been done away with. No 'new life' had begun and sometimes he still saw Karl in church. Karl now had a wife and child. On Sundays he went out for a walk holding a boy by the hand who was the same age as Wilma. But Karl no longer seemed to remember him or his Mother, for he never greeted them. He now went to Communion and for some time past he had confessed. Above the organ music he heard the voice which had spoken of 'a new life' of a 'new deal' and of order, and he could not understand why his Mother had done away with 'it', for otherwise Karl would have been his Father.

One of the residents always wrote with a pencil on the corridor wall the word that Mother had used to the baker, but no one knew for certain who it was. Sometimes the word stayed for a whole day on the wall, but never longer, for the master-joiner who had a little workshop downstairs came and scratched the word out with a nail and the white traces of the plaster lay on the tiled floor. White dust and a scratch on the wall. . . . The unknown person kept writing the word only to have it removed by the joiner. There were already twenty such scratches on the corridor wall. It was a silent battle, waged obstinately on both sides. The word constantly reappeared and the joiner, who smelled of camphor as Erich had done, came from the workshop with a four inch nail and scratched out the word. The joiner was a nice man. He was particularly kind to Wilma. On Saturdays,

when the apprentices swept out the workshop, he sorted out all the big ends of wood from the rubbish, scrubbed them and brought them to Wilma. Also long, very attractive shavings and he brought sweets, too, when he paid the rent.

When Leo happened to be there the joiner said: "I'll still take you down a peg," and Leo replied "I'll take you down one." They never exchanged another word.

Much later—and he was surprised that he had not thought of it before—he had an idea that it could be Leo who wrote the word on the wall. It would have been just like Leo—it was a Leo-word—to do it, when he went to his shift or returned home. He watched him when he went out or came back from his shift, but he wrote nothing on the wall. On the days he watched Leo, the word was not there: it only appeared when he had been unable to spy on him. It took a long time and half the wall now was covered with scratches. One day, when he came from school and found the word in the corridor, he examined Leo's pencil during the meal. He had stuck it behind his ear and the point was worn down, with a little white circle round the tip. This was how pencils looked when they had been writing on a wall. So Leo was the culprit!

Mother was furious, too, that someone should have written it there and said: "The children shouldn't read such things." And she added, in a gloomy voice: "They'll learn all about filth soon enough."

Yet Mother had used the word to the baker in the dark, warm bakery which smelled of sweet dough.

But Leo wrote it again on the wall and the joiner scratched it out with the nail, and Heinrich could not pluck up the courage to tell the joiner what he had discovered.

He would tell Uncle Albert one day when they were discussing various subjects.

When he lay in bed in the dark he could still see his father's picture in the light of the street lamps. A photo that trembled slightly when the cars passed, swaying particularly violently when the 34 omnibus or a truck went by.

Not much remained of Father, the photo on the wall and a book which Mother obstinately kept among the novels and magazines, a thin, dirty, yellowing pamphlet: "All the Motor Mechanic needs to know for his Master's certificate." Between

the leaves of the pamphlet was a folded, dog-eared but still easily recognizable coloured print: "Christ and the Disciples at the Last Supper." The same print which he too had been given with almost the same inscription: Heinrich Brielach received the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Parish church of St. Anna on Whit Sunday, 1930. But in his case it was the parish church of St. Paul, Whit Sunday, 1952.

Mother's father had remained in Saxony. He mentioned a small pension and always wrote the same remark on his postcards: *Can't you find me a cheap room so that I could come home?* And Mother sent him tobacco and margarine and replied: *It's very difficult to find a room, they're so dear.* Mother's mother had died in Saxony and Father's father was buried here in the cemetery . . . a mouldering wooden cross before which she laid flowers on All Souls' Day and lit a bright candle. Father's mother—Grandma—had quarrelled with Mother. She only came on Boxing Day, brought him presents and nothing for Wilma. She spoke almost as Karl had spoken of 'order' and 'a new life'. And her final remark was invariably: "If my poor boy had lived to see it."

But she came seldom and she was not a good woman because she ignored the existence of Wilma and never brought her a present. She always said to him: "Come and see me." But he had been only once. It was as clean in her house as Leo was and it smelled of beeswax. He was given cakes and cocoa and money for the tram. But then she began to question him and he refused to answer and did not visit her again. For she, too, spoke in the same vein as the people beneath the layer of ice: 'chaste soul and a pure heart'—and all the while she asked questions about Leo and Karl and Gert and shook her head as she muttered: "No order. If my poor boy, your father, had lived to see it." And she showed him pictures of Father at the same age as himself, of his first Communion, and pictures of Father in his mechanic's overalls. But he never went back to see her because he was not allowed to take Wilma.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WHEN Nella had visitors she called Albert to help her carry the sleeping boy to his room. The child was a heavy sleeper and murmured in his dreams. They were always afraid that he would wake up, but usually he snuggled down in Albert's bed and went on sleeping.

Nella often had visitors and Albert had to carry the boy to his room about twice a week. Then he had to leave his work because, when the boy slept in his room, he did not want to draw and smoke, and it was only natural that he should go over to Nella's room and sit down with her guests. He had tried a couple of times to take his work up to the empty room next to Glum's, but he did not like the room and he needed a host of small objects for his work which he could not choose from his drawer without long reflection—scissors, various types of gum, pencils and brushes and it did not seem to him worth while to fix up a studio in the empty room upstairs. The living-room downstairs, which was never used, was not suitable for his work. An orange sofa, orange armchairs and a carpet to match, the pictures on the walls, by a painter whom Nella's father had encouraged. Dull photographic precision and the musty smell of the room which, although regularly cleaned, had not been lived in for years.

The boy obstinately refused to go into an empty room, so Albert was obliged to go over to Nella and sit with her guests. He was invariably irritated and bored. Sometimes he went out to get drunk, but he was sorry for Nella when he returned and found her alone with full ashtrays, empty bottles and plates with the remains of sandwiches.

The guests were usually snobs whom Nella had met on her travels or at conferences, or who had been introduced to her at lectures, and he loathed listening to these endless conversations about art. He never took part in the discussions, drank wine and

tea, and he usually felt a little sick when they began to recite Rai's poems but, encouraged by Nella's smile, he would later reluctantly give the guests some details about Rai.

To forget his sorrow at this waste of time, he drank a lot of wine and there were usually a pair of pretty girls present and he liked pretty girls even if they were slightly snobbish. He attended to everything, sat down and stood up to uncork a bottle or at a late hour went to fetch more wine, cakes and cigarettes. What held him there was the boy sleeping in his bed, for the child would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night and be frightened when strange faces bent over his bed; and Nella's mother often made one of her scenes very late at night. If she was not passing blood she concocted something else to disturb the peace of the household. She could skulk quite peacefully for weeks on end in her room with her bottle of red wine, a plate full of meat sandwiches and her bright red packets of TOMAHAWK, looking through old letters or totting up her wealth; she would turn over the pages of old school primers, novels from the year 1896–1900, or the old school Bible which still bore traces of the colourings she had done as a ten-year-old peasant girl—the blood-stained garment of the Egyptian Joseph filled in with carmine chalk more than fifty years before, or the mustard-coloured lion which had spared Daniel and lay sleeping at his feet.

For weeks on end she was peaceful, but then she would suddenly feel the urge to make a scene. At one o'clock in the morning she would decide to make a salad; she would burst into Nella's room in her black dressing gown with the blue flowered pattern, an empty vinegar bottle in her hand, and roar through the door: "A damned nuisance, the bottle's empty again, and I must . . . I must . . . have a salad!" It was not easy to procure vinegar in the middle of the night, but Albert had come to an arrangement with the woman in the station restaurant and in case of need he could usually get anything he wanted from there. If Bolda came down in the middle of the night and Grandmother was awake and in the mood for a scene, she started bickering and raving at Bolda. 'You ex-nun. You two-fold widow.' And she would catalogue the misdeeds of Bolda's father, who had obviously been a poacher and a smuggler, but had already lain for fifty-five years in the cemetery of a small village in the Eifel. If she was not in the mood to make a scene, she would let Bolda pass unhindered

or have a peaceable gossip with her, but she could just as well burst into Nella's room and roar: "Is the whoring still going on? And your poor husband at rest under the Russian earth."

Then she could only be pacified by him or Glum, and it was better that he remained at home, for Nella was terrified of her mother.

So Albert sat two nights a week with Nella's visitors, watched the boy sleep and acted as a kind of night watchman, ready to pacify Nella's mother in case of need.

He did not mind being used as a chauffeur when the guests left. He drove Nella's guests to the tram stop or, when it was very late, to the depot, where a tram left every hour during the night. When he felt so inclined he drove them all home. He liked staying out for a long time, because he always hoped that Nella would be in bed when he returned. It was a pleasure to drive alone through the night. The streets were deserted, the gardens lay in deep shadow and he watched the magic conjured up by his headlights; wild, harsh, very black shadows and the greenish-yellow lights of the street lamps—a cool icy light which he loved because it gave an impression of great cold even in summer. The gardens and parks in this greenish-yellow light were cold, rigid and lifeless, even when the trees were in bloom. Sometimes he drove a few miles out of the city through sleeping villages as far as the Autobahn, drove along at a high speed and at the next roundabout returned to the city, and each time he felt a deep excitement when a human being bobbed up in his headlights. Most of them were whores who had taken up their positions where the car's lights would fall when the driver dimmed them after a bend—lonely, lifeless, gaily-dressed dolls who did not even smile when someone approached them. Bright legs against a black background illuminated in the bright light. . . . They always reminded Albert of figureheads on the bows of sunken ships. His dimmed lights brought them out of the darkness and he admired their shrewd choice of a position, but he had never seen a car stop and one of the girls get in.

At the foot of the bridge was a little café, which remained open all night. There he would drink a glass of beer and a schnapps to delay his homecoming. The proprietress knew him well, for Nella often had visitors and on each occasion he drove them home in order not to remain alone with Nella.

He often remained sitting for a long time in this café, thinking of things of which Nella's guests had unwittingly reminded him. At the tables were usually a couple of Rhine boatmen playing dice: soft foreign voices came from the radio and the little dark-haired proprietress sat knitting near the stove. She always told him whom the garments were for: a light green pullover for her son-in-law, russet brown gloves for her daughter; but usually she knitted for her grandson, pretty little rompers of her own design, and she often asked his advice. He had given her a lot of tips. Recently he had suggested that she should knit dark green bottles with different coloured labels into a light yellow skirt for her fourteen-year-old grand-daughter. With the coloured pencils he always carried, he sketched the pattern on the white wrapping paper in which she packed up cold cutlets and rissoles for the boatmen. It was sometimes two or three o'clock in the morning before he had finished pondering on all the memories Nella's guests had conjured up.

Before the war he had been correspondent of a small German newspaper in London, but the paper had thrown him out and after Leen's death and at Nella's request he had returned to Germany, and Nella's father had given him a job in his jam factory so that he could go underground. Here, with Rai, until the outbreak of war he had run a small statistical department and they had looked upon their salary as a joke. They were of little real use to the factory but the job gave them a front. They could always prove that they were doing respectable unpolitical work and that they were cogs in the so-called 'working programme'. Their workshop looked untidy enough to give the impression that they were very busy. On their drawing boards were sketches fastened down with drawing pins, tubes of paint and brushes, bottles of poster colours lay on the table and, each week, the sales department, issued a report with statistics which they had worked into their tables, columns of numbers, referring to the provinces in Germany, transformed into little jam pots on bright coloured maps.

Later they invented new names for new kinds of jam and knew their statistics so well that they could tell at a glance how much of each kind had been and would be eaten. To crown their cynicism they designed a pamphlet: "The development and distribution of Holstege's aromatic jams", which, on its 25th anniversary in 1938,

the firm issued on fine paper with many drawings and sent free to all their customers. Albert designed new labels, Rai invented new slogans, and they spent the evenings with Nella and the few friends it was still possible to have in the year 1938. They did not feel comfortable at this period and of an evening their suppressed irritation often broke out, particularly when Father Willibrord visited them. Rai hated Willibrord, the man who was now one of the leaders of the Rai cult. It usually ended by the priest being so insulted that he left. When he had gone they got very drunk, discussed the prospects of emigrating and arrived next morning at the office with a hangover and in a fit of rage they would tear up all their drawings and statistics.

But a few days later they started to draw again, to find new symbols for jam consumers, new categories and shades to portray certain varieties pictorially, and then there was a new historical pamphlet in which Rai undertook to prove that the Stone Age inhabitants, Romans, Greeks, Phoenicians, Jews, Incas and Germans had already enjoyed the blessings of jam. Rai squandered his whole imagination and Albert his whole talent as an artist on this pamphlet and it was a masterpiece which brought the concern a host of new customers. But then this became superfluous, for a new customer came along who bought jam without bothering about publicity—the War.

During the war at every roadside where German troops had passed could be seen jam pots from the factory for which they had worked. Labels on tins designed by Albert and slogans invented by Rai. French children played football with these tins; for Russian women they were treasures and even when the labels had been rubbed off or torn and the tins were rusty and battered, they could still recognize the embossed monogram of Rai's father-in-law, E.H.—Edmund Holstege. Even when they lay in the dark, in musty barracks, and trod on clattering tin cans, they were not spared this encounter: by touching the spot where the handle was let into the pot one could feel the embossed E.H. and the stylised cherries which Albert had designed.

The German army's victorious campaigns were not only marked with cartridge butts, ruined houses and rotting cattle, but also with jam pots. In Poland, France, Denmark, Norway and in the Balkans a slogan which Rai had invented could be read on these pots: 'Only a FOOL makes home-made jam; Holstege makes

it for you.' The words 'Only a FOOL makes home-made jam' were in thick red print and the remaining words were in smaller type. This slogan had resulted from a long conference with the board of directors when they had started a campaign against home-made jam; but the campaign came to nothing because the Party intervened, for in its opinion home-made jam was a good advertisement for the German housewife's virtue. But the labels and posters had already been printed and in wartime it was unimportant and they continued to be stuck on and travelled deep into Russia.

Albert and Rai had been separated during the first years of the war, fought with different units in different theatres of war, but even though they were apart they met, in the suburbs of Warsaw and at the Cathedral of Amiens—German jam pots.

Moreover they received parcels from Nella's mother containing charming little miniature nickel-plated jam pots which were given free to anyone who bought three tins—and Nella's mother wrote, quite superfluously, that business was good. . . .

The café was empty. Albert sipped his beer and pushed the glass away because it tasted so sour; he looked at the row of bottles on the shelf and said, without lifting his head: "Give me a Schwarzwälder Kirsch," but the woman did not stir. The ball of wool and the needles had slipped to the floor and he saw that she had fallen asleep. A husky-voiced woman was singing a South American song on the radio. He stood up, went behind the counter and poured himself out a kirsch, picked up the ball of wool and the needles and looked at the clock. It was three o'clock in the morning. Slowly, almost drop by drop, he drank the schnapps and filled his pipe. Nella would not be in bed. She was never in bed when he came home and she would accept everything he told her: Rai's hatred of Willibrord, Rai's cynicism, his snobbishness, and the fact that, five years before his death, he did not write a single poem but only slogans, and that she was responsible for the birth of a false legend.

He finished the kirsch and tapped the proprietress gently on the shoulder. She woke up in a flash, smiled and said: "Lucky I didn't doze off when you weren't here, for I could have been robbed."

She stood up and switched off the radio. Albert put the money on the counter, went outside and waited for the woman who pulled down the concertina blind over the door and locked up.

"Come," he said, "I'll take you home."

"That's fine."

It was Monday and there were few people at this hour in the streets, but the big trucks loaded with vegetables were rumbling to the market.

For her sake he made a little detour, dropped her and drove very slowly home.

Nella was not in bed. She had not even cleared up the room. Glasses everywhere, cups and plates with the remains of sandwiches, half-eaten cakes in glass dishes, empty cigarette packets and not even the ashtrays had been emptied. Bottles stood on the table and corks all over the place.

Nella was sitting in the armchair, smoking and staring into space. He always had the impression that she had sat there eternally, would go on sitting there eternally and in his mind the word 'eternally' had its full strength and meaning: she was there smoking, staring into space in the smoky room, leaning back in her green armchair. She had made coffee and the jug was still warm beneath the shabby cosy and when she removed it, the bright green jug was the only note of freshness in the room. Even the flowers which the guests had brought stood in the cigarette fumes or still lay wrapped up in their cellophane on the hall table. In the old days Nella's slatterliness had always seemed charming but since he had lived with her, he hated it. The jug stood on the table and he knew that it would be a long night. He hated coffee, hated Nella, the guests and the night wasted in gossip, but as soon as Nella smiled he forgot his hatred. What power lay in that single muscle which wrought the sudden change in her face, and although he knew that this smile was purely mechanical he was always taken in, because each time he really thought that it was intended for him. He sat down and made the same remarks he had made a thousand times before about this time in the morning and on these occasions. Nella liked to embark at this hour upon a long monologue concerning her ruined life. To confess or to paint a picture of what might have happened had Rai not been killed. She strained every nerve to put the clock back, to push aside everything that had happened ten years before and to draw him into her dreams.

She stood up at about half-past four to make a second jug of coffee and, so as not to be alone in this room which he had known

for twenty years . . . in this room, full of cigarette smoke and memories of Rai, he cleared away the glasses and dirty plates, emptied the ashtrays, drew back the green curtain and opened the window. Then he joined Nella in the kitchen, took vases out of the cupboard, filled them with water and arranged the flowers. Later he stood at her side waiting for the water to boil on the gas ring, ate cold meat, a roll and butter or one of the tasty salads that she always kept in readiness in the refrigerator.

This was the hour she longed for and on account of which she had presumably laid on the whole party. It had been exactly the same twenty years ago. He had stood here next to Nella, watching her make the coffee, eating her salad at three or four o'clock in the morning and looking at the motto on a black and white tile: THE WAY TO THE HEART IS THROUGH THE STOMACH. Rai had always sat and dozed in Nella's bedroom. In those days, too, the guests had remained late into the night. The nights had been spent in political discussion, wrangles with Schurbigel who challenged them all to join the S.A. and convert it to Christianity. Words like 'yeast' and 'leaven', phrases like: 'to introduce Christian ethics into National Socialism'. It had excited them in those days and there were pretty girls present, but most of them were dead or had moved to other cities and countries during the War. And two of the pretty girls had married Nazis, pagan marriages under the oaks.

Later they quarrelled with nearly everyone. They spent nights poring over maps which they brought back from the office. But they kept late hours and in those days the first pot of coffee was brewed at two o'clock and the second at about three.

Fortunately the jug in which Nella now made coffee was a new one, but a great deal remained as a bitter reminder of the past.

His heart beat faster when he went to his room in the middle of the night to see if the boy was asleep. Martin had grown up fast and it was rather disturbing to see the tall, eleven-year-old boy lying in his bed. Good-looking and fair-haired, very like his Mother. . . . He lay there completely relaxed. The early morning noises came through the open window, the distant rumble of trams, a twitter of birds and the inky blue night had paled behind the poplar trees at the end of the garden. And in the room upstairs, where Glum now lived, there had not been heard for many

years the heavy regular tread of Nella's father: the tread of a peasant too used to walking behind his plough to alter his gait.

Present and past jostled each other like two discs seeking a point of congruence, one rotating smoothly on a central axis—the past, which he thought he could see so clearly—the present, however, spinning faster than the past, spawning on it, driven on another axis. And the face of the boy, his breath on his hand and Glum's good round face were of no avail.

It did not help him to see the scars of the past twenty years on Nella's face, to see them clearly: little crow's feet round the eyes, a slight plumpness in the neck, lips which had grown thin from chain-smoking and the hard, coarsened lines in her face. No, it did not help him. He remembered her smile, an automatically released enchantment, which conquered time and made the child in the bed appear as a ghost. And between the spawning present and the apparently smoothly rotating past streaked a third intruder, a harsh yellow disc, time that had never been, life that had never been lived: Nella's dream. She forced him into it, even if only for a few minutes here at night in the kitchen when she brewed coffee and made sandwiches which would grow stale on the plate. Coffee jugs, rolls and butter, a smile and that grey, milky, shot-silk early morning light. These were merely props and *décor* for Nella's torturing dream, the dream of living the life that had never been and would never be lived—her life with Rai.

"Oh," he murmured, "you'll still succeed in driving me mad."

He closed his eyes to avoid seeing the bewildering rotation, the chaotic glitter of three discs which could never be superimposed, a lethal incongruity in which there was no dead centre.

Coffee that would remain undrunk, sandwiches that would remain uneaten—properties in a narrowing tragedy into which he would be drawn as the sole important super—and yet to know in consolation that Bolda would warm up the coffee for herself, and Glum would pack up the sandwiches and take them to work.

"Go to bed," said Nella, wearily as she closed the green lid of the coffee jug.

He shook his head. "Why don't we try to make things easier for ourselves?"

"Marry?" she asked. "We two? Do you think that would make things any easier?"

"Why not?"

"Go to bed," she said, "I don't want to torment you."

He left without a word and walked slowly across the hall into the bathroom. He lit the geyser, let the water run and set the tap so that the water would not make too much noise as it flowed into the bath.

He stood there for a long time, staring idly at the water which made little pale blue whirlpools as it rose from the bottom to the surface. He listened intently and heard Nella go to her bedroom; a moment later came the sound of weeping. She had left the bedroom door open so that he could hear her weep. It was quiet and cool in the house. Outside dawn was breaking. Absent-mindedly he threw his cigarette stub in the bath-water and, half-dead from weariness, watched the stub disintegrate and the black ash sink. Calcined ash. . . The bright yellow tobacco flakes, first in a thick colony, then dispersing, swam to the surface, each of them leaving a little yellow cloud of water. The cigarette paper grew darker and on this dark grey background he could clearly read 'TOMAHAWK'. For the sake of convenience he smoked Grandmother's brand in order to be prepared for her assaults. The yellow-tinged water cloud now looked like a sponge, and the water gushing from the tap thrust the colony of disintegrating, ever-darkening tobacco flakes further away while below, on the clean blue bottom of the bath, the black, hardened particles of ash were gradually sucked down towards the plug.

Nella continued to weep with the door open and he suddenly turned off the geyser and the tap, pulled the plug out of the bath and saw the yellow tobacco cloud disappear in a little whirlpool.

He switched off the light and went over to Nella. She was smoking and crying bitterly. He stood in the door and was surprised at the hardness of his voice when he cried out: "What do you really want?"

"Come and sit near me," she said. "Come." Her smile was a failure and he found this pathetic. It happened so seldom. He sat down, took a cigarette from the packet she offered and her face brightened and she smiled as though someone had secretly pressed a button. She used her smile as a photographer presses the release to take snapshots. She was famous for her smile but now it tired him, just as the sight of her soft white hands, which were as famous as her smiles, tired him. She was not above using the

cheapest tricks. She crossed her legs and by a swift forward movement gave full play to her attractive breasts.

In the bath the rest of the water gurgled away. A little belch and the calming noise of running water ceased.

"I won't marry again," she said. "I won't be caught again. I'll be your mistress anytime you like as you well know, and as a mistress I shall be far more faithful to you than I could be as a wife. But I won't marry again. Since I've got it into my head that Rai is dead I often think that it would be better never to marry. Why all this comedy, this spook, this deadly gravity about marriage? And the terror of widowhood. . . . A registry office or a church wedding and a little duffer comes and gets your husband shot. Three million, four million of these ceremonial contracts rendered null and void by the war. Widows . . . I wasn't cut out to be a widow. And I don't want to be anyone else's wife except Rai's, and I don't want to have any more children. Those are my conditions."

"And you know mine," he said.

"Naturally," she replied calmly. "To marry. You'd adopt the boy and probably want children of your own."

"Good night," he said, making a move to stand up.

"No, don't go. Just as things are getting amusing you want to go. Why are you so correct, so pedantic? Why stick so firmly to the regulations? I don't get it."

"For the boy's sake. Your dreams are of no importance whatsoever compared with the life of the boy. Moreover, you'll soon be forty."

"Everything would have been all right with Rai. I should have been faithful to him and we should have had more children. But his death has broken me, if you like, and I don't want to be anyone else's wife. You're practically Martin's father as it is. Isn't that enough?"

"I'm afraid you'll marry someone else who'll get the boy."

"You love the boy more than you do me?"

"No," he said gently, "I love him and I don't love you. No more, no less. I know you too well to fall in love with you, but you're pretty enough for me to want to sleep with you now and again. And even that I couldn't really do now because I often think of Rai, and the boy's always around. I think that's it."

"Oh," she replied. "I know exactly why I won't marry you. Because you don't love me."

"But recently you've persuaded yourself that you love me. It suits your dreams."

"No, I haven't persuaded myself and I know that it's not true. It's the same with me as it is with you. In the old days we called that speaking frankly, but our words aren't frank enough. Put all the cards on the table if you like."

Albert wanted to go over and speak from the window as he had so often seen men speaking frankly to women in films, pacing up and down the room as they spoke. So he remained sitting in the uncomfortable armchair and took a cigarette from the packet which Nella offered him. "My God," he said, "even to speak of love is quite ridiculous. Shouldn't we both laugh if one day I said to you 'I love you'?"

"I think so," she replied.

"And, of course, it's another matter to sleep with the widow of a friend rather than marry her—and to marry a woman who takes her dreams consciously and greedily like a drug addict—that I would only do for Martin's sake, but I don't think a man should marry a woman merely because of a child. I see that clearly today for the first time."

Nella began to weep again and he got out of the chair and walked round the room, restless and at a loss, although he had seen this done so often on the films.

"Just one thing," he said. "Can I—can we all expect of you, for the boy's sake, that you should be a little more careful?"

"You're wrong, as all of you are wrong about me. You take me for almost a whore, but since Rai's death I've never really had a man."

"So much the worse," he said, "when you turn on your smile like you wind up a clockwork toy. Ah, we should marry all the same. We could live peacefully and rationally with the child, not bother about all the idiocies of our age, emigrate to another country away from the whole bloody muddle and one day, perhaps, what people call love will descend upon us like a sudden shower or a thunderstorm. "Rai's dead," he said, and he repeated it in a harder, louder voice. "Rai's dead I tell you."

"It sounds almost as if you were pleased," she said maliciously.

"You know that it was just as bad for me to lose him as for you,

only bad in another way. I think that it's easier for men to find women to marry than friends. Women you can sleep with now and again . . . there are hundreds of them. In any case, Rai's dead . . . and you have few possibilities left. To remain a widow or become the wife of another man. But you try to live in a between stage in a category that doesn't exist."

"But a category" she said, eagerly "that is perhaps in the process of becoming, which has not yet a name. Oh, I hate you all, because you admit that life goes on. Strewing oblivion over murder as one strews ashes on icy pavements. For the sake of the children, yes, for the children, it sounds wonderful, and it's a wonderful alibi. To bring up new widows and new husbands who will be shot down in order to make more widows. To consecrate new marriages. Can't you duffers think of anything better? Oh, I know, I know," she said, wandering over to another chair, and looking at Rai's picture above the bed. "I know," she said mimicking Father Willibrord's sanctimonious voice: "Safeguard the child and the work of your husband." And she went on: "Marriage is a mystery. Marriages are made in heaven. They smile like soothsayers when they say it and they pray in their churches for the men to become brave, clean, pious, gay and free so that the widow factory can go on producing. There are plenty of postmen to bring the news and priests to deliver the letters. Oh yes, if anyone knows that Rai's dead it's I. I know that he's no longer with me and that he will never return in this world. I know it perfectly and I'm beginning to hate you because you seem to have the serious intention of making a potential widow of me for the second time. If one starts early enough—at sixteen as far as I'm concerned—before one's demise one can be widowed five or six times and still be as young as I am at the end. Ceremonial oaths, ceremonial contracts and the mystery imparted with a gentle smile: 'Marriages are made in heaven.' Good. Then I'm longing for heaven where my marriage will really be made. Now you've only to say that I can't banish death from the earth. Say it."

"It's just what I was going to say.

"I didn't expect anything else. A fine slogan, my friend. You can be pleased with yourself. Weren't you also going to say that one can start a new life?"

"Perhaps that's what I wanted to say."

"Oh, shut up. The old one was too beautiful. A new life, and by that you mean a second marriage with you as the husband."

"Devil take it," he said. "Don't imagine for one minute that I'm so madly keen on marrying you. I would only do it for intelligent reasons."

"That's a charming thing to say. Very nice, I'm sure. A great flatterer was lost in you."

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't mean it in that way. I shouldn't find it so terrible to marry you."

"That's a lot better. So it wouldn't kill you?"

"Rubbish," he replied. "You know I like you and that you're a pretty woman."

"But not your type, eh?"

"Drivel," he said. "I'm maintaining that it's possible to start a new life."

"You'd better go now," she said. "Go. . . ."

It was daylight. He stood up and drew the green curtains again. "All right," he said, "I'll go."

"In your heart of hearts," she said, "you think I'll grow soft and marry you, but you're wrong."

"Do you want to use the bathroom?"

"No, I'll wash in the kitchen. Go now."

He returned to the bathroom and turned on the geyser, setting the tap once more so that the water could flow into the bath without making a noise. Then he put his wrist-watch on the nail where the chain usually hung. He went over to Nella who was brushing her teeth in the kitchen.

"You forget," he said, "that we once tried to live as you suggested. You forget a great deal."

She rinsed her mouth out, put the glass down and ran her fingers aimlessly over the tiled wall.

"Yes," she murmured. "At that time I didn't want it because of the child. He was too small and I couldn't. Forgive me for forgetting it."

In those days, just after the War, he had desired her passionately. She was the first woman with whom he had slept under the same roof after being five years with men and she was beautiful. A few days after his return he had put his coat and trousers over his nightshirt and gone barefoot into her room. The

light was still on and she was reading in bed with a big black woollen shawl round her shoulders. The big electric heater, whose wires hummed lightly because of a faulty connection, stood near her bed. She smiled at the sight of his bare feet and called: "Heavens, you'll catch cold. Sit down here." It was cold outside and the room smelled of potatoes which were piled in sacks in the clothes cupboard because a few had been stolen from the cellar.

Nella closed her book, pointed to the old sheepskin lying at the foot of her bed and threw him a thick red knitted jacket. "Wrap that round your feet." He had said nothing, sat down, wrapped the jacket round his feet and took a cigarette from the packet which lay on her night table. He sat up a little and felt the beneficial warmth of the glowing heater. She said nothing and was no longer smiling. The child asleep in a small cradle near the bookcase had caught a cold and was breathing heavily through its nose. Without make-up Nella looked older than she did in daylight. She was pale and tired and he caught a whiff of her breath and it smelled of cheap spirits. In his embarrassment he looked at the book which she had laid on the night table: *Thérèse Desqueroux*. On the bottom shelf of the night table her underclothes lay in great disorder. He felt ashamed of invading her privacy so abruptly and without knocking and he stared past her face at the wall where the photo of Rai hung or at the foot of the bed; and he saw Rai's face looking down at him with penetrating clarity. Not a peaceful but an angry face, the face of a man who was angry at this accidental pointless death.

"Would you like a drink?" asked Nella and he was grateful to her for summoning up a smile.

"Yes, please."

She fished a glass and a bottle of brackish brown schnapps from the space between the bed and the wall and poured him a drink. She said nothing, she neither encouraged nor rebuffed him. She merely waited like an animal on the alert.

Then he said: "Have a drink with me." And from the space between the bed and the wall she fished a coffee cup, tipped the rest of the coffee and the grounds over her head on to the floor and held out the cup. He poured out the coffee and they both drank and smoked while the electric heater behind him purred like a great friendly cat. Before she had finished the schnapps, he

turned off the light and said in the red glow of the heater: "If you don't want to, tell me to go." "No," she said, and smiled nervously, and he never discovered whether her 'No' meant 'yes' or 'no'. He turned off the heater, waited until the wires had faded and bent over her bed. In the darkness she put her arms round his neck like a halter, kissed him on the cheek and murmured in the dark: "I think you'd better go" and he felt strangely disappointed. Disappointed at her lips which had seemed to him soft and large on his cheek, a kiss which did not in the least represent what he imagined Nella's kisses would be. He put on the light and the heater again and he was relieved that he did not have to feel ashamed, because Nella had been so sweet, and he did not feel too disappointed that his plan had failed. Nella laughed when the light went on again and put her arms round his neck once more like a halter, pulled him down and kissed him on the other cheek. And once more he was disappointed. . . . "We can't do it," said Nella, and he went back to his room, and they never mentioned the matter again, and he had forgotten the incident until this moment when he remembered it in the bathroom.

Nella put the glass on the shelf and looked at him thoughtfully. "I didn't want to at that time because of the child. . . ."

"And today I can't because of the boy."

"Strange," she said with a smile, "that I should have forgotten."

"One forgets a lot," he said with a smile, "because it's as though it never happened. But perhaps now you're not offended any more at what I said."

"In the meantime, we're nine years older," she said.

"Good night."

He went into the bathroom and a little later heard Nella go into her bedroom and shut the door. He undressed and got into the bath and now he was furious at the thought of how tired he would be at nine o'clock. He liked to go to bed early and to sleep long and deeply, to get up early in the morning and have breakfast with the boy to cheer him on the way to school. He knew by experience how terrible it was for a child to get up alone in the morning, get its own breakfast and trot off to school, knowing that everyone else in the house could go on sleeping. His parents had kept a tavern and never got to bed before three or four o'clock. Throughout his childhood he went of a morning through

the smoky guest rooms into the large empty kitchen. It smelled of cold fat, stale salads and his rolls and butter stood on a tray and the coffee on the gas cooker in an aluminium pot. The hiss of the gas jets in the icy cold, evil-smelling kitchen . . . the hastily swallowed hot coffee which tasted warmed-up and the rolls with pieces of meat cut clumsily and far too thick which he did not like. Ever since he had left home he had always longed to go to bed early and get up early. But he had always lived with people who made this routine impossible.

He took a cold shower, dried himself and made his way into the kitchen. While he had been bathing Glum had been and gone. Glum's coffee pot was empty and the cosy lay beside it. Bolda also seemed to have gone for he saw a lot of crumbs from her dark sour bread.

He went into his room to wake Martin but the boy was already awake. He smiled. He was obviously pleased to see him and to know that they would breakfast together.

"I'm sorry I wasn't at home last night when you came out of school," said Albert. "I had to go out. They sent for me. Come, you must get up."

He gave a start when the boy jumped out of bed. He was as big as everything Nella wanted to dream away. He left him alone and returned to the kitchen to cook the eggs and butter the rolls. It was silent now in Nella's bedroom and for a moment he understood her. She, too, was afraid because the boy was already so big and obviously lived in a completely different world from hers.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE house grew more dilapidated day by day, although there was plenty of money to keep it in repair. But no one bothered about it. The roof leaked and Glum often complained that the big dark stain on his ceiling was growing larger. When it rained heavily the ceiling dripped and—suddenly springing to life—they went up to the loft and put a pail under the leak. Then Glum had peace for a while. The duration of this peace depended upon the size of the pail and the frequency or strength of the rain. If it was a flat vessel and it rained for long, Glum's peace was soon finished for the vessel overflowed and the dark patches on his ceiling grew larger. Then a larger pail would be put under the defective spot. Patches of damp soon began to appear in Bolda's room and on the ceiling of the empty room in which Grandfather had lived. One day a large piece of plaster fell in the bathroom. Bolda swept up the mess and Glum mixed a strange concoction of plaster, sand and chalk and smeared it over the wattling.

Nella, however, was proud of her initiative when she went into town and bought ten large zinc baths which were spread over the entire floor of the loft. "Now it can't happen again," she said. She paid almost as much for the baths as a reasonable repair to the roof would have cost and overhead when it rained she heard the strange melodic dripping of rain which made a dark, threatening noise as it fell in the hollow bath-tubs. Nevertheless Glum had to smear his mixture of plaster, sand and chalk more often on the ceilings. In this way he dirtied the stairs and his clothes, and Martin, who helped him, was filthy from head to foot and his clothes had to be sent to the cleaners.

From time to time, Grandmother climbed up to the loft and looked at the damage. She threaded her way between the zinc bath-tubs and her heavy silk skirt made a ringing noise on the rims. She put on her glasses and her whole being radiated caution

and a feeling of responsibility. She kept on deciding to look up in her old files the address of the builder who used to work for her, and for days on end in her room she went through old files and folders before getting lost in her study of ancient accounts. But the address of the roof repairer was never found although she sent for file after file from the factory records. One year after the other was brought by the little red delivery van until her room was full of documents. She gave no one any peace until she got back to the first year: mouldy folders from the year 1913.

Then she sent for Martin and the boy had to listen to her for hours and be initiated into the secrets of the aromatic jams his grandfather had discovered and distributed throughout the world. The First World War had given a huge stimulus to the new enterprise, and Grandmother closed her lecture by showing the boy graphs of the production figures, straight lines, painted in water colour, which looked like cross sections of mountains. From these it could clearly be seen that years of famine were good for jam factories. The year 1917—"The year your mother was born, my dear boy"—was a peak year not to be equalled until 1941. Forced to look at the tables the boy realized that a rapid rise had begun once more with the year 1933. He asked Grandmother the reason for this rise though he was afraid of her and tried to stimulate interest to flatter her. Clearing her throat she began a long enthusiastic description, of camps, mass meetings, organizations, Party days, and finally pointed triumphantly with her long, rather yellowish forefinger to the year 1939, when the graph began to rise again. "When Germany goes to War," she said, "production figures rise in the jam industry." Having looked through the business papers back to the year 1913, and explained the 'essentials' to the boy, she telephoned to the accountant and the little red delivery van had to drive to and fro several times to fetch the forty years' files again.

The roof repairer in the meantime had been forgotten. The zinc bath-tubs remained standing in the loft and each time it rained there was a magnificent monotonous concert. But the windows, too, were damaged and water stood in the cellar for months on end because the pump was out of action. When Bolda had a big washing day the water rose in the boiler room out of a small cemented shaft. Soap and filth left a slimy sediment which covered the cement floor with a greenish white mould. It smelled

of corruption and the stench of potatoes seeding in wooden bins attracted the rats.

Albert had known nothing of this. He discovered the rats one day when he went down for the first time for many months into the cellar. After a long argument with Nella he was looking for some letters in a big case, which Rai had sent to London. He wanted to prove that he had returned from London, not because of Rai, but because of Nella's plea. Otherwise Albert never went down to the cellar, and he was horrified when he saw how filthy everything was. Dusty crates stood around, rags lay in the corners, and near the entrance to the scullery stood half a sack of mouldy flour, from which a few rats slipped away when Albert switched on the light. He had been afraid of rats ever since the military prison in Odessa and he felt a lump in his throat when he saw their black shadows slinking through the cellar. He threw a few pieces of coal at them, forced himself to go slowly over to the big brown wooden case which stood under the gas meter.

Rai had written him but a few letters, perhaps ten in all, but he remembered that he had tied them up with a piece of string and put them in his case. The bundle of Nella's letters was larger and Leen's letters filled two shoe boxes. Black dust and mouse droppings lay between all the papers. It was silent in the cellar and he was afraid of the rats. In the German military prison at Odessa they had crawled over his face at night; he had felt their soft hairy bellies and had been terrified at his own screams. He took the dirty bundle of papers out of the box and swore softly at the slatternliness of Nella and Grandmother.

From the corner of the little room where the empty crates and jam jars were stacked he heard a sudden rumble, a clatter of metal. Full of hatred and rage he went into the dark corner, opened the lath door and threw into the dark cellar whatever came to hand—a broom handle, a broken flower pot and the runners of Martin's sleigh. The noise stopped and now it was silent.

The case also contained his own letters, written before and during the war, to Nella. And now, as he was rummaging about in them, he decided for the first time in ten years to re-read them all. Of course there were also some of Rai's poems, letters from Absalom Billig and, what he was looking for in particular, letters from Schurbigel. Letters on which Rai had undoubtedly made

comments in the margin. Letters from the year 1940, in which Schurbigel hailed the victory over France and newspaper articles inciting the German youth to sweep away the decadence of beyond the frontier. There would also be Rai's prose writings and many letters written before the War.

Now he took only Rai's letters, a small bundle, and Nella's letters, but he stood still when he saw a large cardboard box on which the word SUNLIGHT was printed in russet brown. He took out this big carton which covered half the bottom of the case. Banging it against the wall to shake off the dirt, he took both packets of letters and the carton and left the cellar. Nella was sitting in her bedroom weeping. She had left the door open to see him when he came out of the cellar and he went straight through the hall past her open door. He was ashamed of himself on account of this pointless quarrel which broke out periodically between them; the same arguments were always produced and it always ended in a reconciliation.

He put the SUNLIGHT carton down in his room, laid the two packets of letters on top of it and went into the bathroom to clean himself up. He was terrified at the thought that rats were scuttling about in the cellar below and in sudden disgust decided to put on clean linen.

Nella was still sitting by her open bedroom door when he came out of the bathroom.

"Aren't you coming to have a coffee?" she called.

"In a minute," he replied.

From the telephone directory he wrote down the numbers of a mason, a roof repairer, an electrician and a rat-catcher, called up all four and told them to come and see him. The business was finished in eight minutes and he went into Nella's bedroom and sat down opposite her in the armchair.

"Did you know that we had rats in the cellar?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "Bolda has complained a couple of times."

"The potatoes are sprouting," he said in a rage. "Food is lying there rotting and there's half a sack of mildewed flour near the scullery entrance. All your filth is rotting down there and the rats are having fun and games in the half-emptied jam pots. It's absolutely disgusting."

Nella wrinkled her forehead and remained silent.

"Ever since I was inveigled into this accursed family I've tried to wage war against filth and slovenliness. But since your father died you've been too much for me. Soon we shan't be able to go down to the cellar without a revolver and you could make a fabulous existentialist film down there for a song."

"Drink your coffee," she said.

He took the cup and stirred the milk. "I'll have the roof and the ceiling repaired, the cellar smoked out and the pump put in order. Do you think it's good for the boy to see all this slovenliness and to become part of it?"

"I didn't know that you laid such stress on orderliness or could get so excited about it," said Nella wearily.

"There's a hell of a lot you don't know. For example, that Rai was a damned good poet despite the loathsome propaganda you're now spreading. And I'll do something else. I'll rescue some of Schurbigel's letters from the box before the rats have eaten such priceless documents."

"Rai was my husband," she said, "and I loved him, all of him. But I liked his poems least because I never understood them. I only wish that he hadn't been a poet and was still alive. Did you eventually find the letters you were looking for?"

"Yes, I found them and I'm sorry I allowed myself to fly off the handle about old stories which by rights we shouldn't mention any more."

"No, it was a good thing. I should like to read the letters, although it's unnecessary, for naturally I know you're right, that it was my fault you came back from London. But I'd like to read the letters all the same. They'll do me good."

"Read them and keep them . . . burn them if you like. It gives me no satisfaction to prove that I'm right. One always thinks it would have been better if one had done this or that years ago. It's naturally pointless."

"I shall re-read Rai's letters because I should like to find out whether my idea is right . . . that he wanted to die."

"When you look through the letters, please don't throw any from Schurbigel away. Not a single one of the letters other people wrote to Rai."

"No, no. I won't throw anything away. I only want to know what was the matter with Rai. You know that Father could have

wangled him out of the War. I'm certain he could have got him out of it. Father had good connections among the high-ups in the Army. But Rai wouldn't hear of it. He didn't want to emigrate, to be exempted from military service, although he hated nothing so much in the world as the military. Sometimes I think he wanted to die. I often think it and that may be why I have to whip up my hatred against this Gäseler artificially."

Albert noticed her scowl and asked: "Why do you mention Gäseler?"

"Oh, nothing. I only thought. . . . You never speak of Rai. You must know, but you never mention it."

Albert remained silent. During the last weeks before his death Rai had become almost dull-witted. He had been desperately weary and their friendship had been confined to sharing cigarettes and helping each other to do their chores and to clean their weapons. Rai had become as tired as most of the other foot-sloggers from whom he was now almost indistinguishable. His hatred could only be aroused by some of his superiors.

"There's still something you've left unsaid," said Nella.

Albert, holding his empty cup, looked at her as she poured out his coffee and he had time to prolong everything by stirring the milk and dissolving the sugar.

"There's not much to say," he said at last. "Rai was tired and depressed and I've never mentioned it because I know nothing . . . in any case not much." He suddenly thought of the big Sunlight carton and the sulky little shop girl who had sold it to him. It had already been dark and he had no joy in going to his room where the stove was drawing badly and the greasy pungent anthracite smoke had settled on the furniture, clothes and bed linen. Where Leen's primus stove still stood on its stand, splashed with soup, which Leen had let boil over.

"Rai was dull-witted and resigned," he said, as Nella looked at him, "but he was already like that when I returned from England. Shaken and badgered and for four years he hadn't written anything that amused him." He thought of the breathless silence that had reigned when War broke out. For a moment it had been silent throughout the world as the cogs engaged in the waiting mechanism, and when the machine started, its effect strengthened the scene of dullness and resignation.

He shook his head when Nella offered him a cigarette, but

automatically put his hand in his pocket, gave her a light and tried to avoid her scrutiny.

"Naturally," he went on, "there's nothing mysterious about it. But it wasn't very pleasant for a poet to meet, everywhere he went, slogans that he himself had written. Jam slogans. 'That's my contribution to the war to end all wars,' Rai said to me once in a rage, as he kicked a jam pot which had come from your father's factory. It was in the bazaar at Winiza where an old woman offered her cakes in a clean tin. They were macaroons, and the tin overturned and the cakes fell on the ground. Rai and I helped the old woman to pick them up, paid for them and apologized."

"Go on," said Nella, and he noticed by the eager look in her eyes that she was expecting some sensational revelation.

"There's no more," he said. "A fortnight later he was dead. But the road to his death was hedged with jam pots. It was naturally a blow to us both to see these objects everywhere, and it made us sick, although it struck no one else, only . . . if I told you you'd hate me and be angry."

"Does it mean so much to you not to be hated by me?"

"Yes. It means a great deal."

He had watched Nella closely, but her face betrayed no sign. She reached for the packet, took a cigarette out and lit it, although she had one burning already, in the ashtray, half smoked.

"I don't want to talk any more about all that, Nella," he said gently. "Rai is dead. We know how he died and it is pointless looking for motives."

"Did he really stop talking to you, as you always maintain?"

"No, he couldn't speak. His windpipe was injured. He looked at me and, because I knew him, I could tell by his gaze, by his handshake, that he was angry with the war and angry with himself, and that he loved you and bade me look after the child. You had written to him that you were pregnant. That's all."

"Didn't he pray? You always said. . . ."

"Yes, he prayed and crossed himself. But I'll never tell that to anyone, and if you mention it to any of these swine I'll kill you. Yes," he said, "that would be good food for them, and the legend would be complete."

Nella now noticed the second cigarette and stubbed it out with a smile.

"I'll never tell anyone, I promise you."

"It would be a good thing if you dropped all those people."

"Will you tell the boy all this one day?"

"Yes, later on."

"And what about Gäseler?"

"What about him?"

"Nothing," she said. "I sometimes reproach myself that I don't feel a burning revengeful hatred for him."

"In actual fact," he said, "he'd make a fine pair with Schurbigel. What's the matter? Why have you turned red?"

"Leave me alone. Leave me in peace for a few days. I must collect my thoughts on various things. Give me the letters, please."

He finished his coffee, went to his room, fetched the two bundles of letters and laid them down on the table in front of Nella.

They lay there and some weeks later he saw the two bundles still unopened on her desk.

He spent several days with the workmen, discussing the repairs and getting estimates. The pump in the cellar was repaired, the roof retiled and the ceilings on the upper floor redistempered. Bolda could now pump the water out of the cellar into the gutter after washing, and the cellar was cleaned and fumigated. Rotting provisions and rubbish came to light, including potatoes with sprouts as long as asparagus.

Albert also had the dark green panes removed from the corridor windows and the light now entered the hall. Grandmother shook her head at so much activity. She came more often from her room, looked at the workmen and surprised everyone by saying that she would pay for the repairs.

According to Nella this offer could be put down to her love of her cheque book, which she used with a kind of childish pride. She loved taking it out of the drawer of her desk, opening it, filling out the blue cheque with the air of an old lawyer. She signed it and tore it out of the book with an elegant gesture. The little treacherous noise when the cheque was torn from the perforation brought a happy smile to her ruddy cheeks. From the moment forty years ago, as a twenty-three year old girl, she had been given a cheque book she had never got over the pleasure of this alchemy. She used an incredible amount of cheque books,

for she paid for the smallest trifle by cheque, even her drinks in restaurants and cafés, and it was not unusual for her to send Martin with a cheque for four marks to buy forty TOMAHAWKS. When there was nothing to pay, she was well stocked with cigarettes and the refrigerator full of provisions, she wandered round the house offering everybody money, merely for the pleasure of tearing out a cheque and hearing the little saw-like noise as she ripped it from the stub. With a TOMAHAWK in her mouth, she wandered from room to room, waving her cheque book, just as she waved her urine glass, saying: "If you want any money, I can help you out." And soon she was sitting on a chair, unscrewing her fountain pen—this too she used with childish pride—asking: "How much do you need?"

On these occasions Glum was the kindest to her, for he named a very large sum and sat haggling with her until at last she wrote the cheque and tore it out. As soon as she had gone Glum tore up the cheque, as did all the others, and threw the fragments in the dustbin.

But Grandmother usually sulked in her room and no one knew for certain what she did all day. She neither went to the telephone nor opened the door when the bell rang. Sometimes she left her room at midday in her heavy, flower-patterned dressing gown to fetch her breakfast from the kitchen. Only her cough would be heard, for her room was always filled with cigarette smoke. She was a chain smoker and the grey skeins slowly drifted into the hall. On such days she would see no one except Martin, whom she called into her bedroom.

The boy ran away whenever he could as soon as Grandmother called, but usually she caught him, dragged him along and he had to listen for hours to lectures, nebulous explanations about life and death and had to prove his knowledge of the Catechism. Bolda, who had been to school with Grandmother, always maintained with a giggle that she had never been able to learn her Catechism.

Breathing with difficulty, because the room was full of smoke, Martin sat in the chair opposite her writing desk, looked at the unmade bed, the tea trolley with the unwashed breakfast crockery, and observed the varying colours of the rising smoke. Blue, almost gleaming blue, were the little round clouds of smoke, puffed out before she took the rest into her lungs. She was proud that she had smoked for thirty years and inhaled deeply. Then a

light grey smoke with a faint blue tinge came from her lips because it had been filtered in her lungs—a heavy puff which for some seconds filled the room with a deeper grey layer of smoke. A drab grey and in some parts of the room—on the ceiling, under the bed and in front of the mirror—the deep grey formed into whitish concentrated clouds like crumpled cotton wool.

"Your father fell in the war, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"What does it mean, to fall?"

"To die in the war. To be shot."

"Where?"

"Near Kalinowka."

"When?"

"On the 7th July, 1942."

"And when were you born?"

"On the 8th September, 1942."

"What was the name of the man who was responsible for your Father's death?"

"Gäseler."

"Repeat the name."

"Gäseler."

"Once more."

"Gäseler."

"Why are we put on earth?"

"To serve God, to love Him and thus to reach Heaven."

"Do you know what it means to take a father away from his child?"

"Yes," said the boy.

He knew it. Other children had fathers. Grobschik, for example, had a tall, fair-haired father, Weber had a short, dark-haired father. The boys with fathers had a harder time at school than those who had none. A mysterious law determined this. If Weber had prepared his lessons badly he was scolded more than Brielach if the latter had been idle. The teacher was old and grey-haired and had lost a son in the war. Of the boys who had no fathers it was said: "He lost his father in the war." When the school inspectors came it was whispered to them when a boy did not put up a good show, and the teacher said it of boys who had just joined the class: "He lost his father in the war." It sounded as though he had left him behind or lost him like an umbrella; like

losing a penny. Seven boys in the class had lost their fathers: Brielach and Welzkam, Niggemeyer and Poske, Behrendt and himself. And also Grebhake, but he had a new father and this mysterious law of indulgence did not apply so much to him as to the other six. There were shades of indulgence. Only three enjoyed complete indulgence—Niggemeyer, Poske and himself—for reasons he had discovered after long years of observation and experience. Grebhake had a new father. Brielach and Behrendt's mothers had children, not from their dead fathers, but from other men. He knew now how children came into the world. Uncle Albert had explained it to him: through the union of men and women. Brielach and Behrendt's mothers had united with men who were not their husbands but 'uncles', and this fact was explained by another rather mysterious word: IMMORAL. But Welzkam's mother was also IMMORAL, although she had no child from his uncle. And this meant further knowledge and experience: men and women could unite without having children, and the union of a woman with an 'uncle' was immoral. The boys who had immoral mothers for some strange reason had less privileges than the boys whose mothers were not immoral—but the least favoured were children of mothers and 'uncles'. Painful and inexplicable that immoral mothers decreased the degree of privilege. . . . But with the boys who had fathers it was different: everything was clearly in order and there was no immorality.

"Pay attention, said Grandmother. "Question 72. When will Christ come again?"

"Christ will come again from heaven at the last day to judge all mankind."

"What will Christ say to the IMMORAL?"

He was not quite sure.

"Don't go to sleep," said Grandmother. "Question 113. What is sin?"

"Sin is an offence against God, by any thought, word, deed or omission against the law of God."

Grandmother loved to run right through the Catechism, but so far she had never caught him out.

Now she closed the book, lit another cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"When you're a little older," she said amiably, "you'll understand why. . . .

From that moment he did not listen any more. Now came the long concluding lecture with no more questions and this, of course, did not merit the slightest attention. Grandmother now spoke of duties, money, aromatic jams, of Grandfather, his father's poems, read him paper cuttings which she had pasted carefully on red blotting paper and with dark hints circumnavigated the Sixth Commandment.

But even Niggemeyer and Poske, who did not have immoral mothers, did not enjoy the privileges he enjoyed and he had long since known why. Their fathers had been killed and their mothers did not unite with other men—but Father's name still appeared in the papers, and his mother had MONEY. These two important points were lacking in the cases of Niggemeyer and Poske. Their fathers never appeared in the papers and their mothers had little or no MONEY.

Sometimes he wished that these two points would cease to apply to him, for he did not wish to enjoy these privileges. He mentioned it to no one, not even to Brielach or to Uncle Albert, and he was a bad pupil for days on end in school to make the teacher spare him as little as he spared Weber, who was constantly thrashed—Weber whose father had not been killed and whose father had no MONEY.

But the teacher continued to spare him. He was old, grey-haired and tired and he had lost a son in the war. And he looked at him so sadly when he gave the wrong answer, that finally, from compassion and emotion, he gave the right one.

While Grandmother was giving her concluding lecture Martin could watch the smoke growing ever thicker. He had to glance at her from time to time to give the impression that he was listening, and then he could let his mind wander on various things that concerned him: the abominable word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker, the word that always stood on the wall of the corridor of Brielach's house, and he could think of the game of football that in three, four, at the utmost five minutes he would begin to play outside on the grass. Another two minutes, for Grandmother was already on the subject of aromatic jam which was somehow connected with his duty. Did she really think that he would take over the jam factory? No, he would play football all his life. It amused and rather frightened him to imagine that he would be able to play football for twenty, thirty years. . . . One

more minute. He cocked an ear as he heard the sharp click as Grandmother tore the cheque out of her book. As usual she was rewarding his perfect knowledge of the Catechism and his attention with a cheque.

Now she was folding it and he took the blue folded piece of paper and knew that he could go. All that remained was the bow, the 'thank you, Granny dear' and he opened the door and a cloud of cigarette smoke accompanied him into the hall. . . .

CHAPTER NINE

ALBERT left the Sunlight carton lying for two days before he opened it. He was frightened of its contents, and yet he had hopes of it for he knew that it contained many drawings from his London days, before and after Leen's death; he was afraid that the drawings would be terrible but still hoped that they would be good, for he had to draw a series of cartoons for *Week-end at Home*, and it was a torture because he was barren of ideas. One day when he was alone in the house with Glum he opened the carton. Nella's mother had driven into town with Martin and he could still see the boy's nervous, distraught face as he got into the taxi with Grandmother. Nella had gone to the pictures. She had somehow changed and was remarkably on edge, and he felt that she was keeping something from him. While he untied the string of the carton, he decided that he would speak to Nella. The address written in London was still legible: Herrn Raimund Bach . . . and he thought he could even smell the paste which he had mixed from a little of Leen's flour to stick the label on the carton.

He untied the knot and rolled the string into a ball but still hesitated to open the carton. He looked out into the garden where Martin's friends, Heinrich and Walter, were playing football; a couple of milk tins represented the goals. They were playing hard and with great enthusiasm. As he watched the boys he thought of his year with Leen in London, a wonderful year during which he had been very happy, although even after her marriage she did not renounce her bachelor girl's habits.

Leen hated cupboards, hated furniture as a whole and day after day flung everything she possessed on the bed—books and notebooks, newspapers, lipstick, the remains of fruit in paper bags, umbrella and hat, cap and gown and the exercise books which she corrected in the evening, bent over the night table—essays on the vegetation of Southern England or the fauna of India. Everything was piled up on her bed during the day when she lay

down on the bed in the evening to read the papers she merely shook out the crumbs and kicked everything else on to the floor—the exercise books, her umbrella and the remains of the fruit. Everything rolled under the bed or round the room, and the following morning she picked up the various objects and chucked them on the bed. She only once wore a decently ironed dress—on her wedding day. A chapel in the dining-room of an old suburban villa where the trumpery statues were so dreadful that he almost found them fantastic. The smell of fried bacon from breakfast on the charming Franciscan's habit, his strangely sonorous Latin and even stranger sounding English, '. . . until death do ye part. . . .'

But that day, when Leen had to wear a decently ironed dress—her mother had come from Ireland, ironed the dress in a hotel and hung it up carefully in the cupboard—precisely that day, Leen looked hideous. Irons did not form part of her stock-in-trade, they were too heavy, and dresses that had to be ironed did not suit her.

For the first few months of their marriage he shared Leen's bed and he never got any sleep for she was as restless as a young foal. She tossed and turned in her sleep and tore off the blankets. She was never still and she kicked and butted him while he listened to the queer dry sound of her breathing. Then he switched on the light in the middle of the night, shaded it with a paper and read, for it was pointless to think of sleep, and he kept patiently pulling up the blankets again over Leen until he received more nudges in the ribs. When she lay quiet for a few minutes he turned and looked at her lying there with her long brown hair, small olive face and the profile of a young thoroughbred. Later he put out the light and lay in the dark at her side and was happy. Occasionally something fell out of the bed; something that had stuck in the mattress or had not fallen on the floor after Leen's energetic kicks and had now been freed by her restless movements—a spoon, a pencil or a banana, and once it was a hard boiled egg that rolled along the tattered carpet before coming to rest at the foot of the bed. He got up, rescued the egg and ate it in the middle of the night, for in those days he was nearly always hungry.

He usually got a little sleep after Leen had gone. Leen was a teacher in a suburban convent. He helped her collect her school things, stuffed them all in the leather brief-case, and it was his job

to watch the big bulging alarm clock which, like all her other possessions, flew off the bed every day on to the floor but never seemed to get damaged. He kept his eye on the alarm clock and told her exactly when she had to leave the house. Sitting in his pyjamas on the bed, he read the morning paper while Leen stood at the primus stove cooking tea and porridge. As soon as the big hand stood at five minutes to eight she grabbed her brief-case, gave him a quick kiss and rushed down the stairs to catch the bus. Sometimes he ate the tasteless porridge greedily after she had gone and returned to bed to sleep until eleven.

Not until a month after their marriage did they have enough money to buy a second bed so that he could get some sleep. Now he was only roused from his dreams when something fell off Leen's bed on to the floor—a book, half a bar of chocolate or one of her heavy silver bracelets.

He tried to instil into her what he understood by order—carefully swept cupboards and a clean cooker. He went out and bought a cupboard from a second-hand dealer, had it delivered while Leen was at work and arranged everything carefully inside it—all her clutter and her clothes on hangers as he had always seen in his mother's house. 'It must smell of linen, clean linen.' But Leen hated the cupboard, and to please her he had it taken away and sold it at a loss to another second-hand dealer. All she would tolerate was a small shelf for the cooker, the kettle and two saucepans, tins of meat and vegetables, a host of strange spices and a packet of ready-made soups. She was a wonderful cook and he thoroughly enjoyed the dark golden tea she brewed. In the afternoon, on her return from school they lay on her bed, smoking and reading, with the teapot on a stool between the beds. Only for the first two months did he suffer a little from what at that time he called 'disorderliness', and complain at Leen's lack of house pride—refusal to buy a couple of extra sheets for example. But she hated household possessions just as she hated cupboards, and only later did he realize that she hated the latter because they usually held linen. She loved balloons, cinemas, and despite her wildness, was very religious. She adored rococo churches, and the Franciscan fathers to whom she confessed. On Sunday she usually took him to Mass in the convent where she taught during the week, and he was annoyed with the nuns, who persisted in calling him Miss Finnegan's husband, and heaping up his breakfast

plate because they had discovered that he was always hungry. But that was only at the beginning. Later he found the nuns kind, and he ate eight slices of toast for breakfast and let the nuns laugh at his fabulous appetite. Leen trained with the girls on Sunday at hockey for some match; their fanaticism amused him and he admired their rough uncompromising play. Miss Finnegan's husband cut a strange figure at the edge of the playing-field. When training was over he had to run round the track three times with Leen, and the girls in the hockey team and the other boarders stood round and encouraged him, and there was a great cry of joy when he beat Leen, as he nearly always did, for in those days he had been a good sprinter. Later he went for excursions with her into Surrey, wandering for hours on end through fields and between hedges, and somewhere they enjoyed what Leen ruthlessly enjoyed and ruthlessly called 'the pleasures of marriage'. He was twenty-five at the time and Leen was just twenty, and the best loved teacher in the school.

On working days he usually slept until half-past ten because the people with whom he did business were never available until half-past eleven and because his restless nights made him tired. He called on grim laconic back-benchers who imparted brief scraps of information while they breakfasted. Most of his information, however, was obtained fourth or fifth hand from journalists who were as uninformed as he was, and later he would write up these vague scraps of information, knowing that things could not go on like this for long. He sat in small pubs, drank whiskey and water, waiting for Leen; he always had a sheet of drawing paper in front of him and drew anything that caught his fancy. He drew cartoons or illustrated jokes he had read in the papers. In the big Sunlight soap carton in his room were hundreds of these drawings which, after Leen's death, he had unceremoniously dispatched to Rai's address in Germany.

There must be hundreds. He did not open the carton but looked out at the boys who were still playing their grim game of football. Perhaps the drawings were good and he would be free of the nightmare of having to invent something new each week.

While he watched the boys he drew a caricature of Bolda on a scrap of paper, but soon laid his pencil down.

The information he obtained in those days grew even scarcer and the vague material he sent to Germany even more inadequate, until the small Nazi paper he was representing in London stopped his meagre salary and then gave him a month's notice, and he lived on Leen's teacher's salary and enjoyed his Sundays when he could eat his fill at the convent. And when Leen was out training with the girls he sometimes went into the chapel and attended the services and admired the grandoise trumpery. Never, he thought, had he seen a St. Anthony in such appalling bad taste or such a revolting Saint Thérèse of Lisieux.

During the week he went and sold his books at 3d. per pound to a second-hand dealer. The money he got for them was not enough even to buy cigarettes. He tried to give German lessons but there were not many English people who wanted to learn the language and there were plenty of refugees in London. Leen comforted him and he was happy in spite of everything. She wrote home saying how badly things were going with them and her father replied that they should come to Ireland. He could work on the farm and if he wished he need never return to those damned Nazis.

Now, fifteen years later, he still could not understand why he had not accepted Leen's father's proposal, and he fell into Nella's bad habit of entering the third plane, dreaming of a life that had never been lived and could never be lived since the time, which had been allotted to it, was irrevocably over. But for a few moments it was charming to envisage a landscape, people and conditions he had never known.

Even now, fifteen years later, he still could not grasp that Leen was dead, because she had died so suddenly and at a time when he was full of optimism. He earned more money, had begun to design labels for a soap factory and had managed to adapt himself to the British taste.

Now that he was earning more money he did not go to the pubs during Leen's absence, but sat in their room, drank cold tea and worked the whole day long. He got up in the morning with Leen, made the breakfast and accompanied her to the bus stop.

The boys outside were tired and hot, and Heinrich sat on the grass with his back against the tree chewing a blade of grass. Albert looked out of the window and shouted: "Get yourselves a

Coca-cola out of the ice box." When the youngsters turned and looked at him in surprise, he said: "Go on, go and fetch one. You know where they are, Heinrich." He heard them shouting as they turned the corner and ran into the house, heard them whisper as they tiptoed into the kitchen. He closed the window, filled himself a pipe but did not light it and resolutely removed the lid of the Sunlight carton. There was a whole sheaf of very thin paper inside and he noticed that he had opened the wrong end, for all the drawings lay the wrong way round. He picked up the first and was surprised to see how good it was. It was an animal cartoon and these were very popular today. He had drawn nothing as good as this since the war. With a soft, very black pencil, and the drawing was still sharp. . . . He was relieved, for he knew that Bresgote would buy this cartoon. Each of these thin pieces of paper on which he had scribbled fifteen years before in London pubs would bring him in 50 marks. Here and there he would have to cut and remount them and many of them had no captions. He had never shown these drawings to Leen because he found them stupid, but today he knew that they were good—better in any case than most of the ones he had drawn for *Weekend at Home.* He rummaged for a few minutes in the carton, took some sheets at random from the middle and from the bottom of the pile and was surprised how good they were. One of the boys called from the hall: "Uncle Albert, Uncle Albert!"

He opened the door and said: "What do you want?" He saw that it was Heinrich Brielach who had called him and the boy said: "Can we have some bread and butter? We should like to wait till Martin's back."

"That will be quite a while."

"All right, we'll wait."

"As you like. But, of course, make yourselves some bread and butter.

"Oh, thank you. Thank you very much."

He closed the door, tidied the sheets of paper and put them back in the carton.

That day Leen had gone to school as usual and he remained the whole morning in the room because he was working on his labels. He drew a lion spreading mustard on a shoulder of mutton. He had the feeling that it would make a good label and the man

for whom he was drawing it had promised him a substantial fee. It was a Jewish refugee whom he had met in a journalists' pub, a distant relation of Absalom Billig. At first the man was very suspicious and took him for an *agent provocateur*, but at their fifth meeting he had commissioned the drawing. He had procured a job in the publicity department of a condiment factory. He worked so hard that he did not notice the time pass and was very surprised when Leen came into the room.

"My God," he said, "is it three o'clock already?"

But when he kissed her and she smiled wearily he knew that it was a long way off three o'clock, and that Leen had come home because she felt ill. Her hands were feverish and she was doubled up with pains in her belly.

"I've had it for some time," she said, "I thought I was pregnant. But today it turns out I'm not pregnant and I've still got the pains."

He had never seen her break down, but now she flung herself on the bed and sobbed. She could hardly speak, and when he bent over her she whispered: "Get a taxi. It was bad in the bus and now it's worse. Take me to hospital."

He took her bag, counted the money as he ran down the street to the taxi rank. There were about four pounds and a little change in her purse. Thoroughly distraught, he sat in the taxi, stopped it at the house and ran up the stairs. By the time he arrived, Leen had vomited and she shivered as he picked her up to carry her downstairs. She screamed and vomited again as he carried her down the stairs. Some women standing at their doors shook their heads as they saw him, and he called to one of them to keep an eye on the room which was unlocked. The woman nodded. He could see her pale, alcohol ravaged face now, as he heard the boys go back to the garden. They started to play football again as they ate their slices of bread and butter.

In the car he put Leen on his lap to prevent her from being shaken, but she kept screaming and was sick once more on the brown polished upholstery. He wondered what he should say to the doctors at the hospital He did not know the English word for peritonitis, but when the taxi stopped at the hospital he ran up the stairs with Leen in his arms, kicked open the door of the out patients room and shouted: "Appendix!" She screamed dreadfully when he tried to lay her on the sofa in the corridor. She was

huddled up and seemed to have found a position which was less painful, and though he could hardly hold her he kept her in his arms, leaned against a reddish tiled pillar and tried to understand what she was whispering to him with her twisted lips. Her face was yellow and mottled, and what she said sounded quite mad: "Go to Ireland . . . go to Ireland." At the time he did not understand what she meant, and at the same time he tried to understand the questions asked by the thin, anxious-looking sister who stood beside him by the red tiled pillar. All he could say was the one word 'appendix' and the sister nodded when he said it. Leen retched, but could not vomit. A horrible yellow slime came from her mouth, and when he laid her on the stretcher she put her arms once more round his neck, kissed him and whispered what she had kept repeating: "Go to Ireland, darling. Go to Ireland." But the doctors pushed him away from the stretcher and she was carried away through a glass swing door. He heard her last screams. Twenty-five minutes later she died on the operating table, and he had been unable to speak to her again. The whole of her belly had been full of pus. He had never forgotten the ashen face of the young surgeon. He came up to him in the waiting-room and said: "Sorry, old chap." The surgeon talked to him quietly and slowly and he realized that it had already been too late when he sat in the taxi with Leen. The doctor was very tired and asked him if he would like to see his wife once more.

It was some time before he could see Leen, and as he stood waiting at the window he suddenly remembered the taxi driver and went out and paid him. The man pointed to the mess in his car and grumbled to himself, his cigarette in his mouth; he gave him an extra pound and was glad when the man's face brightened. He returned to the waiting-room. The carpet was a greenish-grey and the chairs were upholstered in the same colour and the table was covered with greenish-grey American cloth. It happened during the week that Chamberlain flew to Germany to negotiate with Hitler. Later a young, shabbily dressed woman came into the waiting-room. She stood beside him at the window and the cigarette in her hand was dark-stained from the tears that had fallen on it. It would no longer draw and the woman threw it on the floor and stood sobbing at his side by the window. Outside some men were walking along the street, carrying sandwich boards: PEACE FOR THE WORLD, while others carried boards

which read: SHOW HITLER WE'RE NOT AFRAID OF HIM. The shabbily dressed girl took off her glasses and wiped them on the hem of her coat. The coat smelled of meat soup and tobacco and she kept muttering: "My boy, my boy." But then a doctor came in and the woman rushed up to him and he could see by their faces that everything had gone well. The woman went out with the doctor and he was fetched by a sister. She made him follow her down a long, yellow-tiled corridor, which smelled of cold fatty mutton and cooking margarine; huge aluminium pots of steaming tea stood outside the doors. A pretty dark-haired girl carried a tray of bread and butter along the corridor, and at one of the windows stood a boy with plaster round his arm shouting into the street: "You damned swine, I'll show you!" The sister went over to the boy, took him by his uninjured arm and put her fingers to her lips; the boy slunk off after the girl with the tray of bread and butter.

The room to which he was taken was bare and grey with two small bluish panes of glass, on the right a yellow alpha and on the left an omega. Leen lay on a stretcher in this hideous bluish light. The sister left him alone. He drew closer and found Leen's face as it had always been, but now he discovered something new in it—peace—and he was surprised to see her small youthful face at peace. Perhaps it was due to the light that her face had no blotches, was now of uniform colour, and that her twisted mouth had returned to normal. He lit the two candles which stood in copper candlesticks behind the stretcher, and said a Paternoster and an *Ave Maria.* He could not realize that he had lived a whole year with her: it seemed as though he had only just met her. He knew that she was dead, but that she had lived seemed like a dream, and all the details he could remember were of no avail. No, he had only arrived in London the previous day. Everything had been telescoped into one afternoon—the marriage in the newly ironed dress which did not suit her, the Franciscan habit, the hockey and the toast with the nuns, and the 'pleasures of marriage' enjoyed in a meadow in Surrey. . . . The scream: 'Go to Ireland. . . .' Vomiting in the taxi and he himself repeating blindly: 'Appendix, appendix' and the bluish chapel with the yellow alpha and the yellow omega. The balloons which Leen had given to the children and soap bubbles floating from the window of her room into the big grey courtyard. . . . Her hatred

of cupboards and the two candles which burned so peacefully, just as candles in a mortuary should burn. He was not sad: he merely felt a dull compassion for Leen because of the pain she had had to bear . . . disappearing screaming into the operation room and now lying so peacefully in this mortuary. He watched the candles burn, went over to the door but returned and wept. Everything grew blurred and confused before his tear-filled eyes. A swaying O, a swaying A, a swaying bier and Leen's peaceful face. In this little chapel it looked as though it were raining outside, but when he left he noticed that the sun was shining. The sister had gone and he wandered down the corridors, went in and out of wards until he came to the kitchen and recognized the corridor with the yellow tiles; and the pretty little dark-haired girl was carrying another tray of bread and butter along the corridor and someone shouted through an open door: "Mustard," and he thought of the lion spreading mustard on a shoulder of mutton.

When he arrived home it was just one o'clock. Someone had cleaned the stairs and his room was tidy. He never found out who had done it, and was surprised, for he always felt that the people in the house did not like him. He was always in a hurry and only greeted them politely as he passed. But now the corridor was clean and his room had been swept.

He took the poster of the lion off the table, was about to tear it up, then rolled it up and threw it in the corner. He lay down on the bed and stared at Leen's little crucifix that hung above the door. He had no doubts that Leen was dead but he could not believe that he had lived with her for a whole year. Nothing remained of her but a bed full of rubbish, the pot with the cold soup on the primus stove, a broken cup in which she always dissolved her soap flakes to blow bubbles and a pile of uncorrected school exercise books with essays on the zinc mines of Southern England.

Later he fell asleep. He woke up when Leen's little colleague came in and realized that his arms ached from carrying Leen. He had often gone to the cinema in the afternoon with Leen and this girl, whose name was Bly Crowther, a pretty blonde whom Leen had always tried to convert.

He stared at Bly and felt the pains in his cramped arm muscles. Then he tried to make her understand that Leen was dead. He was shocked at the cold and natural way he uttered the word "Dead" but as he uttered it he understood the full

significance—that Leen really was gone. With great difficulty Bly had procured cinema tickets for a very popular Charlie Chaplin film showing that afternoon. He had pestered Bly to get the tickets because the film would never be shown in Germany. She had also brought cakes for Leen, little almond cakes, varnished with egg white. She had the green cinema tickets in her hand and laughed when he told her that Leen was dead. She laughed because she could not understand how he could make such a stupid joke, and it was a strange, half-irritated, half-perfunctory laugh. At last she understood that it was no joke and began to weep desperately. And the little almond cakes with their white of egg varnish fell on the floor. The cakes which Leen loved lay there between her umbrella and the red beret on the bed among a pile of crumpled objects.

He did not stir from the bed, coldly watching Bly. She sat on the stool and wept and when he saw her tears and heard her sobs, he suddenly realized what had happened: Leen was dead. The girl stood up, walked round the room, picked up the rolled poster that lay in the corner near the primus stove and, still weeping, examined the contented grinning lion spreading a shoulder of mutton with Hitchcock's mustard. He knew that in a minute he would take her by the shoulders and try to console her, and that they would have to discuss important things, the funeral, the red tape nonsense he would obviously have to deal with. But he did not stir from the bed and thought of Leen . . . of the transitoriness and beauty of their life of which hardly a trace remained in this world. Her photo would perhaps hang in the corridor of the school and later, at class reunions, girls who were now middle-aged women would say: "She used to be our games mistress and she taught us natural history." But the picture would be taken down one day and replaced by the photo of a Cardinal or a Pope. And for some time Leen's scrawled comments would remain in the school exercise books, just for a prescribed period in the files. And a grave in a big cemetery. Bly pulled herself together before he stood up. She realized that there were things to do and she claimed the right to take as much as she could off his shoulders: to notify the convent, Leen's parents and her brother who was an engineer in Manchester.

The damp patch on the floor where the unknown neighbour had wiped up Leen's vomit slowly began to dry and only the

trace of scrubbing soap still remained on the floor which had been so seldom washed. A month later, when he returned to Germany at Nella's request, he found the cup without a handle in which Leen had always dissolved her soap flakes to blow bubbles. Soapy, chalky sediment . . . and only much later he realized that the obituary in the paper and the little cross on her grave bore her maiden name—Finnegan—and the nuns with whom he breakfasted after the funeral persisted in calling him Miss Finnegan's husband.

Leen's brother offered to find him work in Manchester and her parents, with whom he was on good terms, invited him to come to Ireland and work on the farm—plenty to do and there would always be enough to eat. They were all convinced that there would be a war and that he would be well advised not to return to Germany. He never told anyone that Leen had whispered to him: "Go to Ireland, darling." He hesitated for a long time, went on living in the London bed-sitting-room and eventually sold the mustard-spreading lion for a good fee. The traces of the scrubbing soap remained in the spot where Leen's vomit had been wiped up. He still hesitated as Nella's letters grew ever more urgent and one day, during this period of waiting, he sent the big Sunlight soap carton with the drawings to Rai's address in Germany. He did this one afternoon he had been to the cemetery, and had pondered for a long time whether he should fulfil Leen's wishes.

In the bus he decided to return to Germany and when he vacated the room and Leen's bed was taken away, two objects fell out of the mattress—a nail file and a little red tin box of cough drops.

He heard the boys outside speaking to someone and opened his window. Heinrich called up to Bolda's room: "We are being careful," and Bolda shouted: "I've just seen you break off two pansy heads." Albert leaned out of the window and called up to Bolda: "They won't do it again." The boys laughed and Bolda laughed and called: "Oh, if it were left to you, they could trample down everything."

He left the window open while he tidied the drawings. There were almost a hundred thin sheets of paper. He suddenly realized that he could write to Leen's parents, for they had often sent him parcels of ham and tea and tobacco, and he had never had the courage to write them a long letter, only a short note of thanks and sometimes a few books.

CHAPTER TEN

It was terrifying when Grandmother took him to eat in town. She went out very seldom, but she had quite a reputation in certain restaurants and her appearance called forth a curious smile among the staff. He never knew whether it was mocking or respectful. She loved rich, heavy foods, thick soups, brown congealed messes, the smell of which made him feel sick. The mayonnaise was put on ice so that she could enjoy the hot fat in the ice cold sauce. She ordered big slices of roast meat which she sniffed, stabbed with knife and fork to test their tenderness and ruthlessly sent back if they did not meet with her approval. Five different salads which she dressed with a variety of spices from bottles, mysterious silver jugs, copper-coloured shakers and casters. Long discussions with the head waiter about the seasoning. Salvation was the plate with huge slices of very white bread standing like a tower in the middle of the table. In vain he waited for the other food he liked as much as bread—potatoes. He liked them yellowish white, steaming, with butter and salt, but Grandmother looked down her nose at potatoes.

She drank wine and insisted that he should drink cider—a drink she had liked as a child. It upset her when he did not drink it, for she could not understand that something which had seemed so wonderful to her as a child should not seem wonderful to him. He had a small appetite—salad, soup and bread—and wolfing her food like a wild beast she shook her head in despair. Before the meal she crossed herself belligerently. Her arms waving like windmills, she banged her forehead, breast and belly with the flat of her hand. She drew attention to herself also by her clothes—black heavy silk and a gleaming red blouse which matched her ruddy face. The waiter, the proprietor and the buffet waitress took her for a Russian emigrant although she had been born in a little village in the Eifel, and her childhood had been one of

abysmal poverty. Every time she had a good meal, she related how badly she had eaten as a child. At the top of her voice, so that the people at the next table could hear, she described the sweet, tasteless swedes, the unpleasantness of burnt skimmed-milk soup. Followed a detailed description of the nettle salad and the sour black bread of her childhood, while she triumphantly crumbled a slice of the whitest white bread. She had a whole litany of oaths for potatoes: floury stuff, that made you choke, Prussian bread. This was usually followed by a stream of dialect which he did not understand. She took a new slice of white bread, soaked up the sauce with it and there was a mad gleam in her blue eyes which terrified him. He understood why he was frightened of her when she began to describe how rabbits had been slaughtered at home. He could hear the bones of the little creatures breaking, see their eyes glaze, and the blood flow. He was given a description of how they fought for the offal—dark red entrails, lungs, liver and heart and she, as the youngest, was usually cheated by her hungry elder brothers and sisters. Even now, more than fifty years later, she howled with rage at her brother Matthias who always managed to get hold of the rabbit's heart. Vagabond and thief, she called him, although he had lain for twenty years in the cemetery of her village in the Eifel. He could imagine the silly cackle of chickens running round the pathetic barnyard when her father appeared with his chopper. Skinny poultry, which, as she said, was ready for the pot. She told him that when rich peasants slaughtered she begged for a pail of blood and brought the clotted blood home in the washpail to make black sausages. The moment had almost come when he would be sick. As her last course she always ate a tender, underdone lamb chop. When she cut it up she praised the tenderness of the meat. But he could not help thinking of dismembered, murdered children, and while he tried to enjoy the ice-cream, coffee and cakes, he knew that he would have to be sick and would be unable to eat anything more. He remembered all the dishes which had stood on the table: the greasy, burning-hot goulash soup, salad, roast and the suspicious-looking red sauce, and he looked in terror at Grandmother's plate on which the red gravy was congealing. Blood with blobs of fat. . . . During the whole meal a burning cigarette lay in the ash-tray and between each bite Grandmother took a puff and looked round in triumph.

He thought that Brielach and Behrendt would now be playing

football in the garden, drinking cold lemonade and eating slices of bread and jam and that Albert would drive them later into town and buy them ice-cream. Perhaps by the bridge or down near the Rhine where one could throw stones in the water from the table and watch men dragging bits of rusty ship-wrecked iron out of the water. And he was condemned to sit and watch Grandmother making a pig of herself, mopping up the bloody fat with her bread.

He always left it too late to go to the cloakroom and be sick. But Grandmother sat in the farthest corner of the restaurant and the way to the lavatory led past five, six or seven big tables. He counted them anxiously and the russet strips of carpet seemed to lead past an endless row of guzzling diners. He hated them as he hated Grandmother—flushed red faces enhanced by the white napkins, steaming plates and the cracking of bones, children's bones. . . . Blood with blobs of fat. . . . Blobs of fat like the cold eyes of the skinny gluttons and the bloodshot hideously mild eyes of the fat gluttons. And the waiter kept carrying in dismembered murdered children from the buffet and the eyes of those who as yet had no plate in front of them watched him greedily as he passed.

It was a long way to the lavatory, but at last he managed to get there. He stumbled past a double row of guzzlers, growing more nervous step by step, but he managed to reach the lavatory: white tiles, the smell of stale urine and synthetic lemon soap. The lavatory attendant's table covered with bright packets, combs, towels and the grunting guzzlers whose flushed faces he could see twice reflected in the mirror. . . . A double row of murderers picking their teeth, savouring their rich food and running their tongues round their chops.

White shirt tails protruding from open flies and at last a free place. He bent over the pan and the acrid odour of the meat-eaters' urine increased his disgust and increased his desire to be sick. And he longed to get it over. Next to him the round, red, rather young face of a bone-breaker who said to him: "Stick your finger down your throat. Stick your finger down your throat." He hated the well-meaning importunity of this murderer, his flushed face and he longed for Uncle Albert and his mother, for Glum's simple rugged features and Bolda's smooth, pitch-black hair framing her white face. He longed to be playing football

with Brielach and Behrendt but now he was a prisoner between belching, urinating bone-breakers, confined in this lethal clean white prison, for ever condemned to smell the stale piss and the synthetic lemon. The attendant's warm, white paws were laid on his neck and a good-natured face peered over his shoulder. At this moment Grandmother rushed into the gentlemen's cloakroom crying: "What's the matter with my boy." The warm soft eyes of the attendant opened wide, and the men relieving themselves, hastily fumbled with their trouser buttons. "What's the matter, little one? What's the matter?" Her hands were gentle but firm. She forced his neck forward, although he screamed with terror, and thrust her long, tobacco-stained forefinger into his mouth. But still he could not vomit. The disgust lay on his stomach like a lump of iron, a cramped indissoluble terror, and Grandmother chivvied him back through the double row of guzzlers. And then it happened—right in the middle of the restaurant. Just as he passed the table of a murderer who, in evident satisfaction, had plunged his knife into a rosy, bloody piece of tender meat. It was terror and relief. . . . He felt neither shame nor regret—merely triumph. Now that the terror had disappeared from his stomach, he could even smile.

The child-eating cannibal turned red; there were shouts and excited chatter, a rattle of crockery and the windy rustling of the waiter while Grandmother laughingly paid up for the damage with her cheque book. His suit was unspotted and his face quite clean. He only needed to wipe his mouth a little with a handkerchief and he had come out of the battle whole, empty and free, and victorious. He had not dirtied his hands, had not stained his soul and had ejected his enforced meal unaided. Even Grandmother had lost her appetite. She refused cream cakes, ices and coffee, tore a cheque from her book, one for the cannibal's suit and one to pacify the waiter. And now that his belly was empty, holding Grandmother's hand without fear or shame, he made his way along the russet strip of carpet.

In the taxi on the way home Grandmother kept up a grumbling commentary on the 'ruined' stomachs of present-day youth. "No one can eat decently any more. No one can drink decently any more. No one can even smoke strong cigarettes. A damned race of weaklings."

These little jaunts took place once every six months. He knew

when one was imminent, just as he knew when the 'I've passed blood' performance was to take place. Usually he got out of them by disappearing just before midday, or begging Uncle Albert to take him for a drive. But flight was only a postponement for Grandmother always nabbed him.

These jaunts, she considered, were part and parcel of his education. One day, when he was just five years old, she had said to him: "Now I'm going to show you how one eats properly," and she had taken him for the first time to Vohwinkels Wine Restaurant. In those days he really imagined that slaughtered children were brought into the restaurant from the buffet, steaming plates of pink flesh, impatiently awaited by murderers, and from his fifth year he closely observed how adults ate, what they ate, and in a bold flight of imagination he came to the conclusion that what took place there must be immoral. But Grandmother persistently took him along and the proprietor, the buffet girl and the waiter had all known him now for a long time. He had heard them whispering: "Here comes the Grand Duchess with the kid who's always sick." Grandmother was obstinate about getting him used to big meals. Goose's bones were crushed and pulped before his eyes. He had to eat meat; bloody steaks were cut up on the table and he hated them all. Much of the mysterious commodity known as MONEY was paid out. Notes and coins—could anything except children be so expensive?

For months after one of these trips with Grandmother he ate no meat, only bread, eggs, cheese and milk, fruit or the marvellous soups that Glum prepared in the kitchen. A brew into which anything could be put as long as it would cook and dissolve—vegetables, bones, fish and apples. A mysteriously prepared but appetizing soup, which Glum produced in gallons whenever he had the time. Glum lived on bread, eggs and gherkins into which he bit like apples. He put in big marrows and stood smoking his pipe by the stove, brooding for hours over the pot, tasting it, adding something—an onion, a Maggi cube and dried herbs which crumpled between his fingers. Glum sniffed, tasted and grinned until he took the huge iron pot off the stove and put it in the refrigerator. There was peace for a week. When he went to work he filled his mess tin, screwed it up, stuck half a gherkin in his pocket with bread, a length of sausage and a book. Glum read very strange books—a thick one called DOGMA and another called

MORAL THEOLOGY. Books in which he made notes with a pencil and whose chapter headings were difficult to decipher. MORAL THEOLOGY had something to do with IMMORAL. Glum knew exactly what immoral meant and according to him the murderers in Vohwinkel's Wine Restaurant did not eat children and were not absolutely IMMORAL, but perhaps Glum's book was out of date, because there was nothing in it yet about these murderers.

Glum smoked his pipe almost continuously, sometimes taking it to bed with him. He cooked soup, read weighty tomes and went out on early morning shift. He worked in Grandmother's factory.

Glum was remarkable, but a good man. He liked Glum, although his lack of teeth and lack of hair was sometimes rather alarming. But there was a reason why he had lost his hair and teeth: Glum had been in a concentration camp. He never mentioned it but Uncle Albert had hinted at what it was: death, murder, rape and terror. Millions of human beings. . . . And because Glum had seen all that, he looked older than he really was. He always thought that Glum must be older than Grandmother but in actual fact he was fifteen years younger. He spoke very seldom and every word came out of his mouth like a clot. He opened his mouth wide—a naked rosy cavern—made remarkable contortions with his tongue against the darker-red background and it seemed as though something round and thick would roll out of his mouth, but only a single word emerged: the. The next word was larger, thicker and rounder—almost like a small marrow, forming slowly and ejected with great patience. Once more only a single word—a big word—Virgin. The word 'virgin' sounded gigantic in Glum's mouth, more like a balloon than a marrow. Glum's eyes lit up. His small nose quivered and no balloon, no marrow, but something came out about the size of a fairly large apple: powerful. Powerful was Glum's favourite word, and particularly round and tender was his enunciation of the middle syllable: er.

Glum was pious and friendly, but when he spoke it was difficult to follow him because the intervals between the individual words were so great that one had almost forgotten the first by the time the next came, and thus it was difficult to follow the sequence. Only slowly, with great ceremony and patience—patience was another of Glum's favourite words—could he tell a story. But if one paid great attention one could hear fantastic things.

One wall of Glum's room was covered with a huge map of the world, which Glum himself was painting and annotating. He had stuck together curved pieces of stout paper, working them out to scale for months on end, so that they fitted his wall, and with industry, pedantry and patience had marked in frontiers and mountains, rivers, seas and oceans. He had erased and carefully hatched, spending months in preparation before he began, very carefully, to paint the foundation colours. A great expenditure of green for the gigantic plains, brown for the mountains and blue for the oceans.

Glum must have seen a lot before he came to the house, long long ago; as long as Martin could remember, Glum had been there. Glum had seen a lot on the way from his home until he crossed the Rhine, but never, never a paint box, and the paint box Albert showed him enchanted him more than the cathedrals or the aeroplanes. He had copied Uncle Albert's movements precisely—dipped the brush in the water, squeezed the paint on to it, ran the brush over the paper and laughed for joy when it turned red and light red, and the same day he bought a paint box of his own.

Very slowly, very accurately and with great patience Glum painted the world; he had begun far in the back of beyond where everything was so green—in Siberia. Here he had put the first black dots on the map. "Over there," he said, "eight thousand miles from here, I was born." It took him nearly a minute to say eight thousand miles. Apple, marrow, apple, click, click, apple, marrow. . . . He seemed to bake the words behind his gums before releasing them. Tasting and forming them once more with his tongue before he let them go cautiously and lovingly, syllable by syllable.

Glum had been born eight thousand miles away and his real name was Glumbich Cholokusteban, and it was a particular joy to hear him pronounce his name. It meant: 'The sun that ripens our berries.'

When Heinrich Briela'h and he felt inclined, they went up to Glum and made him pronounce his name and explain it. It was as good as going to the pictures.

Unfortunately he could go up to Glum's room only very rarely, for he went to early morning Mass and then to the jam factory and only returned in the evening. Before going to bed,

Bolda always cooked his breakfast; coffee, gherkins, bread and blood sausage. Glum's blood sausage had nothing of the child murderer about it. Although it was red it tasted mealy and soft and, according to Bolda, actually consisted of flour, margarine and a little ox blood.

Every Sunday Glum slept until midday. His dinner consisted of soup and marrow and, if a little coffee remained in the jug from breakfast, he would warm it and take it up to his room where, until four o'clock he studied his strange books. And once a month he was visited by the little old priest who lived with the nuns. He spent the whole of Sunday afternoon with Glum, discussing what Glum had read in his books. And later they always drank coffee downstairs with Mother—the priest and Glum, Uncle Albert and Martin—and they often argued, Mother with the priest, Uncle Albert with the priest, and Glum always agreed with the priest and eventually said, rolling the words out patiently: "Come, little Father, we will go and drink a schnapps. They're all so foolish." Everyone laughed and Glum actually went off with the little priest to drink a schnapps.

Sunday, from four to half-past seven, Glum painted his map and during these hours he could sometimes go up and visit him. After five years Glum had not yet finished a quarter of the world. Carefully, shade by shade, he copied from Uncle Albert's atlas, and when he had to paint round the Arctic Circle he had to stand on a stool. But the stool was now in the cellar and would not be fetched until Glum had got so far to the West that Spitzbergen, Greenland and the North Pole had to be painted in.

He used countless tubes of green, blue, brown and a lot of white to make the brown, green and blue lighter. Icy as the Arctic Ocean, green as fresh salad and light brown as the sand on the banks of the Rhine. Uncle Albert, who understood something about painting, insisted that Glum was a great artist. In actual fact, Glum could also draw beasts, men, houses and trees, direct with his brush on to the paper. He would do this when he was in a good mood: red cows, a yellow horse and a stocky black man on the horse.

"My father's cows were red, quite red. Yes, you can laugh. They were as red as dark, ripe tomatoes and my father had a bright yellow horse, a black beard, black hair but blue eyes, quite blue like the Arctic Ocean up there. I had to graze the cows in the

forest clearings where short grass grew, and sometimes I had to drive them through the forest to the river where there was a strip of tall, lush grass. The river was called Schechtischechna-Schechticho which means: 'The One who brings the water, fish, ice and gold.' "

Savage cries came from Glum's mouth as he described the broad, rushing, wild cold river. Its source was in the great mountains that lay beyond India.

And Glum pointed once more to the black spot among a mass of green where he had been born.

"My father was a chieftain and later he called himself Commissar. But he was a chieftain although he called himself Commissar, and every year in the spring, when Schechtischechna-Schechticho became free of ice, when the blackberries began to ripen in the forests and the grass grew green, even when he was a Commissar, he did what all the chieftains had done for countless generations—he drew lots for the boys in the village and one of them had to be flung into the river so that it would not overflow and would bring down lots and lots of gold. The draw took place in secret for the men who had made father a Commissar must not hear of it. But no one said a word and none of the strangers noticed anything for no one counted the boys in the village, and there were many boys in the village."

To tell all this, Glum needed several days. Slowly, by year-long questioning and probing, Martin had extracted Glum's story. The men of Schechtischechna washed gold and this gold was given in part to the men who had made Glum's father a Commissar, but most of the gold went to Fritz! While he spoke of Fritz, Glum painted shrubs, berries and the ice cold Schechtischechna. Fritz found a way over the river and Fritz came and brought cigarettes—"the white sticks which put dried happiness into the brain." And Fritz brought something else, something white in glass tubes, and by Glum's accurate description, Martin recognised that they were ampoules such as the doctor used when he gave Grandmother an injection in the arm.

"And what did your father do with it, Glum?"

"I only understood that later," replied Glum. "In spring there was always a feast in the forest hut at which the girls took part. None of the elder women, only girls, and my father and another two men, whom we called Shamans. And if the girls

refused to take part in the feast, the Shaman cursed them and they fell ill." At this point Glum fell silent for a moment, blushed and the red rose from his neck to his cheeks and Martin realized that in the forest hut 8,000 miles away something IMMODEST, perhaps IMMORAL, had taken place.

"When the girls were ready to take part in the feast in the hut they recovered and Fritz brought both disease and health in his glass tubes." Later Glum fled because his Father chose him to be thrown into the Schechtischechna and Fritz helped Glum to flee. Glum told all this slowly, sometimes only a few phrases and then nothing for weeks and punctually at half-past seven he would stop short, wash his brush, dry it carefully, relight his pipe and sit down thoughtfully on the edge of his bed to take off his slippers and put on his shoes. Behind him the colours of his map were already bright but the part of the earth that remained still white seemed to Martin endless—white seas, separated by thin pencil lines from dry land, the outlines of islands, rivers which all led to the little black spot that represented Glum's birthplace. Far below and to the left of the map, in Europe, lay the second black spot called Kalinowka, the place where Martin's father had been killed. And higher up, far away to the left, almost on the sea shore, lay the third black spot where they lived. A forlorn triangle on an endless plain. While he changed, Glum cut little pieces from the marrow which lay on the night table, put MORAL THEOLOGY and DOGMA in his haversack and went down into the kitchen to fill his mess tin before going to the tram stop.

There were often big breaks between the Sundays when Glum felt like talking and for weeks on end he could only get two or three sentences out of him. But he always carried on from where he had left off. Glum had run away from home thirty years before. Fritz had helped him to reach the city where lived the men who had made his father a Commissar. The town was called Atschinssk. There Glum had made streets, become a soldier and wandered even farther west. Glum used to wave his hands as though he were rolling a snowball to show how he had rolled towards the west. Other towns cropped up in his story—Omsk, Magnitogorsk and another one much farther west, Tambow. There Glum was no longer a soldier but had unloaded railway trucks. Wood, wood, coal and potatoes. . . . And in the evenings he went to school and learned to read and write and he lived in a real house and had a

wife whose name was Tata. He described her, painted her, fair-haired, plump and smiling, and he had met Tata in the school where he learned to read and write. Tata also worked on the railway but she only carried parcels. As soon as she could read and write, however, she would be promoted and the fair-haired, plump Tata in Glum's pictures seemed to grin more broadly, for Tata stood in the station at Tambow checking and chipping the tickets. Tata with a cap from which her fair hair peeped. . . Tata with a ticket punch. . . .

But the great moment came for Glum after he had been married a year to Tata, long after she had begun to stand with her cap and ticket punch on the station at Tambow. After a year Tata showed him what she had kept hidden beneath a wooden crate in the kitchen—a crucifix and a sacred medal. And at night, when he lay in bed with Tata, she explained to him and Glum was kindled by the flame—Glum painted a very red and yellow flame. But he went on rolling westwards, a snowball that grew larger and larger and larger. . . . Glum was rolled away irrevocably from Tata for it was war. He was wounded and rolled back eastwards to Tambow, but Tata had disappeared and no one knew where she had gone. She had left one morning in her ticket collector's hat, a ticket punch in her hand and never returned. Glum remained in Tambow making inquiries about Tata but could find no trace of her. Once more he rolled westwards, was caught up again in the war because he was healthy, rolled and rolled until at last he came to rest in a concentration camp, which Glum merely referred to as a camp. In this camp he had lost his teeth and hair, not only from hunger but from terror, and when Glum uttered the word 'terror' it really sounded terrifying. Not an apple or a balloon but a knife came from his mouth and his face changed so much that Martin was afraid of him, just as he was afraid when he laughed. Glum laughed when Bolda came up to his room to sing chorales with him. He sang well and his voice was clear and wild. But when Bolda began to sing Glum laughed, and his laugh rang out as if a hundred little knives had streaked through the air. If Bolda went on singing after he had laughed he grew almost angry and said imploringly: "Oh, Bolda, you're really getting on my nerves."

Uncle Albert had brought Glum home, had rescued this bald-headed, toothless monster who was begging for work at the

gates of the jam factory and was being shooed away by the porter. Albert had brought him home and Grandmother was good to Glum—a big feather in Grandmother's cap—just as she was good to Bolda in spite of everything.

Bolda was always referred to with the same strange word that Mother used with reference to herself: a failure. Bolda was a failure. She was Grandmother's age and whenever she told the story of her life she seemed to have been something quite different. At first she had been a nun, but then she had married, her husband had died and she had married a second time. When Grandmother had a row with her she always said: 'You unfrocked nun' and 'you twofold widow'. And Bolda giggled. Bolda was ruined but good, and Glum was strange, rather sinister, but also good. When Bolda told the story of her life she muddled up everything: nunhood, marriage and widowhood, the first and second widowhood. "When I was in the convent," she would begin, and two sentences later she went on: "When I was working in an electricity shop in Coblenz, you know, irons and heaters——" but in the next sentence she was back in the nunnery, describing her trousseau. "When I was widowed for the first time," but she soon went off on to another plane. "He was a good man, you know."

"Which one?"

"My second husband. Fortunately he had no business but was an official. He was with the Sipo."

"What's that?"

"Security Police, but you wouldn't understand. As a result I fortunately have my pension."

Dark hints as to the function of the Sipo made him suspect that it had something to do with IMMORAL and IMMODEST. And yet Bolda got her pension from this department. In Bolda's hints bushes played a great part, and her husband had obviously inspected them. He remembered what Grebhake and Wolters had done in the bushes. Brazen, flushed faces, open flies and the bitter-sweet odour of fresh sap. "Filth," said Bolda, who sometimes came up when he was sitting with Glum, and Glum shook his head at her stories so constantly and patiently that each time Bolda flew into a rage and screamed: "What do you understand of culture, you old, you old. . . ." She sought for a word and finally brought out: "You old Turk!" At this Glum laughed as

though a hundred knives had streaked through the air. But why did she come to Glum's room if he made her so angry? She often came there to speak about breakfast although there was nothing to discuss, for everyone had the same breakfast—each, naturally, his own but the same every day. Mother had real coffee, as strong as Albert's; coffee essence was brewed for Glum and Bolda herself drank hot milk, into which she dripped honey. Everyone was given his own little pot with a cosy and slices of bread and butter, sausage or jam on a plate, and this was Bolda's job. Everyone, however, had to fetch his own breakfast from the kitchen when he got up.

Bolda was a failure, but good, and Mother was a failure and he did not know whether she was immoral. . . . Hoarse whispers in the hall: 'Where are you always flying off to?' Glum was not a failure, but strange and good, and Albert was different. Neither strange, nor a failure and yet good. Albert resembled the other boys' fathers; and neither the word failure nor the word strange applied to Grandmother, and he knew that actually Grandmother was good. She was not, for example, ENTIRELY good, only ACTUALLY. He could not understand why the words ENTIRELY, ACTUALLY and OTHERWISE were banned in school, for with these words you could express things which could not otherwise be expressed. Bolda, for example, was ENTIRELY good whereas Mother was good but ACTUALLY, in all probability, immoral. This point had to be cleared up and he sensed that the answer would be unsatisfactory.

Bolda and Grandmother had known each other as girls and each considered the other mad. Except when peace reigned—at Christmas, etc.—and then they embraced each other and said: "We used to tend the cows together, you remember. Do you remember this and that?" And they spoke of the bitter wind from the Eifel hills, of huts made from branches, stones and straw, of camp fires on which they had cooked coffee and soup, and they sang songs no one understood, and Glum also sang songs no one understood, which streaked through the air like knives. But if Boldo and Grandmother met on ordinary days they usually wrangled and Grandmother would tap her forehead and say: "You were always crazy," and Bolda would put her finger to her forehead and say: "You were always cracked and moreover. . . ."

"What do you mean, moreover?" shouted Grandmother. But Bolda never replied. The pretext for their quarrel was usually Bolda's private menu. Swedes, sweet potato soup with skimmed milk and melted margarine poured into it and skimmed milk soup which, according to Grandmother, she 'burned even more than was necessary'. "Yes, that sow lets it burn on purpose to remind me of my childhood poverty, I'll chuck her out of my house. I own this house and I can say who shall and who shan't live here and I'll chuck her out." But she never chucked Bolda out. Bolda had lived there as long as Glum and, moreover, Grandmother sometimes slunk humbly into the kitchen and tasted Bolda's concoctions. Swede soup, skimmed milk soup and the sour black bread that Bolda dug up somewhere in the city. Then tears would fall from Grandmother's ruddy face into her plate and a strange, good-natured smile would appear on Bolda's face making her thin paper-white cheeks look younger.

Everyone had to fend for themselves at lunch. Glum had his soup and in the refrigerator or on the kitchen shelves lay his gherkins, melons, potatoes and huge violet rings of blood sausages which, in actual fact, was not real sausage. Bolda also cooked from her reserves, some colourless stuff which grew thick in brown enamel pots. Grandmother had her own compartment in the refrigerator, the biggest: sausages and steaks, piles of big new-laid eggs, fruit and vegetables and sometimes, about four o'clock in the afternoon, she stood, with a cigarette in her mouth, cooking at the gas stove, humming songs while the steam whirled round her nose. She often telephoned to a restaurant to send in a hot meal—burning hot silver platters, long-stemmed beakers containing sundaes and red wine. Sometimes, even the coffee was sent in from the restaurant. But occasionally she ate nothing after breakfast or went into the garden in her dressing gown, with a TOMAHAWK in her mouth and wearing old leather gloves, to cut herself stinging nettles which grew in profusion along the mildewed wall and round the arbour. She carefully chose the young green plants, wrapped them in a newspaper and later stood in the kitchen making nettle salad with which she ate some of Bolda's sour black bread. Mother sometimes forgot to prepare a midday meal for Albert and himself. She herself ate a little toast for breakfast, an egg and a great deal of coffee. When she happened to be at home it entered her

head to cook lunch only about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Soup out of tins, heated up, small bowls of salad and sometimes she warmed up Glum's soup. In exchange she presented Glum with a ring of sausage or a packet of tobacco and the same evening he added as much water to his pot as Mother had taken soup. But usually Mother suddenly went away without cooking for him and Uncle Albert stepped into the breach. He took some of Bolda's mashed Swedes, improved them with butter and milk, fried some eggs or made pancakes. But sometimes there was no one at home, neither Mother, Albert, Bolda nor Glum. Then all he could do was to pinch some of Glum's soup, warm it up or look in Mother's room for chocolates and cakes. He did not want to visit Grandmother, for she would roast him some meat or drive with him into the city and he would have to endure the ordeal of 'the Grand Duchess and the kid who was always sick'.

He was very rarely given what he liked—potatoes, boiled or in their skins, steaming hot, salty and yellow with butter. He loved them. No one knew how much he loved them, not even Albert or Uncle Will. Sometimes he persuaded Bolda to cook him some—a whole plateful with a large lump of butter in the middle which melted slowly and fine, dry salt, white as snow, which he sprinkled slowly over them. Other people ate potatoes every day and he envied them. Brielach had to cook some every day for supper. Occasionally he was allowed to help Brielach and, as a reward, was given freshly peeled potatoes. At other people's houses—he had seen it himself—it was quite different. Their food was cooked regularly for the whole family—vegetables, potatoes and sauces. They all ate the same, Grandmother, Mother, Father and Uncle, and they had no refrigerators in which everyone kept his own peculiar specialities. . . . And no big kitchen in which they could all cook what they pleased. Of a morning a big coffee pot stood on the table with margarine, bread and jam and they all ate together and had bread and butter to take to school, the office or to work. There were rarely eggs, only for Uncle and Father. That was the symbol of most uncles and fathers and the only thing that distinguished them from the other members of the family: the BREAKFAST EGG.

Other boys had mothers who cooked, sewed, prepared bread and butter, even the immoral ones, but his Mother seldom cooked,

never sewed and never made bread and butter. Usually it was Uncle Albert who thought of sending him to school with bread and butter.

Sometimes Bolda took pity on him and prepared some for him and it was lucky that Grandmother was still asleep when he went to school, for she did her best to turn him into a meat eater, and would cut thick slices of pink roast meat, belly of pork and cold scarlet loin chops.

It was heaven when Grandmother went away for a few months. Huge trunks, suitcases and packages were sent on ahead in one taxi and Grandmother driven to the station in another. A month in summer and another in winter. Postcards arrived of mountains, lakes and rivers and kisses, thousands of kisses for the boy and for the others, even for the 'defrocked' nun. Bolda would giggle and say: "Didn't some good fairy say at her christening that she would one day travel to fashionable spas?" Huge, sprawling writing on the postcards, each letter as large as the letters on cigarette packets. And she sent parcels, strange sticky parcels which had melted in the heat at post offices, sweets, toys and souvenirs and 'many many thousand kisses from your Granny'.

When she was away he could think with a certain tenderness and emotion of this distant Granny because he did not feel directly menaced. There were even days when he wished she were there, for the house was so empty and quiet without Grandmother and she had locked her room and he could never go and stare at Grandfather's portrait. Naturally the 'I've passed blood' performance was lacking.

Bolda was silent and sad and he felt that not even Mother's constant visitors filled the house as Grandmother filled it.

But as the day of her return approached, he wished that she would stay away. He never wished her dead. She should live, but far away, because her fits disturbed him more than anything. On her return everything started again. At first there was a big meal at home. She telephoned to the restaurant for it and pale, downcast youths in white aprons carried silver platters through the hall and Grandmother waited for them with a greedy glint in her eye and a chef stood in the kitchen with all the jets on, while the pale-faced boys hovered between the kitchen and Grandmother's bedroom. Bloody steaks wandered to and fro,

vegetables, salad, roasts and towards the end of the meal, the chef 'phoned to the restaurant and a smart little cream-coloured van brought coffee and ice-cream, cakes and fruit covered with cream. Later blood-stained bones lay in the dustbin and the savage music of a torn-out cheque signified the end of the meal and the beginning of his torment for, her vigour restored, and smoking TOMAHAWKS, his Grandmother called him in to make up for lost time.

Question 51: "When will the dead rise again?"

"The dead will rise on Judgement Day."

"Your father fell in action, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"What does it mean—fell in action?"

"Killed in the war. Shot."

"Where?"

"Near Kalinowka."

"When?"

"On the 7th July, 1919."

"And when were you born?"

"On the 8th September, 1921."

"What was the name of the man who caused your father's death?"

"Gäseler."

"Repeat that name."

"Gäseler."

"Once more."

"Gäseler."

"Do you know what it means to deprive a child of his father?"

"Yes."

He knew it only too well.

Three days in succession she would call him in and ask the same questions.

"What did God order us to observe in the Sixth and Ninth Commandments?"

"In the Sixth and Ninth Commandments God ordered us to be modest and chaste."

"How do the questions go on the searching of one's conscience for the sin of immodesty?"

And he reeled off fast, without a mistake: "Have I looked with pleasure on anything immodest? Have I heard with pleasure

anything immodest? Have I thought with pleasure of anything immodest? Have I desired anything immodest? Have I uttered anything immodest? Have I done anything immodest? (Alone or with others.)"

He added quite correctly in parenthesis: 'Alone or with others.'

And the concluding lecture: "When you're a little older you'll understand why. . . ."

Grebhake and Wolters had done something immodest in the bushes: flushed faces, open flies and the bitter-sweet odour of fresh sap. The confusion and the strange startled cowardice on their faces had attracted his attention and made him imagine something sinister. He did not know what Grebhake and Wolters had done, but he knew that it was immodest. To the last question regarding the Sixth Commandment, they would not only have to say 'Yes' but also 'With others'. After he knew what Grebhake and Wolters had done, he watched the chaplain's face intently at religious instruction for they had both confessed to him. But his face showed no change when he spoke to Grebhake and Wolters. Or had the boys confessed and gone to Communion all the same? He caught his breath when he thought of this possibility and grew red in the face from fear until Grandmother asked "What's the matter?" And he replied, "Nothing, it's only the smoke." She cut short her concluding lecture and pulled out her cheque book. He went into Uncle Albert's room and while still in the doorway blurted out: "Grebhake and Wolters did something immodest!"

Uncle Albert looked surprised, bit his lips and turned a little pale as he asked: "Where? What did you see? How did you know?"

It was difficult, but he stammered: "In the bushes, they . . . flushed faces, open flies. . . ." Uncle Albert filled his pipe calmly, lit it and gave him a rather prolonged lecture on the union of the sexes, the beauty of women and sex. Adam and Eve cropped up and Uncle Albert's voice trembled with an enthusiasm which he found a little ridiculous when he began to praise the beauty of women and the urge of men to unite. A slight, rather sinister enthusiasm in Uncle Albert's voice. . . .

"Incidentally," said Uncle Albert, putting out his pipe, which still contained some burning tobacco, and, contrary to his usual custom, lighting a cigarette, "incidentally, you know,

children result from the union of men and women." Adam and Eve cropped up again, there was mention of flowers and animals and Uncle Albert's mother's cow. Adam and Eve again. . . . What Uncle Albert said sounded intelligent, calm and illuminating, although it offered no explanation as to what Grebhake and Wolters had done in the bushes. Something he had not clearly seen and could not even imagine—open flies, flushed faces and the bitter-sweet odour of new sap. . . .

Uncle Albert talked at length of 'certain secrets I can only hint to you', spoke of dark urges and how difficult it was for a growing boy to wait for the time when he would be ripe for union. More talk of flowers and animals. "A very young heifer, for example," said Uncle Albert, "does not unite with a steer and cannot have young, although it has a sex. All men and all animals have a sex."

Uncle Albert smoked one cigarette after the other as he spoke and at times he stuttered.

Uncle and marriage struck Martin as immoral.

"But you were married when you were in England?"

"Yes."

"And you united with your wife."

"Yes." Although he looked at Uncle Albert closely he noticed no sign of trembling and no change in his face.

"Then why have you no children?"

"Well," replied Albert, "children don't result from every union"—more flowers, more animals, nothing about Adam and Eve, and he interrupted Albert and said: "So it's as I thought."

"What did you think?"

"That a woman can also be immoral if she has no children by her husband with whom she unites, like Welzkam's mother."

"Hell," said Uncle Albert, "how do you make that out?"

"Because Brielach's mother is immoral. She has a child and unites with a man to whom she's not married."

"Who told you that Heinrich's mother is immoral?"

"Brielach heard the Rector say to the school inspector: 'He lives in terrible conditions. His mother's immoral.' "

"Really," said Uncle Albert, and although he saw that he was angry, with less self assurance, he went on: "It's really true. Brielach heard it and he knows quite well that his mother is immoral."

"Really? Go on."

"Hm, well, Welzkam's mother is also immoral although she has no children. I know it."

Uncle Albert said nothing, but merely stared at him with benevolent surprise.

"Immodest," he blurted out, as though he had suddenly realised it, "is what children do and immoral is what grown-ups do. But did Grebhake and Wolters unite?"

"No, no," said Uncle Albert and his face was now scarlet. "They were muddled, that's all. Don't give it another thought and always ask me if you hear or see something you don't understand." Albert's voice was serious and stern but very friendly. "Do you hear? Always ask me. It's much better to talk about it. I don't know everything but I'll tell you what I do know. Don't forget to ask me."

There still remained the word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker. He thought of it and blushed, but he would never be able to utter the word.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Uncle Albert. "What's the matter now?"

"Nothing," he said. He was ashamed to ask whether his Mother was immoral. He would not ask this question until much later.

After this Uncle Albert bothered far more about him. He often took him out in the car and he thought that Mother too was different from that day. She was quite different and he was certain that Uncle Albert had spoken to her. And the three of them often went for a drive and Brielach could come whenever he liked in the car. They went to the woods, to the lakes, to eat ice-cream or to the cinema.

Each day, too, they seemed to have planned that one of them should hear his homework. They heard him, helped him and were both very friendly. Mother was patient and at home more; each day he was given lunch and for a time even potatoes—but only for a time, because Mother's patience was soon exhausted and she reverted to disorderliness and there was not food every day. He could not count on Mother in the same way as he could count on Glum, Albert and Bolda.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

NELLA stood behind the green curtain smoking. She puffed grey smoke into the space between the curtain and the window and watched the sun unravel the grey skein as it rose in small strands: a colourless mixture of dust and smoke. The street was deserted. Albert's car stood at the door, the roof was wet from the previous night's rain which had left little puddles in the street. In this room, behind the green curtain, she had stood twenty years ago waiting for the young beaux who came running down the avenue with their tennis racquets—ridiculous, pathetic heroes who had no idea that they were being watched. In the shadow of the church opposite, they ran their combs once more through their hair, inspected their finger nails, tipped the money out of their purses, for it was considered smart to carry it loose in their trousers pockets. Smartness was very important to these young heroes. A little out of breath they strode over the red chestnut blossoms in the front gardens—they had fallen in the first rain—and she would hear a bell ring. But even the smartest had spoken, thought and behaved as the young tennis players on the films behaved, thought and spoke. They knew that they were ridiculous—that, too, was considered smart—but it did not change the fact that they were really ridiculous. Now, a young hero came down the drive, tennis racquet in hand, combed his hair in the shadow of the church, inspected his finger nails, took the money out of his purse and stuck it loose in his pocket; was it a ghost striding over the carpet of red petals, or was she looking at a film? Sometimes the films she saw appeared like a real life to which she had condemned herself by payment of one mark eighty, and life often appeared to her as a bad film. Obviously: black stripes on the screen, the soft grey veil, typical of old films . . . now where this young hero with the tennis racquet came out of the shadow of the church on to the street to visit a girl in the nearby house?

Without turning round she said: "Do people still play tennis on that court?"

"Naturally, Mother," said Martin. "They play a lot of tennis today."

Naturally it had been the same in the old days, only she had never made use of it because she liked to sleep late and did not care much for playing tennis. What she liked was the red hard court and the green, bright green lemonade bottles on the white tables, the tang in the air, the woolly clouds coming from the Rhine, the acrid smell when a freshly tarred ship passed and the ship's pennants fluttering slowly above the chestnut trees like aerial properties held by someone hidden in the wings. Clouds of pitch black smoke, the hoot of the sirens and the noise of tennis balls, a mild drum fire which rose at times and the loud curt calls of the players.

The young hero ran past the house. She knew him. That yellow skin could only belong to a Nadolte. Yellow skin and fair hair, a curious pigmentation, which had made this boy's father, Wilfried Nadolte, so attractive and which he had passed on to his son. Probably he had also inherited the musky perspiration that gleamed green on the yellow skin and gave all sweating Nadoltes the look of corpses sprayed with vitriol. His father had been an airman who was shot down over the Atlantic and his body was never found. And yet this highly poetic death—"Icarus murdered by treacherous pursuers," the parish priest said at the time—had not prevented his son from playing in a bad film, a super who took everything seriously but played his part well. He looked exactly as bad tennis players had to look in bad films.

She stubbed out her cigarette on the little marble gutter which still held a trace of water from the previous night's rain and thrust her right arm through the big gold brocade sash which, like the curtains, had survived the war. As a child she had always wanted to be tall enough to put her right hand in the sash when she stood at the window. She had been tall enough now for many years. Twenty years ago she could have already done so.

Behind her she could hear the noises Martin made as he ate his breakfast at the table: the little rustle when he took the cosy off the coffee pot, when he spread the bread and tapped his

spoon on the jam jar, crunched toast between his teeth and the traditional bang on the empty shell, turned upside-down in the egg-cup. Click! The whining drone of the electric toaster. Whenever she got up early enough to drink coffee with her son, there was a smell of slightly burnt bread in the room and she could hear Albert splashing in the bathroom. Today there was no noise, so Albert was obviously not taking a bath.

"Isn't Albert up yet?" she asked.

"Yes," said the boy. "Can't you hear him?"

She could not hear him. Three days in succession she had got up early and already had the impression of endurance and orderliness: toast, egg, coffee and the boy's happy face taking breakfast with his mother, watching her lay the table, watching her as she poured out his coffee. Outside the Nadolte boy returned with a girl. She was pretty and young and she dutifully displayed a white, gleaming row of teeth. Her very effective upturned nose—at the director's express wish—was held expectantly in the mild south wind. 'Smile'—and she smiled. 'Shake your head,' and she shook her head. A well trained actress, used to playing parts. Would she notice Nadolte's strange perspiration—when one kissed a Nadolte in the bushes—which made his face look the unhealthy colour of a faded lettuce leaf.

Now Nella heard the rush of water in the bathroom and knew that Albert was taking a bath. She had known him for twenty years and he imagined that he knew her, but in twenty years he had not understood what an erotic magic lay for her in a man's washing utensils . . . and what a torture it was to share the bathroom with him.

Each morning, as she washed herself, she fell in love with the indifference which flowed like a pleasant odour from his safety razor. Her fingers often stroked the badly screwed up tube of shaving cream and the blue tin of skin ointment which was already five years old. His toothbrush, comb, soap and the dusty bottle of lavender water which never seemed to grow any less. For years, the liquid in the bottle was level with the lips of the pink-cheeked women on the label. The woman had grown old on the label . . . a faded beauty, smiling sadly now at her transitoriness as once, when she was new, she had stared so hopefully into the distance. An ageing face, dishevelled clothes, withered beauty, unaccustomed to such shabby treatment. The

bottle had stood there for a long time. Obviously he had no idea that it was a torture for her to live in such close proximity with a man whom she liked . . . and why this terrible seriousness, this insistence upon marriage?

She knew a man by the way he went to the telephone. Most men went to the telephone like the men in mediocre films, with a face that was radiant with self-importance and indifference. With huge strides and an expression which seemed to say: 'leave me in peace' or 'so you need me'. When they spoke they tried, even in trivial conversation—and anyhow what conversations were important?—to smuggle in words like 'rearrangements', and 'reservations'. And the decisive moment when they hung up. . . . Who could hang up unlike a bad actor? Albert could and Rai could. Who could dispense with weaving curtly rapped out intelligence tests into his telephone conversation, like artificial flowers in a wreath of pine twigs? And a man could also smoke in a different way from the way men smoked in the films. The world was made up of decadents and perhaps Albert was so natural because he rarely went to the cinema. She often longed for his indifference and regretted the waste of time and the useless expenditure of her smile when she was with idiots.

Her suitcase was packed and she would be bored for three days in Brernich while Albert took the boy away. The idea of listening to Schurbigel was like being condemned to a life sentence in a barber's shop. Sweet and warm, beneficent and at the same time repulsive—and all the nice people that Father Willibrord would introduce her to. 'Don't you know each other?' 'Ah, it was high time you met.' Oh, to be condemned to trivial gossip and was Albert really surprised that she immediately fell for someone who was nice or who seemed to be nice?

She turned away from the window, went slowly over to the oval table and pulled up the green armchair.

"Is there any coffee left?"

"Yes, mother."

Martin stood up, removed the cosy carefully from the pot and poured her out some. He nearly knocked over the jam-dish. Normally he was calm and almost slow in his movements, but when he spoke to her or did something for her, he grew over eager in a vain attempt to be casual. He looked anxious, as

grown-ups do when they have to deal with helpless children, and sometimes he sighed as children sigh when things are difficult. He plugged in the toaster, put in a slice of bread, watched patiently for it to brown, took the finished slice out and stood it upright against the edge of the bread basket.

"Do you want some more?"

"No, it's for Albert."

"And where's his egg?"

"Here," he said with a smile as he stood up, went over to his bed and lifted the pillow. There lay the egg, a little clean brown egg.

"That's to keep it warm. Albert doesn't like his eggs cold. There's enough coffee there for him too."

His solicitude for Albert was different from that which he reserved for her. Perhaps it was because Albert told him more about his father and had slowly developed into the role of an indispensable friend. In any case he was quite calm when he did something for Albert.

She hardly ever spoke to him of Rai. Only occasionally did she take out the brief-case in which she kept Rai's poems, newspaper cuttings, manuscripts and the little twenty-five-page blue bound volume with mention of him in each essay on modern poetry. At one time she had felt proud when Rai's name appeared in the index of anthologies, when his poems were broadcast and the fees were paid to her. Men she had never known and would never have wanted to know, sought her out—youths dressed with carefully-studied negligence, who savoured their bohemianism like brandy, whose passions never exceeded a certain well-tempered mean. Whenever such people visited her she knew that another article on modern poetry was being prepared. At times there had been pilgrimages to her house; articles appeared in papers like mushrooms after summer rain; royalties poured in and two new editions of his poems appeared. But then the youths with the carefully-studied shabby clothes discovered other victims and she had a moment's peace. And Rai cropped up again only when there was a 'flop', for the theme was always topical: a poet killed in Russia, an opponent of the system. Was he not a true symbol of youth sacrificed in vain, and with a deft little twist was he not the symbol of youth purposely sacrificed? Did not strange dissonances appear in the speeches of

Father Willibrord and Schurbigel? Inexorably, Rai had become a favourite subject for essays and there were apparently whole troops of young men dressed with studied negligence to write essays and spend their time tirelessly creating symbols. Clean, industrious and assiduous, with not too much and not too little passion, they wove the tapestry of culture . . . nimble-fingered cheats, who smiled at each other when they met like soothsayers. They could value the entrails and they understood how to prophesy from some pathetic mesentery. They sang luke-warm hymns on a freshly exposed heart and in underground laboratories cleaned the burnt entrails of the sacrificial beast from filth and secretly cut up the liver. Masked nigger-drivers who produced culture instead of soap from corpses. Seers and prophets, who rummaged in ash-cans and intoned their discoveries, when they met they smiled at each other like soothsayers and Schurbigel was their pontifex. Divers for sponges with human horizon and duck's arse haircuts.

Nella was filled with hatred and she was afraid of agreeing with Albert. Tentacles which were ready to capture her.

As long as Rai was alive she had waited for letters greedily as a wild beast in a cage waits for food. She waited with her right arm thrust in the gold brocade sash, listened behind the green curtains and kept her eye on the postman. When he turned the corner of the parish church, his next step was decisive for her whole day. If he walked straight across the street towards her house—a clearly visible twist of his thigh at the corner—she knew that he was bringing her something. But if he turned immediately and went across the invisible diagonal which led to the neighbours' house then there was no hope for her that day. She would dig her fingernails in the heavy green stuff, unravel the weave and remain standing there in the mad hope that the postman could have made a mistake and would turn back. But the postman never made a mistake and he never turned back once he had gone off in the direction of the neighbours' house. She was often a prey to crazy thoughts when at last she saw him reappear in the street. Did he steal her letters? Was he in some conspiracy against herself and Rai? A sadist in a blue uniform embroidered with a yellow posthorn. A traitor disguised as a respectable old fool. But the postman was neither a sadist nor a traitor. He was

a respectable old fool and genuinely devoted to her. She felt it when he brought her a letter.

For years now she had not known what the postman looked like, his name or when he called. At certain hours someone dropped a few circulars and letters into the box and later someone in the house would remove these circulars and letters. . . . Advertisements for brassières, wine and cocoa. They were of no interest to her. For ten years she had not read any letters even when they were addressed to her. Many of the indolent young men—trichina inspectors of culture, who churned out symbols from the entrails of the dead—had complained about it to Father Willibrord, but she had simply ceased to read letters. The only friend she had, lived in the next-door room and when he went away for a few days there was always the telephone. Anything rather than read any more letters. Letters had arrived from Rai after he was dead, after she knew that he was dead. Oh, reliable postal service, smooth-working, praiseworthy, innocent organisation, bringing answers to questions which would no longer be asked.

No, no more letters; beaux could telephone but if they wrote they must not expect an answer. All the letters ended unread in the big dustbin and were punctually taken away by the dustman.

The last letter she had read was from Albert, eleven years ago. It was short—*Rai is dead. He died yesterday, the victim of a piece of chicanery. Note down the name of the culprit—Gäseler. I'll write and give you more details.*

She had noted down the name Gäseler but did not open any more of Albert's letters and therefore never learned that he was in prison for six months. He had paid dearly for slapping a handsome mediocre face. She did not even open the official notification of Rai's death. It was brought by the priest and she refused to receive him. That dark, vibrant, pathetic voice, praying for the Fatherland, imploring victory, propagating patriotism. She refused to see him. He had stood with her mother outside her door and called: "Open the door, my dear Nella, open the door," And she heard him whisper: "Let us hope that the poor child does not do away with herself." No, she had never entertained the idea of suicide. Did he not know that she was pregnant?

She simply did not want to hear his voice. False pathos,

ingrained seminary rhetoric, artificially stressing certain words.... Wave after wave of false sentiment, shattering palpable lies, theatrical rolls of thunder and the thunder clap in the voice when the word Hell was uttered. Why all the din? So much noise ... and over the congregational hosts rolled the false pathos with which the teacher of rhetoric at the seminary had equipped two generations of priests.

"Open the door, my dear Nella."

"Why? I don't need you. I need God and God needs me. And when I want you I'll come. Go on rolling the 'r' in Fatherland and Führer; trill the 'l' in folk, listen to the ineffectual echo that your false pathos sets up in the baptistery: -ührer -olk and -atherland."

"Let us hope that the poor child does not do away with herself."

"No, I shan't do away with myself and I shan't open the door. A million widows, a million orphans, for -atherland, -olk and -ührer. Oh, incorruptible echo, you will not bring back Rai."

She heard the priest champing with despair in the hall, heard him whisper to her mother—and for a moment she felt some compassion until the wretched echo once more rang in her ears.

Had the wheel come full circle with Gäseler? Albert's letter ten years ago and Father Willibrord smiling pleasantly: "May I introduce Herr Gäseler?" The invitation to Brernich, the packed suitcase standing near the bookcase.

The street was empty. It was still early and the milk van had not yet passed. The bread sack still hung on the garden gate and in the next-door room Martin was laughing with Albert and Albert was hearing his catechism. IF THOU, O LORD, SHALT OBSERVE INIQUITIES, LORD, WHO SHALL ENDURE IT? And more laughter. A film in which she did not want to play: Happy family life. A laughing child, laughing prospective father, and laughing mother—moderation, happiness and the future. It was all so familiar, so suspiciously near and familiar. The laughing child, the laughing mother, with Albert added as the laughing father. No; she lit a cigarette and watched the clear blue smoke spiral upwards as she held it absentmindedly in her hand. Had not Albert's wife preferred balloons to furniture, the transitory to the stable, soap bubbles to a cupboard? 'Oh, cool linen in the

housewife's cupboard.' Laughing father, laughing son, but she would not become the laughing mother in exchange for a lie, which echoed pathetically from the baptistery.

The cigarette slowly burned away in her hand. The light-blue smoke formed nebulous patterns and from the room next door came the boy's voice repeating his catechism to Albert. OUT OF THE DEPTHS I HAVE CRIED TO THEE, O LORD; LORD, HEAR MY VOICE.

She had spent years thinking how things would have turned out. More children and the house and an ideal job for Rai—a job such as he had dreamed of from puberty to manhood, a dream preserved through the Nazi era and the war, to which he always referred in his letters: to publish a newspaper. The dream of all men of letters.

She knew at least twenty men who nursed the ambition of publishing a paper. For years Albert had been artistic adviser to the owner of a printing works who wanted to found a satirical magazine.

Despite all her private scepticism, her amiable mockery, the idea of sitting with Rai in a room which was at the same time an editor's office pleased her. Piles of books on the tables, typescript lying around, endless telephone conversations about the new numbers and everything done in the intoxicating knowledge that the Nazis had gone and the war was over. She had managed to see this film as long as the war was on. She had seen this life in its smallest details, had smelled the bitter odour of wet ink on coarse paper, seen the tea trolley being pushed into the room, visitors drinking coffee, being offered big light-blue packets of cigarettes while the children played noisily in the garden. A picture out of *House and Home*: children leaping round a fountain, lowered sun blinds, galleys corrected on the table, Rai's script written with a very soft, very black pencil. A picture that had come to life out of *House and Home:* home of an author, soft green light and a general impression of happiness. And someone on the telephone—Albert saying: 'Have you read the new Hemingway?' 'No, no, I'm afraid it's no use discussing it.' Laughter and Rai as happy as he could have been in 1933. Down to the smallest details she saw Rai, her clothes, the pictures on the wall, herself peeling oranges on tasteful plates, piling up nuts and in her dreams she invented drinks she would prepare

on hot summer days—wonderful sparkling, red, green and blue fruit juices with lumps of ice . . . and Rai and the children coming in hot out of the garden, squirting each other with soda water siphons and Albert on the telephone: 'He's a talented boy, that young Bosulke.'

A film that had already been made but which could never be shown, cut by a wretched little duffer.

LORD, WHO SHALL ENDURE IT? said the boy next door and Albert banged with his fist on the wall and shouted: "There's a call for you, Nella."

"Thank you, I'm coming," she replied, and slowly crossed the passage. Albert played a role in her dreams. He was the indispensable friend for whom she mixed particularly refreshing drinks. He remained long after everyone else had gone. She gave a start when she saw him now, sitting on the bed with half a slice of bread and jam in his hand. He had grown old. He looked tired, his hair was thinning and he did not fit so easily into this wonderfully rubbishy film.

She looked at Albert, said good morning, and could see from his face that Gäseler had not given his name. Martin, a book in his hand, stood beside Albert's bed and recited: HEARKEN UNTO MY PLEA, O LORD.

"Please keep quiet for a minute," she picked up the receiver and said "Hallo, hallo." Smooth and audible came the voice from the film in which she had no desire to play, and she was suddenly flung into reality, into the present, a thing she hated.

"Is that you, Nella?"

"Yes."

"Gäseler here."

"I hope you. . . ."

"No, I didn't give my name. I only telephoned to make sure that our arrangement stood."

"Naturally," she replied.

"A room has been reserved for you and Father Willibrord is delighted that you've agreed to come. It will be marvellous."

"Naturally I'm coming," she said irritably. The cause of her irritation, however, was because she had not brought a cigarette and it was ridiculous to have to phone without a cigarette.

Gäseler fell silent for a moment and then said shyly: "Very well, I'll wait for you as we arranged in front of the Trustees

Bank." and even more shyly, he added: "I'm looking forward to seeing you, Nella."

"Good-bye," she said abruptly, replacing the receiver.

She stared at the black telephone and it suddenly struck her that women on the films after a decisive telephone conversation always stared thoughtfully at the apparatus as she was now doing. In films, women did it when making appointments with their lovers in the presence of their husbands. Women who then looked sadly at their husband, their children and their house, knowing what they were leaving behind, but also knowing that they had to 'follow the call of love'.

She tore her eyes from the black apparatus, sighed, and turned to Albert. "I'd like a word with you when Martin's gone. . . . Shouldn't you run off now, dear?"

The gentleness in Mother's voice, that maternal voice! Martin looked at the alarm clock on Albert's night table and shouted: "For Heaven's sake, it's high time."

"Come," she said, "hurry up."

It was always the same. Until the last moment they forgot the time and then the satchel was quickly packed and sandwiches cut.

She helped Martin to put his books in the satchel, Albert jumped up and buttered a roll. She kissed the boy on the forehead and said: "Shall I write a letter to the teacher? It's nearly nine and you'll never get there in time."

"No," said Martin with resignation. "It's pointless. The teacher doesn't read the letters any more, and whenever I happen to be punctual, the whole class laughs."

"Well, we're going away this evening, so run along now. There's no school tomorrow."

Albert, looking guilty, stood near his bed. "I'm sorry, Martin," he said. "Yes, we're off this evening."

Nella called the boy back when he got to the door, kissed him again and said: "I have to go away for a few days, but Albert will look after you."

"When are you coming back?"

"Let the boy go now," grumbled Albert. "It's shocking that he always arrives late."

"It doesn't matter any more," said Martin. "I shall be late anyway."

"I don't know," said Nella. "It may be a few days, but I shall probably be back tomorrow evening."

"O.K.," said the boy, and she waited in vain for some sign of regret. She stuck an orange in his pocket and he walked slowly away.

Albert's door remained open. She hesitated, closed the door and went back to her bedroom. The cigarette on the marble sill had almost smoked away and heavy, light-blue spirals rose from it. She stubbed it out in the ash tray, and saw that the yellow burns on the sill had increased. The boy crossed the street very slowly, and disappeared round the corner of the parish church. The street had now come to life; the milkman was doing a thriving trade with the servants, and a thin man wearily wheeled his cart, offering lettuces in a sad, sing-song voice. Bright green lettuces like the lemonade bottles on the tennis court. The milkman and the hawker disappeared from view. Women with shopping bags appeared and a travelling salesman followed the invisible lines which the postman had taken years ago, when there had been letters for her. The old battered bag tied up with string and the hopelessness in the droop of the man's shoulders as he opened the garden gate. . . . She saw him as though in a film, and gave a start when he actually rang the bell. Was he not the dark shadow which had to be woven into this sunny film—the seductive, unreal dream of an editor's office, galleys and iced drinks? The bell rang softly and timidly and she waited to see if Albert would answer it. But Albert did not stir, so she went into the hall and opened the door. The travelling bag was open; it contained orderly little piles of cards with indiarubber bands, buttons sewn on cartons and the delicate laughing blonde on Albert's lavender water bottle—a new, fresh, friendly courtesan in an elaborate dress, waving at the mail coach as it passed. . . silk and Fragonard trees in the background, skilful atmosphere with misty effects . . . and, in the far far distance, the handkerchief of the lover waving from the post-chaise as it disappeared in the distance, without growing any smaller. Delicate gold leaf, the green of Fragonard trees and the frail little hand holding the pocket handkerchief—a pink little hand that knew the art of caresses. . . . The travelling salesman stared at her. He still did not dare to hope that she would buy anything. And yet he knew she would buy the most expensive

article in his pack, but still dared not hope, dared not believe that the big silver coin would really be pressed into his hand. His hope and faith were weaker than his instinct; he had a deathly weary, lined face.

She took the bottle and asked softly: "How much is it?"

"Three marks," he replied and turned pale because it had really happened, against all hope, against all belief. He sighed when she picked up something else, once more sweet beauty who this time was washing her hands in a porcelain bowl. . . . Little pink fingers that knew the art of caresses, but washing themselves here in the cleanest possible water . . . glimpse of a Fragonard garden through an open window, and the alabaster white bosom of the beauty on the soap packet. . . .

"How much is it?" she asked, and also took the piece of soap.

"One mark," replied the man, and his face was almost angry. Rage at the realization of so many hopes on which he would have to feed for a fortnight, a foretaste of happiness which he accepted with mixed feelings, fearing the worst: things could not be that good.

"Four marks then," she said, and he nodded with relief.

She gave him four silver marks and laid three cigarettes on the lid of his pack.

The man was too terrified to say 'thank you'. He stared at her and received one of her effortless smiles. It had an immediate effect. dark greed, a mild longing for so much beauty, beauty that he normally saw only on soap packets, film star beauty, a radiant smile in a half-lit hall. Nella drew back and gently closed the door.

"Are you coming, Albert?" she called. "I have to go now."

"Yes, I shan't be a minute," he called from his room.

She returned to her bedroom and left the door open. Albert was already dressed when he came in. He had his paper in his pocket, the car key in his hand, and his pipe in his mouth.

"What's the matter?" he asked, standing in the doorway.

"Come in a minute—or haven't you time."

"Not much," he replied, but he came in, left the door open and sat down on the edge of the chair. "Are you leaving?"

"Yes."

"For several days?"

"I don't know yet. I may be back tomorrow. It's a conference," she said.

"By whom and about what?"

"Poetry and society. Poetry and the church."

"Fine," he said.

"I must do something eventually. I should like to have a regular job."

'Oh, that's started again,' he thought, but he merely said: "Naturally you must have something to do but it would be crazy to work. Most people work simply because they have to keep their families, a house over their heads and all that. To have something to do is different from working, and you could have something to do all day."

"I know," she said with a sigh. "The child——" and mimicking Father Willibrord's voice. "The child and to preserve your husband's work."

"Naturally," said Albert. "Do it. Go through that carton downstairs, look out Willibrord's letters, Schurbigel's letters, and count the 'Heil Hitlers' in them. It'll be a nice job for you."

"Oh, hell," she said from the window, "must I really spend my life looking after thirty-seven poems? You'll cope with the boy far better than I should. And I don't want to marry again. I won't be the laughing mother on the cover of an illustrated magazine. I won't be the wife of any man—no one will ever come along who was like Rai—and Rai will never return. He was killed and I've been made a widow for -atherland, -olk and -ührer," and she imitated the echo as it came back from the baptistery, with all the lies, threats and seminarist pathos. "Do you really think I enjoy driving to conferences with cretins?"

"Then stay here, Nella," he said. "I've become a rich man . . . overnight, so to speak." He laughed pathetically, thinking of the contents of the Sunlight soap box. "We'll have a nice week-end with the boy and you can talk about films to Will. If you like . . ." She looked at him suddenly because his voice had changed. "If you like we'll drive somewhere a long way away."

"The two of us?"

"With the boy," he said, "if you can put up with it, with both of them. Let's take Martin's friend, if he wants to come."

"Why not the two of us alone?" she asked. "Why play at

happy families where happiness is a swindle? Laughing father, laughing son and laughing mother."

"It's no use," he said. "Be reasonable. For the boy it would be terrible. It would be the last shock, and even worse for his friend. I can't help it," he said gently, "but for those kids I'm rather like a last support. It would be a terrible blow for them and they would never recover from it, if I, too, suddenly left my present uncle category and changed over into the other."

"And what about yourself?"

"For myself? My God, are you crazy? Do you really want to force me into a position from which I could only extricate myself with difficulty? Come, I must go. Bresgote's waiting for me."

"With difficulty" she echoed, remaining at the window and continuing the conversation without turning round:

"Yes, with difficulty," he repeated, "if you really want to know, or would you prefer that in this house which stinks of memories we should play lover and beloved in secret and good uncle and good mama to the outside world. Anyhow it would be pointless, the children would spot it."

"The children?" she said wearily. "So much bother because of the children?"

"Oh, you can call it that if you like. You won't get round marriage, Nella."

"I shall, you know," she replied. "I shan't marry again; I'd rather play the merry widow than the smiling wife, the germ-cell of -atherland, -olk and . . ."

"Come along," he said, "or make up your mind to stay here. You'll be bored to death."

"No," she replied. "I really must go today. Even if I had no cause before, I have one today. This time I must go." She reflected for a moment what effect the name of Gäseler would have on Albert.

"All right, let's go," she said. He took her suitcase and as they went out she remarked to him, quite casually: "You can't do any more for me than you do already, and it's good that you bother about the boy and you must know that I don't feel the slightest pang of jealousy."

It had grown warmer. He took off his gloves and cap and took his place next to Nella in the car.

Before he drove off, she said: "I wish I had a job like yours. You must be very happy."

"Well, I'm not," he said, and the rest of the sentence was drowned by the drone of the engine. All she heard was: "No, I'm not really and you, too could have something to do."

"I know. I could help the nuns with their ironing, keep the books, knit socks and the Mother Superior would be able to say: 'We have an absolutely enchanting new helper, the wife of the poet so-and-so!' "

"Don't be so stupid," he said; by the way he flung in the gear, she realized that he was livid. "The drivel you talk won't spoil my little pleasure. You can grouse at the nuns as much as you like. They don't lead a bad life. They do a job which has always seemed to me one of the most intelligent even though I myself have never been able to practise it. . . . They pray and, so that they may have a little time to pray, it gives me pleasure to take some of the work off their hands."

"It's wonderful to hear how well other people have organized their lives." She began to weep, pulled herself together and said: "A wife now and your life would be complete."

"Why not?" When they had to stop at the lights in the Pippinstrasse, he took her hand and said: "You're taking refuge in snobbishness Nella."

She returned the pressure of his hand and said: "No, it's not that. I can't forgive them for having killed my husband. I can't get over it, forgive or forget it. And I don't want to give them the pleasure for the second time of presenting them with the picture of a happy, loving wife."

"Who?"

"Them," she said calmly. "You figure out for yourself who I mean. You can go now, the light's green."

He drove on. "You never finish anything you start," he grumbled. "You're not a mother or a widow or a whore, and no one's real beloved. I'm jealous," he said, "jealous of the wasted time and never of the imbeciles with whom you waste it . . . and after all a man can't do more for a woman than ask her to marry him."

"You're wrong," she said, "sometimes it can mean more to be a woman's lover. It's odd. In the old days women were pleased

when they married. Today it seems to be the reverse. In any case, it has no charm for me."

"Because you've become a snob. Listening for years on end to those pinheads . . . naturally it's had an effect. Where shall I drop you?"

"At the Post Office Savings Bank," she said.

He waited until the policeman waved him on, drove round the Karlsplatz and pulled up in front of the Post Office Savings Bank. He got out, opened the door for her and took her suitcase from the boot.

"This time," she said with a smile, "I'm really not wasting my time."

He shrugged his shoulders, "Okay, let's play the game your way. In the old days faithful women waited to be married by unfaithful men, now I'm waiting like a faithful man until the unfaithful woman agrees to marry."

"I know you're faithful," she said, "and I know that it's good."

He took her hand, got in the car and circled the square for the second time.

She waited until he had made the circuit and disappeared into the Merovingerstrasse. Then she called a taxi from the rank under the old City Gate and said to the driver: "The Trustee Bank Square."

CHAPTER TWELVE

USUALLY he did not hurry home when school was over. He joined with those boys who were known as loafers, but the name applied less to him than to the others. Some of them ran off very quickly. They were hungry or looking forward to something; they had to go shopping or warm up the food for their younger brothers and sisters. Brielach had to cook for his little sister. He was always tired in class and he ran off as soon as the bell rang because his Mother left the house twenty minutes before school was finished. Wilma was left alone with Leo and Brielach could not sit still while he knew this. In the last hour Brielach constantly whispered to him: "I can't sit still."

Brielach really had no peace. He had a great deal to do, and for him school was something tiresome and disagreeable, an additional trial. Air bubbles under the ice, charming trifles which it would have been nice to enjoy had they not meant a waste of time. Sometimes the lessons were boring and Brielach slept in the last hour, when his anxiety for Wilma did not keep him awake.

Martin was wide awake listening for the bell. The time seemed to waver, took a breather and with a jerk the big hand reached the figure twelve and the bell rang. Brielach woke up; they grabbed their satchels, slung them round their necks as they ran through the corridor and the courtyard on to the street. A race to the corner where they parted company. . . . They ran far apart in the road so as not to be hampered on the pavement by the girls streaming into school.

Brielach was first at the corner but he waited although he was impatient to get home and when they parted, Martin called: "You're coming with us to Bietenhahn. We'll pick you up."

"I must ask Mother first."

"Bye-bye."

He could cover the distance, which usually took a quarter of an hour, in five minutes. He ran very fast, breathing clumsily in his impatience, and could already see from a long way off that Albert's car was not at the door. Recovering his breath by leaning against a garden wall, he looked back down the avenue along which Albert must drive on his return from Bresgote. He had no desire to go home. Bolda was out, Glum was out and Friday was a dangerous day—a Grandmother day. The 'I've passed blood' period had not yet come to an end and today four dozen different kinds of fish would be ordered from Vohwinkel's Restaurant, and he did not like fish. As soon as Albert came round the corner he would see him waiting here, and he was furious with Albert because his car was not standing outside the door.

He stood up and strolled back to the petrol station at the end of the avenue.

Now the first girl loafers, whom he usually met at the corner, came down the avenue. They crossed the road, glanced up at the large golden hand of the church clock and began to trot. A few hurrying girls were still coming down the avenue. In the distance he saw a whole group dawdling. He knew them all, for these laggards were the same ones he met by the petrol station, where he now sat, when school began at midday. Today the rhythm was disturbed and he was annoyed with himself for having run. Usually he was the very last and would be sitting here on the garage wall when the dejected loafers arrived—the ones who did not even bother to run because it was pointless. These were the girls—now leaping over the shadows of the trees as though over thresholds—whom he usually met at the petrol station and today he had almost been home and back, and they still hadn't arrived. Hair flying in the wind and flushed faces, the girls who had not yet got used to arriving late ran past. The big hand on the church clock stood just before three and it was pointless them running because they would arrive late in any case.

Uncle Albert's car did not appear and this period of waiting seemed like a penance, for which Albert was to blame. Now the group of dawdlers crossed the street, the church clock struck a quarter past one and the rhythm had been restored. All his hurry had been in vain, for everything had reverted to everyday routine. The loafers laughed and chattered and he admired them,

for they were the MULES among whom he would so willingly have been classed. There were OBSTINATE MULES to whom nothing mattered. Obstinacy was a concept that remained a problem, for there were mules whose parents had money and others whose parents had no money. Brielach could be a mule but his obstinacy had an element of pride in it. On his face could be clearly read: 'Well, what do you want?' Mules were all those of whom the principal said 'They must be BROKEN', and this sounded terrible, as though faggots were being broken, bones cracked, and for a long time he had thought that the BROKEN mules were served up to the gluttons in Vohwinkel's Wine Restaurant. In his second school year Hewel was BROKEN and disappeared. Hewel had been fetched from school by the police and had disappeared during the break. Later he had led Born astray. Hewel and Born lived together in the air raid shelter and they had done something IMMODEST and they laughed when they were thrashed and the principal had said: 'They must be BROKEN.' The two boys disappeared and he imagined that they had been BROKEN and served in Vohwinkel's Restaurant to the children-eaters and bone-breakers and paid for with a great deal of MONEY.

Albert had explained later but he was still somewhat vague and the air raid shelter itself was mysterious—a windowless lump of concrete among the allotment gardens, in which Hewel and Born had lived. They had been BROKEN and disappeared mysteriously into 'the Institution', as Albert called it.

Albert did not come, he would never come, he thought as, with half-closed eyes, he watched the cars approaching from the city and Albert's car was not among them. No sign of the old, broad, mouse-grey Mercedes, which was unmistakable.

He had little choice: he did not feel like going over to Brielach's. Uncle Leo would be there since his shift only began at three o'clock. Bolda was scrubbing the church and he could have gone to see her and eaten one of her hunks of bread and drunk some hot *bouillon* from her Thermos flask in the sacristy.

He stared at one of the hopeless loafers who had only just turned into the avenue. She was not hurrying in the least. He knew that state of complete indifference as to whether one were twenty or twenty-five minutes late. The girl was taking a great interest in the first leaves that had fallen from the trees, making a bouquet of not quite green but only slightly yellow tinged

leaves. Now she crossed the street calmly with the bunch of leaves in her hand.

This laggard was a new one. She had dark, tousled hair, and he admired the peaceful way she stood outside the ATRIUM looking at the cinema stills. He edged along the wall towards the ATRIUM which lay near the petrol station. He had already examined the poster with Brielach and they had decided to go to the pictures on Monday. The poster showed two green poplars and the bronze park gates of a castle. One of the gates was open and in this opening stood a woman in a mauve dress with a broad gold border at the neck like a collar. The woman's wide-open eyes followed anyone who looked at the poster and on her lilac belly was posted the white U Certificate slip. On the light blue sky above the castle in the background was the title: *The Captive Heart.* He did not care for films when only women appeared on the poster. Women in high-necked dresses on posters with a Certificate U slip were usually a bore, while women with low-necked dresses on the posters with a red X certificate slip signified IMMORAL. But he hankered neither after the immoral nor the tedious. The best films were still the westerns and the cartoons.

An immoral film was announced for the following week. The poster stood next to the current U certificate picture: a woman displaying her breasts being embraced by a man in the scantiest of bathing trunks. The man's trunks were indecent and reminded him of the word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker.

He had heard the word when he went with Brielach and Wilma to fetch their mother.

It smelled sweet and warm in the bakehouse. Piles of warm newly baked bread lay on the wooden shelves and he loved the murmur of the kneading machine and the big cream piping bag with which the baker wrote 'Many Happy Returns' on the cakes. The baker wrote very skilfully with these squirts, quicker than most people could with a fountain pen, and Brielach's mother was skilful with the icing bag, painting trees and houses with smoke coming out of the chimneys and doing delicious drawings with the chocolate pencil. Whenever he went there with Brielach, they crept through the gate past the flour trucks. They stood outside the iron door, which was usually ajar, and closed their eyes, enjoying the warm, sweet odour. Then they opened it

quietly, rushed in and shouted: "Bah!" This game amused Wilma, who shrieked with joy, and also amused the baker and Brielach's mother.

They had stood there a week ago waiting to kick the door open when they suddenly heard Brielach's mother break the silence: "I don't let myself be. . . ." The word. He blushed when he thought of it now and was too scared to think of the actual word. And the baker said, sadly and gently: "You shouldn't say that. No. No. . . ."

Wilma had nudged them in the back, encouraging them to begin the 'Bah' game, but they had both received a shock. The baker stammered incomprehensible words which sounded disturbing, wild yet humble, interrupted by shrill laughter from Brielach's mother. He remembered what Uncle Albert had said about men's longing to unite with women and the baker seemed crazy to unite with Brielach's mother. The man seemed almost to be chanting an incomprehensible litany, and he had pushed open the iron door gently to see what he could now only hear—to see if they really united. But Brielach angrily pulled him back, picked Wilma up and they returned home without showing themselves.

Brielach did not return to the bakery for a whole week. He tried to understand his friend's grief, and to imagine what he would have felt like had his mother used that foul word. He tried the experiment of imagining it in the mouths of all the people he knew. But Uncle Albert simply would not say it while—his heart beat faster and he almost understood Brielach's grief—it did not ring altogether impossible on his mother's lips. It did not ring true on the lips of Will, Bolda, Albert's mother or grandmother. Only on his mother's lips was it a possibility.

The word was tried out in theory on the teacher, the chaplain, the young man in the ice-cream parlour, but there was one mouth in which it seemed as natural as the cork in an ink bottle—Uncle Leo's. Leo enunciated it far more clearly than Brielach's mother.

The little laggard had disappeared and it was nearly a quarter to two. He tried to visualize her entering the classroom. She would smile and lie and she would continue to smile when she was scolded. She was an unregenerate MULE. She would be BROKEN and although he had long since known from Albert that

children were not slaughtered, he imagined her bones being broken and served up in Vohwinkel's kitchen. He imagined it because he began to hate Albert and wanted to punish him. Because he did not know where to go since Uncle Leo was still at Brielach's and he did not want to see the mouth to which the word was so suited, and the empty church, where Bolda was now scrubbing, terrified him as much as the prospect of being carried off by Grandmother to Vohwinkel's where the 'broken' would be consumed and where, in any case, he would have to be sick in that appalling lavatory between the urinating guzzlers and bone-breakers.

He edged nearer to the ATRIUM and felt hungry. Only one choice remained: to go home, creep in unnoticed and warm himself up some food. He knew the process by heart: tear a strip of newspaper, make a spill, turn on the tap—not too far—stand by it—underlined three times. But no one seemed to know that the sight of the cold food spoiled his appetite . . . congealed fat in the gravy, the shrivelled potatoes, lumpy soup and the danger that Grandmother might come in. Four dozen fish dishes from Vohwinkel's wine restaurant, reddish, bluish, greenish, glittering fish and grinning eyes of fat in which jellied eels were encrusted and transparent greenish, reddish, bluish sauces, wrinkled skin of cooked shell fish which looked like bunches of rubber erasers.

But Albert did not come, he would never come and in his revenge he concentrated so long on the hateful word that it eventually suited Albert's mouth.

It was too sad to think of Father: the smiling young man with the pipe in his mouth who had been killed so far away was incapable of uttering such a word.

The chaplain was horrified when he used it at confession. Hesitant and blushing, to relieve his mind, he uttered the word which neither Brielach nor he had ever used. The pale face of the young priest twitched and he bent forward like a BROKEN one. Deathly sad, he shook his head, not like someone who says 'No' or who is taken by surprise but like someone who wobbles before he falls.

The reflection from the violet curtain tinged the pale face of the melancholy chaplain, giving a spectral look . . . pallor from days of fasting, and he sighed, asked questions and spoke of

MILLSTONES, MILLSTONES round the necks of those who corrupted children. And instead of imposing a penance he begged him to say three Paternosters and three Aves every day to wash away the stain of the word. Sitting on the wall Martin said three Paternosters and three Ave Marias. He paid no further attention to the cars and as far as he was concerned the Mercedes could pass by. He prayed slowly with half closed eyes and thought of the millstones. A millstone hung round Leo's neck and Leo sank, sank to the bottom of the sea, through blue and green darkness—past ever stranger fish, hulks, seaweed, mud, sea monsters—and Leo sank, dragged down by the weight of the millstone. Not Brielach's mother but Leo had a millstone round his neck—Leo who tormented Wilma and threatened her with his ticket collector's punch and hit her on the head with his long nail file, Leo to whose mouth the word was so suited.

He said the last Paternoster and the last Ave Maria, stood up and went into the ATRIUM. He gave a start. The little girl loafer stood there arguing with the attendant who said: "The programme will begin any minute now. Have you been to school?"

And from the lips of the little loafer came the clear, bright, wonderful lie: "Yes."

"Don't you have to go home?"

"No, Mother's out at work."

"And your father?"

"Father's dead."

"Show your card."

She produced a green piece of paper and pointed to the U certificate slip on the lilac belly of the woman on the poster. The girl disappeared inside and Martin went shyly over to the box office. A dark-haired woman sat in a glass cage reading. She looked up and smiled at him but he did not return the smile. He did not like her smile, there was something about her that reminded him of the word that Brielach's mother had used to the baker. She looked down again at her book and he could see the gleaming white parting in her raven blue hair and then she looked up again and pulled up the glass window. "What do you want?" she asked.

"Does it start soon?"

"At two o'clock," she said, looking up at the clock on the wall. "In five minutes. Do you want to go in?"

"Yes," he replied and at the same moment he remembered that he had invited Brielach to see this film on Monday. The woman smiled, picked up the green, yellow and blue rolls of tickets and asked: "What price?" He pulled the zipper on top of his trousers, fished for some money and said: "One mark ten." He suddenly thought it would be a good thing to keep Albert waiting, that it would be a good thing to sit alone in the dark and that he could go with Brielach on Monday to see another film.

The woman tore a ticket off the yellow roll and took his money.

The attendant looked sternly at him.

"What about you?" he asked. "Have you been to school?"

"Yes," said Martin, and, to avoid the second and third question, added: "My Mother's gone away and Father was killed in the war."

The attendant said nothing, tore the yellow ticket in two, gave him one half and let him in. When he passed through the thick green curtains he thought how stupid the attendant was. Didn't he know that boys and girls kept different school hours and that he and the little truant could not go to school at the same time.

It was very dark inside the hall. The usherette took him by the hand and led him down the centre aisle. The girl's hand was cool and soft and as soon as his eyes grew accustomed to the dark he noticed that the cinema was almost empty—a few people at the back and front and the middle empty. He sat there alone. The truant girl was in the front row seats between two young men and her black tousled hair was outlined above the back of the seat.

His attention was held by an advertisement for shoe polish: dwarfs skating over the brightly polished shoe of a giant. They carried hockey sticks in their hands with brushes in place of the wooden end, and the giant's shoes grew brighter and brighter and the commentator said: "Gulliver had shining shoes like this—he used BLANK."

A second advertising film followed: women playing tennis, women riding on horseback, flying aeroplanes, strolling in big gardens, swimming in calm lakes, women driving cars, on bicycles and motor bicycles; women on the parallel bars, the

horse and throwing the discus. Women smiling, all smiling at something that a smiling woman was holding—a large dark-green box with a white cross on it: OPHELIA.

He was bored even when the main feature began. Wine was drunk; Mass was said, the castle park gate was opened and a man in a green coat, green hat and green hose rode along a forest path. At the end of this clearing stood the woman in the lilac dress, the U certificate woman with the gold border like a collar. The man jumped down and kissed the woman who said: 'I will pray for you. Take care of yourself.' Another kiss and the U certificate woman wept as she watched the man ride away nonchalantly—hunting horn in the distance and the man with the green hat, green coat and green hose rode along a second forest path and out towards the blue sky.

Martin was incredibly bored; he yawned in the dark, hunger gnawed his belly and he closed his eyes and said a Paternoster and an Ave Maria; he fell asleep and saw Leo with the millstone round his neck sinking to the bottom of the ocean—a bottomless abyss—and Leo's face was other than it was in real life. It was sad and he sank deeper and deeper through the green darkness to the amazement of the sea monsters.

A scream woke him up. He was frightened and almost screamed himself, then pulled himself together in the dark.

Slowly the screen grew clearer before his eyes. The green man was wrestling on the ground with a shabbily dressed man. The one in rags was the victor and the green man lay there while the other sprang on to the horse, whipped it—O noble blood—and with a sinister laugh rode away on the prancing horse.

The Certificate U woman in a forest chapel knelt at the feet of the Virgin and the sound of hooves could be heard in the forest. She ran out of the chapel. Could she not hear the neighing and hoofbeats of a horse? HIS horse. Her eyes brightened. He had come back in answer to the call of love. No—a scream. The woman sank unconscious on the threshold of the forest chapel and with a mocking laugh the shabbily-dressed man rode past the chapel without taking off his hat. But who was that crawling helplessly like a snake along the forest path, his face racked with incredible pain, unable to utter a sound? It was the well-dressed man in green. He reached a mossy bank and, breathing stertorously, looked up at the sky.

And who was that running into the clearing in a fluttering lilac dress? Tears pouring from her eyes, but running, running, searching, searching, calling, calling—the U certificate woman.

The well-dressed man in green heard her. Once more the forest chapel. . . . Hand in hand they made their way up the steps, the well-dressed man in green and the woman who, for some strange reason, was now dressed in green, too. His right arm was in a sling and he wore a bandage round his head, but now he could smile—a painful smile but he managed it. Hat off, chapel doors wide open, the horse neighing in the background and a twittering of birds. . . .

He felt sick as he blundered to the exit. Without being aware of it, he was hungry. It was sunny outside and he sat down again on the petrol station wall and thought: 'It's four o'clock and Uncle Leo must have left long ago.' But he was still in a rage with Uncle Albert. He flung his satchel over his shoulder and walked slowly towards Brielach's house.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

BRESGOTE had asked him to wait, and Albert paced up and down the empty room, returning now and then to the window to watch the sales girls going from the stores to the canteen. They had brought their sandwiches and one girl had an apple; those who returned from the canteen stopped their friends as they crossed the street, and he heard them say what he had long since smelled: that there were leeks, sausage and potatoes, and a pudding which was inedible—a poisonous looking red jelly covered with burnt vanilla custard. The returning girls warned those who were entering against it: "For God's sake don't take any of that red muck. It's filthy. The sausage is all right and so are the vegetables, but the sweet..." and there followed a number of variations from 'bah!' to 'ugh!'

All the girls were dressed in black shiny overalls which made them look almost like nuns. None of them was made up. Their clothes expressed precisely what they were intended to express—exaggerated dowdiness. Their hair styles were simple and unadorned—in fact womanly. Black woollen stockings, very stout leather shoes and the high-necked overalls prevented any impression of frivolity being given. The department heads—elder women—wore overalls the colour of cheap milk chocolate, and the braid on their sleeves was broader and shinier. Some of the girls, pale apprentices with the faces of truant school-children, wore no silver stripes on their arms and the head women carried no cutlery, whereas some of the apprentices had a ki

Some of the girls, however, looked pretty and
observed them closely, realized that they had t
ordinarily good looking to still be pretty in such a g

He heard their clear voices discussing the disastr
and since, in his hurry, he had forgotten his tobacco pouch, he lit the last cigarette out of his packet. He dropped the empty

red packet in the gutter which ran along the penthouse above the pompous entrance.

Thirty or forty times he heard the twittering warning against the red jelly and the burned custard, and then no more girls came out of the stores and only a few returned, and at the gate stood a sour-looking woman in a dull green overall with three silver stripes on her arm, watching the big clock with a frown. The big hand stood like a threatening finger at one minute to twelve, suddenly reaching the hour with a jerk, and at this moment a few girls ran across the street and ducked past the woman through the revolving door.

The street was empty and Albert yawned as he paced up and down the room. He had brought nothing to read because his business with Bresgote was usually finished in a quarter of an hour. He handed in his drawings, received a cheque minus the printing costs, remained chatting a few minutes with Bresgote and, when he went out into the long corridor, began the nightmare which would last for another week—the fear that he would get no ideas for next week or that the readers of *Weekend at Home* would one day insist upon a new cartoonist. Beasts of prey, glutted on human flesh, would for a change want to become vegetarians for a while.

The nightmare had passed since he had discovered the Sunlight carton. Drawings which, half starved, his stomach fortified by weak whisky and almost intoxicated with strong tobacco, he had drawn in London pubs sixteen years ago, more in the nature of a joke to pass the time. These drawings now brought him 200 marks apiece, not counting the printing costs, and Bresgote was most enthusiastic.

"But, man, you've developed a new style—quite different. The readers will fall for it. Congratulations. . . . It's splendid."

He had received a cheque less the deductions, shaken Bresgote by the hand, but when he got to the door his employer called out to him: "Wait for me outside please. I've got something very important to discuss."

He was still a little afraid of Bresgote, although they were now on familiar terms. On a drinking bout one summer night they had decided that they had a great deal in common, but his fear still remained even now that Bresgote was enthusiastic about his new style. It was the aftermath of a fear that had to die

before a new one would be born—the fear that Nella was being trapped.

He sensed the authority he represented for the children, and it disturbed him that he might possibly disappoint them, but at the same time he understood Nella better than he actually admitted to her.

Since he had opened the Sunlight soap carton he often thought of those days in London, and once more he had begun to live on the third plane—that life which could have been but never had been lived: on the farm of Leen's parents in Ireland and in the printing works of a little neighbouring town drawing birthday cards, obituary notices and designing titles for pamphlets. . . . Letters constantly arrived from Nella, begging him to come home, and he had disregarded Leen's cry: 'Go to Ireland' and had returned to Germany to design labels for jam pots and to see Rai killed, powerless against the colossal stupidity of the army. He did not like thinking of Rai's death. His hatred for Gäseler had dried up and died over the years and now he seldom thought of him. It was pointless to picture what would have happened had Rai survived the war. His imagination baulked at this, for he had seen the finality of Rai's death—drowned in his own blood, with smashed sinews—and the trembling hand that slowly made the sign of the cross. He had been angry enough to slap Gäseler's face, but even in prison his hatred for this little subaltern had not increased, only his fear because Nella did not write and he did not know whether the child had been born.

He stared at the map on the wall; the distribution of *Weekend at Home* was marked with little red flags. There were so many of them that practically nothing of the map remained visible. The names of towns, rivers, counties and mountains where *Weekend at Home* was sold were completely obliterated by the little red flags.

No sound came from Bresgote's room and the silence of this big house, usually so noisy, oppressed him. The clock on the stores now showed ten minutes past one and in five minutes Martin would be coming out of school.

The black-overalled girls opposite were busy under the eyes of the milk chocolate-coloured woman, posting bills on the pillars between the shop windows. The posters were bright red with white letters: SALE.

He was annoyed that Bresgote did not appear for he was anxious about the boy. Martin was so absent-minded. He might put his food on the gas, then go to his room with a book and fall asleep from the heat of the room, while in the kitchen the vegetables turned to black lumps, the soup steamed away and the noodles became a black sodden mass. On the table lay old numbers of *Weekend at Home* with his cartoons on the back page. He opened the door on to the corridor and listened. No footsteps to be heard, no door was opened, no sound of a telephone, and no sign of those desperately youthful, desperately gay, desperately journalistic journalist faces which reminded him of bad journalist films whose scripts were taken from the broadcasts of journalists.

Today the house was empty and on the gate he had read the big white notice: CLOSED TODAY FOR OFFICE OUTING. It was some time before the porter had let him in. The particular snobbishness of the proprietor of *Weekend at Home* manifested itself in leaving corridors, rooms and everything in apparent neglect, an ostentatious shabbiness which contradicted the profits of the business. The bare concrete walls of the corridors were adorned with posters and at regular intervals there were notices in the childish writing one finds on a school blackboard: 'If you spit on the floor you are a pig,' and on others: 'If you throw rubbish on the floor you are also a pig.'

He gave a start when a door opened in the dark corridor, but it was only a girl out of the switchboard room. She went to the tap, washed her hands and called through the open door of the office what he had already heard a score of times; "Don't take any of that jelly. It's quite filthy. The custard is burned."

One of her friends called from the room: "The others will eat better today. The chief will have to make it up to us."

"He will," said the girl at the wash tap. "The ten of us who have stayed behind are going on a trip later. It will be much better than the mass migration today."

"Did you see the red charabancs?"

"Of course. I arrived just as they drove off."

Albert waited for the other voice which he recognized from his many telephone conversations with Bresgote. He had phoned sometimes merely to hear the voice—friendly, lazy, complacent and a few extraordinary contradictory tones which reminded him of Leen's voice.

The girl at the tap put her knife and fork into her overall pocket, took the red comb out of her hair, put it in her mouth and began to tidy her hair.

Albert went up to her.

"Listen," he said, "I have an urgent call to make. Can I phone from here?"

She shook her head and straightened a lock of brittle hair. She took the comb from her mouth, stuck it back in her head and said: "You can't phone from the office. You must go to the public box."

"But I can't leave. I'm waiting for Bresgote."

"He won't be long. He's just told me that he's leaving," cried the girl in the office, and he could picture her from her voice—tall and plump with a slow rhythmic gait, and he was curious to see this girl with the soft, friendly, complacent voice. She would have a white face and very large, frank eyes.

The other girl was still at the mirror powdering her reddish nose.

"But the sausage is good, you said?" came the voice from inside.

"First class," replied the one at the mirror. "And so are the vegetables. Go and get some. They're really good. Even the coffee's been better since we went on strike. Have some honey instead of the pudding."

"We ought to complain about the pudding. It shouldn't be allowed."

Albert did not know whether to go or stay. It was now a quarter past.

"That's what the girls opposite said." She stood back from the mirror, kicked the door open with her foot and he caught sight of the other telephonist. He gave a start because she looked almost exactly as he had pictured her: soft and fair-haired with large dark eyes, passionately indolent and simply dressed—a green pullover and a brown skirt showing beneath the overalls. "*Weekend at Home.* No, we're closed today. There's no one here. It's our yearly outing. Perhaps you'd be good enough to ring up again tomorrow." The door was shut and he heard the two girls talking about the food until it opened again and the fair-haired girl came out with her cutlery and disappeared down the dark corridor.

Strange that he had to think of Leen when he heard the voice of this girl who was so unlike her. Leen had always said to him on the phone everything she was too shy to say when he was with her. She had trotted out all her religious teaching—treatises about marriage, the sin of premarital relations, whispered into a dirty London telephone receiver. Leen would rather have killed herself than become his mistress.

The tall, well-made girl who had disappeared with her elegant natural gait down the stairs excited him. Perhaps it would be good to marry such a friendly, passionately indolent goddess, one who looked the exact opposite of Leen but had Leen's voice.

He stared thoughtfully at the brown polished door of the switchboard room and gave a start when Bresgote rushed out into the corridor.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," he cried. "I must speak to you urgently. Very urgently."

Bresgote took Albert by the shoulder, pushed him down the steps, then ran back to open the office door and called out to the girls: "You can reach me after five o'clock at home."

Bresgote returned and they made their way down the stairs together.

"I hope you're not in a hurry," he said.

"No," said Albert, "I've got plenty of time, but I must go home to look after the boy."

"Can we talk there undisturbed?"

"Yes."

"Well, let's go to your place. Who's the boy you have to see? Is he your son?"

"No," replied Albert. "He's the son of a friend who was killed."

He reached the car which was standing near the loading ramp, got in, and opened the door for Bresgote.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I'm in a great hurry. We shall have plenty of time at home."

Bresgote took out cigarettes and they lit them before Albert drove off.

"Oh, it shouldn't take long," said Bresgote.

Albert did not reply, sounded his horn on leaving the printing works and drove past the stores. All the pillars between

the shop windows were now adorned with red and white posters each bearing one single word and forming the entire slogan: WE HOLD AN AUTUMN SALE TOO.

"To make it brief," said Bresgote, "it's about the woman you're living with."

Albert sighed. "I don't live with a woman," he said. "If you mean Nella, I live in her house, but. . . ."

"But you don't sleep with her."

"No."

They fell silent as Albert crossed the busy square. Bresgote was a considerate passenger and he did not continue until they turned into a quieter street.

"But she's not your sister?"

"No,"

"But wouldn't you like—wouldn't you like to live with her?"

"No," said Albert.

"How long have you known her?"

Albert was silent for a moment because for the first time he had to reckon how long he had known Nella. He seemed to have known her for ever. He turned again into a busy street, crossed a second and at last came to a quieter one.

"Wait a minute," he said. "I've known her so long that I have to think." He put his foot down on the accelerator, puffed greedily at his cigarette and went on: "I met her first in the summer of '33 in an ice-cream parlour. So, you see, I've known her exactly twenty years. At the time she was an embryo Nazi. She was young and wearing her Deutsches Mädchen jacket, but when Rai spoke to her she left it lying in the ice-cream parlour and we soon drove that nonsense out of her head. It wasn't difficult because she's not stupid. We shall soon be there," he said. "I must buy something quickly for the boy. The food's ready at home and we only need to warm it up. Later we can make some coffee. I have until six o'clock, for then I'm going away for the week-end."

"Fine," said Bresgote and Albert felt that he wanted to hear more of Nella.

"Incidentally Nella's not at home," he said.

"I know," replied Bresgote. Albert looked at him in surprise and said nothing.

"She was twenty-five when she lost her husband and the

child was on the way. I've been living with her now for eight years, and you can believe me I know her pretty well."

"I couldn't care less what she's like," said Bresgote, "and I don't mind what you tell me about her, but I want to hear everything."

Albert stopped the car, and when he caught sight of Bresgote's face in the mirror he recoiled at the expression of desperate passion he could read in it.

Bresgote got out of the car.

"How old's the child?"

"He'll soon be eleven," said Albert.

They had pulled up outside a shop window. It was a stationers and a few toys were displayed among the books, papers and scales.

"What can one buy an eleven-year-old boy?" asked Bresgote. "I don't know anything about children. Don't care much for them."

"I thought like that until I was thirty," said Albert. "I didn't like children either and didn't know how to talk to them."

He preceded Bresgote into the shop. "But since I've lived with Martin I've felt differently."

He fell silent, fearing to betray the affection he felt for Martin. He pushed a pile of newspapers aside and examined a box of plasticine. He was very fond of Martin and now he was terrified that Bresgote would marry Nella and that he would lose the boy.

Bresgote was rummaging about in a pile of clockwork cars and although the saleswoman had come in from the back shop he said: "I've never been jealous in my life, but now I know what it means."

"There's no one of whom you need be jealous."

Bresgote picked up a table tennis bat and felt the thickness of the cork.

"Would a table tennis set be any good to the boy?"

"Not a bad idea," said Albert. He was idly turning over books and magazines, let the shop girl show him some mechanical toys and put aside a *Hopalong Cassidy* volume. Bresgote seemed to know something about table tennis, for he had all the boxes brought out, tested the nets, bats and balls, ordered the woman to pack up the most expensive one and laid a note down on the table. Albert was shown some inflatable rubber animals. He was impatient and irritated because Bresgote forced him to think

about his relationship with Nella. The strong smelling rubber of a bright green crocodile made him feel sick and the shop girl, who still appeared to be chewing a tough piece of her midday roast, tried to blow up the crocodile for him. Her face flushed and little drops of sweat appeared on her red cheeks beneath the glasses. Little bubbles of saliva formed round the valve but the crocodile refused to expand.

"Thank you," he said. "I'll think it over." The woman took the valve out of her mouth and was so clumsy with the deflating animal that her warm breath, mixed with an unpleasant smell of rubber, caught him full in the face.

"Thank you," he said irritably. "I'll take that." He pointed to a sheet of cardboard to which were attached hammer, tweezers and gimlet; as the tool set was being packed up and he took money from his pocket he realized that Martin would have no use for it because he was as unpractical as his father had been and took no pleasure in pottering about with tools.

They left the shop and Albert drove fast in silence along two more streets, across the broad avenue, and slowed down as he reached the street with the chestnut trees.

"Here we are," he said, pulling up.

Bresgote got out with the carton under his arm.

"It's nice out here," he said.

"Yes, it's fine," said Albert.

He opened the garden gate, went on ahead and saw at once that Martin was not yet back from school, for the notice which he had pinned on the door that morning was still there. He had written on it in red pencil: *Don't eat until I come. I shall be punctual today.* Today was underlined twice.

He removed the notice, opened the front door and they made their way along the green, silk-upholstered corridor. The material was not worn but had faded and the small marble pillars which separated the four silk panels showed yellow stains. The radiator was dusty. Albert straightened Martin's scooter which was leaning against the radiator and Bresgote unfurled its pennant: green, white, red.

"Come in, please," said Albert.

It was dark and quiet in the hall. A big mirror between two doors reflected the portrait of a man hanging on the opposite wall. Bresgote looked at the picture—a tempera sketch, rough

and unfinished but full of charm. It showed a young man, in a bright red cardigan, with lowered eyes, reading something he had written on a piece of blue cardboard, for he held a pencil in his hand. He had a pipe in his mouth and Bresgote could clearly decipher the ochre yellow writing on the piece of blue cardboard: BAMBERGER'S EGG NOODLES.

Albert came back from the kitchen leaving the door open. Bresgote noticed that it was enormous and white-tiled. Black tiles were let into the white bearing emblems of the culinary art: spoons, pots and pans, huge spits, kitchen utensils and, between two of these emblems, the motto: THE WAY TO THE HEART IS THROUGH THE STOMACH.

"Is that her husband?" asked Bresgote. "The poet?"

"Yes," said Albert, "but you can see the picture better from here." He turned Bresgote round by the shoulder, gave him a slight push and now they were standing opposite the mirror which was the same size as the portrait. Bresgote looked thoughtfully at the picture and the piece of blue cardboard on which the inscription was now reversed. They both stood before the portrait of this young man in the mirror, with the light hair and tired face, and they looked at each other and smiled.

"Come," said Albert, "we'll eat as soon as the boy arrives. Let's have a drink meanwhile."

His room was spacious. The bed stood in front of the window, his large drawing table on the opposite wall, and there was plenty of room between the drawing table and the bed. The rest of the furniture consisted of a couch, a cupboard, a chair and a little table with a telephone. Albert opened the cupboard, took out glasses and a bottle of brandy and placed them on the table.

Bresgote had already sat down and was smoking. The house, the garden and the whole neighbourhood radiated peace, concentrated silence which he had not enjoyed for a long time. He felt well and was looking forward to discussing Nella with Albert. While Albert poured out the drinks he went over and opened the window and from the distance came the voices of laughing children, and from their shrieks it was obvious that they were playing with water. He sat down again opposite Albert and took a sip from the glass.

"I feel splendid," said Bresgote. "I shall stay here until you chuck me out."

"Okay," grinned Albert.

"I must phone up the office though, about four o'clock."

"You can do that from here."

He caught sight of Bresgote's face and gave a start as he suddenly saw that sullen forlornness which reminded him of Scherbruder, who had shot himself twenty years ago for love of Nella. Nella, who arranged Deutsches Mädchen cultural evenings, had become friendly with Scherbruder who was her opposite number in Hitler Youth. He was twenty-one, had just passed his teacher's exams, and had obtained his first position as a junior in a rural suburb. In a little wood surrounding a disused fort he had promptly found a gigantic oak tree round which he made a clearing. He called it 'Thing Square' and there he played and sang choruses with his boys. Scherbruder was dark-haired and small, he looked almost like a gypsy and one could see by his face that he would cut off his right hand for fair hair. Nella had beautiful fair hair. She looked exactly like the pictures in the Nazi racial books, only not so boring. Scherbruder had denounced Rai and Albert to the S.A. who, in the fort near his Thing Square, ran a small, almost private, concentration camp. For three days they were locked up there, interrogated and beaten. He still dreamed of it sometimes: the dark vaults of the casemate, which echoed the screams of the tortured, the soup and blood stains on the concrete floor and, in the evening, the songs of the drunken S.A. men watching them peel potatoes and, when it was silent for a moment, he could hear Scherbruder's Youth Group singing: 'The Blue Dragoons are Riding.'

They had been kept only three days in the fort, for Nella's father, who supplied the big Hitler Youth camp with jam, obtained their release. They had realized that it was on account of Nella but she never mentioned what had taken place between her and Scherbruder.

Even later, when they were freed, Scherbruder did not give Nella up and she met him a few times in Hähnels ice-cream parlour. His face had a look of sullen passion. He had never forgotten that look. It was the same look he could now see on Bresgote's face.

"Have another drink," he said, and Bresgote poured himself out one.

Scherbruder shot himself after the Midsummer Night feast

on the 22nd July, on his Thing Square. Two of his boys discovered the body. They had gone early to the place to rekindle the bonfire and burn the rest of the wood. Blood had flowed from Scherbruder's head-wound down the dark blue uniform jacket and had tinged the cloth violet.

Bresgote filled his glass for the third time. "It's ridiculous," he said hoarsely, "to be so terribly in love at my age, but I am, and I can't do anything about it."

Albert nodded. His thoughts were elsewhere, with Absalom Billig who, a few months after Scherbruder's suicide, had been martyred in the sinister fort. It suddenly struck him how much he had forgotten and that he had never shown the boy the fort in which his father, too, had been tortured for three days.

"Tell me about her," said Bresgote.

Albert shrugged his shoulders. What was the point of explaining to Bresgote how fickle Nella was. While Rai lived she had been rational but when he himself had returned from the war he was appalled to see to what extent she had been broken. She could remain Godfearing for months on end, get up early in the morning and go to Mass, spend days and nights reading the *Lives of the Mystics* and then suddenly she lapsed once more into apathy, dozed away her days and wasted her time with people whom she invited home and was happy when a fairly congenial escort turned up who would take her to the cinema and the theatre. And sometimes she went away with the men for a few days and when she returned she was depressed and sat howling in her room.

"How did you know that she had gone away?" he asked.

Bresgote did not reply. Albert observed him and began to find him a bore. He loathed men who grew sentimental and started to confess, and Bresgote looked just the type to pour out his soul. He was like desperadoes on the films, desperadoes in a jungle hut. Creepers hanging down and a monkey flings a banana at the desperado who, in turn, flings his whisky bottle at the monkey who runs away, screaming. Then the man, with trembling hands, opens another bottle of whisky, begins to soak and to tell his life story to a colleague who now appears. The listener is a doctor, a missionary or an intelligent merchant who encourages the desperado to start a new life. And, of course, the desperado, taking a barbarous gulp of whisky, roars: 'A new

life!' Mocking laughter and then, in a hoarse voice, the story of a woman who has turned him into a desperado—hoarse voice, cut, raw voice, cut—surprised doctor, surprised missionary, surprised intelligent merchant. And the emptier the whisky bottle grows the hoarser the voice of the desperado as one approaches the end of the film. . . . But although Bresgote had a hoarse voice and had drunk six brandies he remained silent. Suddenly he got up, walked across the toom and, standing at the open window, between the bed and the writing desk, began to fiddle with the pink curtain and he was no longer the desperado but the intelligent man caught up in a sentimental phase as one saw in well-written, intelligently-made, intelligently-photographed films, standing at a window to make his confession.

Albert poured him out another brandy and decided to submit to everything. He was worried about the boy who had not yet returned from school. Bresgote did not have to worry: he was the type Nella liked, 'Intelligent and masculine, rather careless in his dress,' and it was only to be expected that Nella's present phase would soon pass. About once a year she yearned for the sublimated erotics of intelligent monks; the sweet magic of religious conversations by the fireside in large ascetic rooms, with good wines and a selection of cheese cakes. Surrounded by beautiful paintings by modern astists, she enjoyed the sight and conversation of handsome monks, whose eyes were full of fire and who, thanks to their habit, looked far more intelligent than they really were.

Albert smiled involuntarily and it suddenly struck him how fond he was of Nella and how pleased he would be to see her again.

"Go on, smile," said Bresgote at the window, "but I'm a sick man. I should probably have been content to wait for a meeting with her and not to have engineered it, had I not seen her this morning."

"You saw her leave?"

"Yes, with a fellow I loathe, whom I loathed before I saw her with him."

"Who was it?" said Albert mechanically, for he had a feeling that Bresgote was looking for an audience.

"That Gäseler," said Bresgote angrily. "Don't you know him?"

"No."

In the old days the very mention of this name would have aroused his hatred, but now he merely gave a slight start and understood Nella's secret about her adventure.

"But you do know him," said Bresgote, coming nearer, and Albert could see from the man's face how his own must have looked at the mention of Gäseler's name.

"I once knew a fellow of that name, and he was a swine."

"And he is a swine," said Bresgote, "that's quite certain."

"What is he?"

"Oh, some Catholic sod who has something to do with culture. He's been on the *Messenger* for three weeks.

"Thanks for the flattery," said Albert. "I'm a Catholic myself."

"Sorry," said Bresgote, "I apologize to you, but I'm not sorry I said it, for he's a swine. What did the Gäseler you know do?"

Albert stood up. Now everything had changed and he was at the window. Was he now the desperado of the intelligent man in the film who had to tell his story convincingly before the camera. He was sorry for Bresgote who was pacing up and down in despair with a match in his mouth, and he thought of the boy and was worried because he had not come home. It was a torture to have to tell the same old story—a story he felt had changed and lost its power by constant repetition. He often had to tell it to Nella's mother and to Nella herself and at the outset even to the boy. But for a long time Martin had ceased to ask any questions.

"Well, get it off your chest," said Bresgote.

"The Gäseler I knew has Nella's husband on his conscience. Oh, in the most legitimate and commonplace way possible. He murdered him during the war. In the old days the word murdered came easily to me and I say it today only because I can't think of any other word. But it's pointless my telling you the story because we don't know that it's the same man."

"We shall know it within the hour." said Bresgote. "There was a picture of him in the week-end number of *The Messenger*. There can't be so many bastards called Gäseler."

"What's he done to you?"

"Oh, nothing," said Bresgote sarcastically, "Nothing. They never do anything to anybody."

"Are you certain that she went away with this Gäseler?"

"I saw her get into his car."

"What does he look like?"

"Oh, never mind. I've only got to telephone and we shall have the picture within the hour."

Albert was afraid of the real Gäseler and tried to call the matter off, but Bresgote went to the telephone and dialled his office. Albert took the second receiver, listened, and when the voice at the other end said "*Weekend at Home*", he knew it was the girl who had stood at the mirror; but at the same time he heard her colleague say: "You were right. The pudding was awful."

"Plug in properly," said Bresgote angrily. "I can hear conversation going on in the switchboard room."

Albert laid down the second receiver.

"I want the last week-end number of the *Messenger* delivered here within the hour. Send Welly with it on the motorbike."

"No, no," shrieked Bresgote. "Not home—here, to Herr Muchow's address"—he gave the number of the street—"and put all calls through to me here until further notice."

He hung up and said to Albert: "Come on—tell me the story." It was half-past-three and Albert was getting really nervous about the boy.

"It was in the summer of '42. We were lying one morning in foxholes we had just dug, in front of a village called Kalinowka. A new Lieutenant had arrived, and he was crawling round checking up on his command. It was Gäseler. He remained longer with us than with the rest. It was all quiet and he said: 'I want two intelligent men.'

"We were silent.

" 'I'm looking for two intelligent men,' he repeated.

" 'We're not intelligent,' said Rai.

"Gäseler laughed: 'That's the only thing you are—intelligent.'

" 'I don't remember having drunk *Brüderschaft* with you,' replied Rai."

Albert fell silent. He seemed to be dying a slow death. Why must he tell this story all over again? Why must a man called Gäseler turn up? Why did he have to meet Nella and arouse Bresgote's jealousy?

"This reply," he went on wearily, "decided Rai's fate. Gäseler detailed us for a reconnaissance patrol which we were

totally unequipped to carry out. The boys were all reasonable and the Sergeant-Major, who knew us, advised Gäseler against it. Even the Captain entered the lists and proved to him how unsuited we were to carry out such a ticklish job, for it was deathly still in the village in front of which we lay and no one knew whether the Russians were there or not. Everyone tried to dissuade Gäseler but he went on shouting: 'Does an officer's order have to be obeyed or not?'

"This put the Captain in a difficult position——" He was too tired now to tell the whole story. "Well, the Captain harangued us because he was afraid of Gäseler and told us that we should certainly be shot for disobeying an order if Gäseler reported it to the battalion, but that if we carried out the patrol we should have some chance of getting through. We gave in and the appalling thing is that we should not have given in. But we did it because they were all so decent and so reasonable. N.C.O.s and soldiers gave us advice, and we actually felt for the first time that they liked us. That was the worst. They were decent to us and we gave in and went on the patrol and Rai was killed, and half an hour later half the Company was dead or had been taken prisoner, for the Russians were in the village in force, and there was a rout in which I still found time to hit Gäseler in the face. Rai was dead and it was little satisfaction to have avenged Rai's death with a slap in the face, an expressive slap for which I was given six months' imprisonment. Do you understand, now, what happened?"

"Yes," said Bresgote, "I understand, and it's just like him."

"We shouldn't have given way," said Albert, "and the worst is—and it makes me feel ill when I think of it—that it had nothing to do with the war. It was a personal hatred because Rai had said: 'I don't remember having drunk *Brüderschaft* with you.' And Rai hated him. We had got into the habit," Albert went on in a livelier tone, "of cataloguing all the new officers as they appeared. Rai did it and his summing up of Gäseler was: 'Passed out of College well. Catholic! Will study law, but has cultural ambitions. Corresponds with right-wing monks. Pathologically ambitious.' "

"My God," cried Bresgote, "people ought to read poetry from time to time. It's a wonderful summing up. And I tell you it's him. I needn't bother about the picture any more."

"I don't think we shall want it any more, either. And you can quite safely read Rai's poems. He hadn't counted on dying. He gave in because he wanted to live, and it was terrible for him to die and to have given in to a man like Gäseler, and everywhere jam pots lying around with his slogans and the Nazi papers praising him."

"What jam pots? What's that about Nazi papers?"

"In 1935 Rai began to be known in Germany. A number of people encouraged him because it was so harmless to do so. His poems were non-political, but anyone who understood could read between the lines. Schurbigel discovered him; the Nazis could make wonderful propaganda out of his poems because they were so different from the muck that came from their firms. They could at least go canvassing and prove that they were not one-sided. So Rai was forced into the hideous situation of being praised by the Nazis. He published no more poems and wrote very little and took a job in his father-in-law's factory. At first he worked on his own coloured graphs showing where and how much jam was eaten by whom. He got engrossed in this work, studied the culinary specialities of individual regions and used red in all his shading when compiling his statistics for the sales department. When there was a party day in Nuremberg or some Nazi meeting, a whole tube of red was used and later, when I returned from England, we teamed up and designed posters and slogans for the jam pots which we constantly ran into during the war. And Rai remained famous against his will, for they dragged out his poems and published them, although he wrote that he did not wish them to be published. He was furious and the idea made him quite ill."

"Did you know Schurbigel in the old days?" asked Bresgote.

"Yes, I knew him. Why?"

"Do you think it possible that she will start an affair with Gäseler?"

"No," said Albert. "In any case she knows who he is."

"How's that?"

"She made some curious hints when she drove away."

"Where's she gone with him?"

"To a conference in Brernich."

"God," said Bresgote, "I've a mind to go there."

"Let her be," said Albert. "She'll do the right thing."

"What can she do?"

"I don't know, but she'll do the right thing."

"A slap in the face? A kick in the arse? What can you do with such a man? I'd murder him."

Albert did not reply. "I'm worried about the boy," he said, "I can't think where he's got to. He knew I was taking him away this evening. Are you hungry?"

"Yes," said Bresgote. "Put on something to eat."

"Come. . . ."

They went into the kitchen and Albert put the vegetable pot on the gas and took a salad out of the refrigerator. Nella had prepared the pancake mixture, diced the bacon and even ground the coffee. She had remained three days at home, peacefully and quietly, without visitors. Albert stared at the maxim on the wall: THE WAY TO THE HEART IS THROUGH THE STOMACH.

It disturbed him that Gäseler had turned up. He was afraid of facing the real Gäseler again. To speak about him and to think of him had been easy, but now the boy and Nella's mother would be involved. Bresgote stood frowning at his side and watched the pancake mixture stiffening and the little pieces of bacon dancing as they were trapped in the dough.

Albert was now listening for noises in the street. He knew Martin's footsteps. They were like Rai's—only slightly lighter. He also knew the creak of the garden gate when Martin opened it. He only pushed it a little ajar, whereas Nella gave it a tremendous kick so that it banged against the hinges. Martin only half-opened the gate, slipped through and caused it to make a particular noise that he was now waiting for. The sizzling in the kitchen and the steam of the heating vegetables irritated him. It made it more difficult to listen to the noises outside. He took the first cooked pancake, laid it on a plate for Bresgote, piled some salad for him in a bowl and said: "Excuse me, I can't hold out any longer. I must go and look for the boy. It's nearly three o'clock."

"Where could he be?"

"One of two places," said Albert. "I'll drive there. Eat your fill and put the water on for the coffee when you're finished."

Each time the boy was late his imagination ran riot. Images flashed through his mind—accidents, blood, stretchers, and he saw the earth thrown on to a coffin, heard his classmates singing as

they had once sung at Leen's burial. The English girls had sung MEDIA IN VITA. Blood and the swiftness of death: MEDIA IN VITA. He forced himself to drive slowly down the avenue, looking behind each tree, and he went on looking although he was sure that he would not find the boy, just as he was sure that the man who had driven away with Nella was Gäseler. But that did not interest him now. Past the ATRIUM to the corner of the Heinrichstrasse where the school lay. . . . The street was empty, deserted and calm in the sunlight until suddenly there was a great hubbub. The girls' school had a break and hundreds of voices were raised at the same time. Laughter and shouts and a terrified dog ran across the road with his tail between his legs. He drove on and a minute later he came to a sign, JOINER; he sounded his horn three times and Heinrich came to the window. A handsome, smiling face. . . .

"Is Martin with you?"

He already knew the answer before it came.

"No—he's not here. He went straight home."

"Did he? Are you coming this afternoon?"

"I must ask Mother first."

"We'll pick you up."

"Yes."

There remained Bolda. He drove so slowly that the other cars passed, hooting angrily. But he paid no heed, turned right, drove round the church and pulled up outside the sacristy.

Blood and the suddenness of death. . . . The certainty that he was not with Bolda and the paralysing urge to get out and verify this conviction. . . . MEDIA IN VITA.

The door was unlocked. He pushed on it and strode past the cool, clean cupboards. On a nail next to the priests' white robes hung Bolda's cloak—a dark brown cloak with a Thermos flask full of *bouillon* in the left-hand pocket and a packet of sandwiches in the right.

He pushed the aisle door open, genuflected towards the altar and turned into the nave. He had never been here except for a service and the emptiness appalled him. An oppressive silence. He caught sight of a pail of soapsuds near a pillar, a brush leaning against it and at last discovered Bolda. She was wiping the dust from the Gothic motifs of a confessional. As soon as she heard his footsteps, she turned round, called out something

incomprehensible and came towards him. He met her at the altar rail and from her face he could read how his own must look.

"Whatever's the matter?" she asked.

"The boy's not back from school. He ran home and then went away again."

"Oh, is that all?"

"No." Her loud voice infuriated him, but his own voice, which he had involuntarily lowered, rang out louder than he had expected. "No," he repeated, "but isn't that enough?"

Bolda smiled. "He'll be back soon," she said, "nothing's happened to him. He gets annoyed sometimes when there's no one at home. He's sure to turn up." She smiled again and shook her head. "Don't be silly," she said.

He was surprised to hear her so friendly and gentle. He had never known that she could be like this, although he had lived in the same house with her for seven years. He found her almost beautiful; her hands were small and delicate and for the first time he noticed that the yellow woolly duster in her hand was brand new. It still had a label—a piece of linen with a black raven on it.

"I'm quite sure," she said with a smile. "Don't excite yourself."

"You really think so?" he asked.

"Of course. Go home quietly, he'll soon be there." She half turned round, gave him a smile of encouragement, then turned her back on him and continued to dust the confessional.

"If he comes, I'll send him to you straight away," he said.

She turned round once more, nodded and went on with her dusting. He went to the sacristy door, genuflected and left as he had come.

He did not know where to look now. He drove back the same way, slowly, and felt that he was calmer. Bolda's conviction had had its effect.

Bresgote had already made the coffee and fried the second pancake. "Take a look at him," he said, picking up a newspaper that lay on the dresser. Albert saw immediately that it was Gäseler. Yes, it was his dark, handsome face.

"Yes," he said wearily, "that's him all right."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

WHILE she paid the taxi she saw Gäseler standing outside the the entrance of the Trustees Bank. A slim, well-dressed form between the two bronze figures flanking the entrance—on the left a bronze man with a brief-case, on the right a bronze labourer with a mason's trowel. They seemed to be smiling at each other —a bronze smile across a decorative glass window lit from within. Neon lights enhanced the transparency, outlining dark flowers, wheels, a pair of scales and, clearly visible, surrounded by this frieze of flowers, wheels, scales and ears of corn, the snow-white words: TRUSTEES BANK—FOR SECURITY. The SECURITY was three times as large as TRUSTEES BANK, and Gäseler stood between the man with the trowel and the man with the brief-case, exactly under the U of SECURITY.

Gäseler looked at his wrist-watch, and Nella, who had just paid the taxi, suddenly longed for Martin, Albert, Glum, her mother and Bolda. She tried in vain to feel some hatred for Gäseler, but all she felt was something else, alien, cold and sinister: boredom.

Everything lay in a bright flat light: Amateurishly placed spotlights were directed on the boring young man who was now pacing up and down between the man with the trowel and the man with the brief-case, between the C and R of SECURITY.

"Well," said the driver, "are you getting out here or not, young lady?" She smiled at the chauffeur and the disgruntled look disappeared from his face. An effortless twitch of a muscle and he jumped out, ran round the car, opened the door and took out her suitcase.

Gäseler glanced again at his wrist-watch. Yes, she was seven minutes late, and she closed her eyes to shut out the bright light: a pedestrian film without shadows, a film without atmosphere. . . .

"Ah, my dear Nella, I'm delighted that you've come." Unimaginative handshake, a brand-new car, blue as the sky on a summer day, soft luxurious interior and the homage paid to her smile.

"Beautiful car," she said.

"Yes, she's already done 40,000 miles. One must always look after one's things."

"Of course," said Nella. "Order is half the battle in life."

He looked at her rather suspiciously.

Inside ashtrays, a cigarette lighter—a gleaming reddish coil that worked—and Gäseler put his foot down on the accelerator.

Did Judith come like this to Holofernes? Did she yawn so heavily as she strode through the camp to his side?

Self-confident elegance at the wheel, punctilious observance of the traffic lights, swift decisions taken, slipping through at the right moment, and a skilful use of the gears. . . . Hard eyes, a trifle sentimental on closer inspection, and everything in this bright, flat light. . . . The latest number of the *Messenger* in the glove compartment next to the cigarette lighter. She opened the paper and looked at the table of contents: Serial by Werner Gäseler. Neither Albert nor her mother had ever mentioned his Christian name or his age and for years she had envisaged him quite differently: a massive, brutal beau, an intelligent officer, a bovine observer of army regulations. . . . Not this profile that would be ideal for a travel film. 'Visit Schloss Brernich, the baroque pearl in the idyllic Brer Valley.'

The suburbs: hedges, gypsy carts, a fair being dismantled; bright wains and in the background merry-go-round, the calliope still playing, children bobbing up and down on the horses, while the tents were being struck ready for departure. But even the picturesque seemed flat in this light with this brash juvenile lead and the road was like a picture postcard.

Smile after smile was turned on him. Lap it up, my boy, and if you're the man, may it poison you. . . . And if you're not him, the kiss you can press on my hand will cost me untold self-control. But you are the man. . . . You're the duffer who was detailed to cut the film. So destiny looks like this—like you—not gloomy or gruesome, but like you—a bore. . . . Even the calm methodical way he kept the speedometer at forty infuriated her. When she drove in a car she liked the needle to hover around sixty—a ticklish little needle, more sensitive than the hands which regulate its movement.

He turned towards her and she twitched her facial muscle three times. A mechanically-strewn poison for which he looked grateful.

Bietenhahn. Gabled houses dotted in the forest apparently aimlessly, but with all the cunning of tourist resorts which cultivate their romantic appeal. The bullet from the Thirty Years War cemented into the town gate: a Swedish ball-bearing from Schmidt's workshop, given an antique patina and stuck in the masonry.

"Pretty place," he said.

"Very pretty."

Albert's mother was hanging her washing out in the garden and Will was at her side handing her the pegs, and later that afternoon Albert would come with the boy and it would be a wonderful week-end, for in the evening Glum would appear and sing and perhaps on Monday they would drive very far away.

She would have liked to say 'Stop', but she did not say it, and could only turn round once more at the bend to see Will patiently carrying the bag of pegs and Albert's mother putting down the bright yellow basket and hanging up one of Will's nightshirts: the flag of peace behind her, a property to arouse melancholy, disappearing behind the trees.

"Enchanting country," he said.

"Enchanting."

Once more he looked at her suspiciously, for perhaps the tone of her voice had caught his ear. She cured his distrust with a smile. Infallible free balsam, to banish the frown from ill-tempered masculine faces, and 'everything was all right again'. He drove faster and the speedometer rose to seventy-five. He took his bends with graceful confidence and the film went on: Visit Schlos Brernich, the baroque pearl in the idyllic Brer Valley.

And now the Brer flowed below them, a green, ribbon-like stream, artificially kept alive. Hidden concrete pipes led water to the Brer so that it should not fall asleep but remain idyllic and cool. A pretty little river between meadows and forests and of course the inevitable mill with its wheel gaily turning, sweet music in the valley of the idyllic Brer.

"My God, how beautiful," he said.

"Beautiful."

Suspicious glance, a healing smile and the camera handle went on turning. At times she forgot that he was Gäseler and boredom descended upon her like a disease. Yawns and the

terrible effort of keeping up a conversation, so as not to let him see how bored she was.

He thought that he was being vastly amusing in telling her all the intrigues it had needed to become editor of the *Messenger*.

Now they were driving at moderate speed through a sleepy landscape: meadows and hedges fled past, cattle stood by the fences and not far from the coffer-dam the Brer took on the character of a mountain stream. The lock keeper had probably pulled a lever to let the fresh idyllic water stream into the Brer. She smoked to wrestle with her boredom. The film now showing seemed to have been made by a very eager, well-intentioned amateur: dull, grey lighting which made everything seem flat, such as one sees in bad photographs, in tedious albums. Photographs that don't come to life, piles of albums which she would have to look through. A deadly grey at the pressure of a duffer on the camera shutter . . . a grey only too familiar from the photograph albums of school friends. Accumulated boredom in streaky albums full of photographs which dreary chemists had developed at the seaside. . . . Holiday resorts between Flensburg and Medina, between Calais and Carlsbad. . . . Preserving what was worth preserving. Boredom in groups and single portraits. . . . Boredom 8 x 8 or 16 x 12 and here and there enlargements of boredom: Lotte in the Gulf of Medina, 24 x 18, immortalized in Album No. 12 illustrating Lotte's life from her State Exam to her engagement. Then came Album No. 13—oh, we're not superstitious—devoted entirely to the wedding and the honeymoon: boredom with and without veils, with and without chastity. Did you know Bernard's father? No. That's him—a smiling stranger immortalized in 8 x 6. And, of course, in Album No. 14 the baby. Sweet, sweet, sweet—the grey facial shadows retouched with a sure hand. . . .

Obviously he would pull up somewhere in this beautiful countryside, try to kiss her and take his Leica out of the brief-case. In the album: Nella at the big bend where Road No. 8 forks to give a view of the Brer. To their right lay the coffer-dam in the forest . . . an idyllic lake, an idyllic forest. The river below, the village, the baroque steeple and the big, baroque inn, The Blue Boar. Oh, didn't she know why it was called the Blue Boar? No. Well, listen—and the anecdote and another kiss, out of the car to take a photo of the baroque steeple, a photo of the Blue Boar—

also baroque—and, like a miracle, the boredom was fetched from the chemist.

"Isn't it sweet?"

"Yes, sweet."

She had often travelled this road with Rai and, in recent years, with Albert and she had never been bored. Never once had she found the baroque steeple and the Blue Boar tedious. But now, she was so bored that it approached irritation, like quicksilver rising in the barometer on a hot day.

"Stop," she said quickly, "I want to get a breath of air."

He stopped. Nella got out and walked a few steps into the forest. She heard a click; he was taking her photograph from the front seat with his Leica.

She walked back to the car and said quietly: "Take that film out."

He gaped at her.

"Give me that film. Take it out of the camera."

Slowly, with raised eyebrows, he opened the back, took out the film and gave it to her. She ripped open the spool, exposed it to the light and tore it.

"I loathe photographs," she said calmly, "please don't try to take any more snaps of me."

She got into the car, watched him out of the corner of her eye and for a moment was amused by the bovine, offended expression on his face and the slightly pouting lips in profile.

He stopped at the fork from which they could look down on the Shallow Brer, the baroque steeple and the baroque Blue Boar.

He played boyishly with the Leica, which was still bumping on his chest, and made the inevitable remark:

"Isn't that enchanting?"

"Yes. How long will it take us to get to the castle?"

"Half an hour. Do you know Brernich?"

"Oh, I've been there a few times."

"Strange that I didn't meet you."

"I haven't been there for a year."

"Oh, I was there only two months ago."

"Where were you before that?"

"I studied," he said. "I had to start again from scratch."

"Were you a soldier for a long time?"

"Yes," he replied. "Four years. And then I pottered about

for another six choosing a profession. And now I can gradually start to live."

"To live? But you must be twenty-eight at least. . . ."

"Exactly thirty-three," he said with a smile. "Thanks for the compliment."

"It was no compliment—only curiosity. I knew that you'd tell me how old you were, for you'd like to look much older."

"For you," he said, "I should like to be two years older."

"Why?" she asked coldly, staring in her boredom at the newly painted and distempered bright baroque façade of the Blue Boar in the sun.

"Then I should be four years older than you."

"A back-handed compliment," she said wearily. "But you're wrong. I'm exactly thirty-seven."

Criminal police must feel like this when they interrogate a little shop lifter, but not the examining magistrates dealing with a big murder. . . .

"My flattery was quite unconscious," he said. "You actually look far younger."

"I know."

"Do you mind if we drive on?"

"No," she said, "but don't stop at the church or at the Blue Boar."

He smiled at her, and she remained silent until he had negotiated the hairpin bends and driven slowly through the little village.

"A charming story about the Blue Boar, eh?"

"Delicious."

The travel film ran on. Meadows, cows and the clean, beautifully shaved eighth-class actor, the producer who had previously been an actor and she, the star who had been engaged with an eye to the box office. The landscape cost nothing. And at the camera stood an amateur who had been singled out in his class as talented. She could not manage to project herself on to the other planes: neither into the film recorded in her memory nor the second which lay neglected in the files nor the continuation of one which was now a memory: Life without ballast, children, a newspaper office, cold, bright-coloured drinks and Albert, the faithful friend. A film, without Glum or Bolda, with the never-conceived, never-born abecedarians of 1950 to 1953. She tried

desperately to remember Rai, to add fuel to her hatred. But nothing appeared except pale pictures, lifeless stills: Italian villages as they looked on prospectuses, and Rai in them like a crazy tourist. A weary mirage . . . the present paralysed everything. . . . And suddenly Gäseler's arm lay on her shoulder and she said calmly: "Take your arm away." Gäseler removed his arm and she waited in vain for her hatred: Absalom Billig, trampled to death on a cement floor . . . blood on the rough cement and Rai sacrificed to an order, to a principle . . . a prestige death, shot down and never to be brought back. Rai did not appear and the memory died. Hatred did not appear, only a yawn, and once more the hand fell on her shoulder, and once more she said calmly: "Take your hand away," and he removed it. So he called that 'beginning to live', fumblings at the wheel, kisses exchanged at the forest's edge while a doe in the thicket looked on with a snort; snorting doe, cleverly photographed by an amateur cameraman. . . .

"Don't do it again," she said. "Keep your hands to yourself. It bores me. Tell me, where were you in the war?"

"Oh, I don't think about it very much. I find it quite easy to forget. It's over, you know."

"But you know where you were, don't you?"

"Nearly everywhere. In the west, the east, the south. Everywhere except the north. At the end I was in Erwin's Army."

"In whose Army?"

"Erwin," he repeated. "Haven't you heard of Erwin Rommel?"

"I've never been particularly interested in the Christian names of generals."

"But why are you so angry?"

"Angry?" she said. "You call that angry, as though a little girl refused to hold her aunt's hand out of defiance. Banish the spook in the corner. But perhaps you didn't know that my husband was killed?"

"Yes, I did. Father Willibrord told me. But I already knew it. Is there anyone who doesn't know it? Forgive me."

"What is there to forgive? That my husband was shot down? *Kaput*, cut off from the film which was no dream but should have been reality. Chucked into the records . . . try and piece the celluloid together. There they aren't so accurate about the Christian names of Generals."

He drove for a long stretch in silence, a respectful silence, and from his face she knew that he was thinking of the war. Memories of hardships, sentimentality and Erwin.

"What is your lecture about?"

"My lecture? 'What we can expect from Modern Poetry.' "

"Are you going to talk about my husband?"

"Yes. No one can talk about poetry without mentioning him."

"My husband was killed at Kalinowka," she said. She looked at him and was surprised and disappointed at her own calmness. His face did not change.

"Oh, I know it. How odd, I think I was there. I was in the Ukraine in the summer of '42. Isn't it odd?"

"Yes," she replied and she wished it had not been him.

"I've forgotten everything," he went on. "I've systematically destroyed my memory. We must forget the war."

"Yes . . . and the widows and orphans and the filth, and build a beautiful, clean future, inspire confidence in the Trustees Bank, forget the war and remember the Christian names of the Generals."

"My God," he said. "One sometimes lapses into the jargon of the old days."

"Yes—of course—that was the jargon of the old days."

"Is that so bad?"

"Bad? One calls bad the young ragamuffins who pinch apples, and for me it's far worse than bad when I hear the jargon of those days expressed so clearly. My husband hated the war and I won't let you publish any of his poems in your anthology, unless you add a letter which I shall give you. He hated the war, hated Generals and the Army. And I had to hate them. But, isn't it odd, they only bored me?"

He smiled and managed to put the exact amount of sorrow into his voice and face that an amateur film director would have demanded. "Why did you have to hate me?"

"I should have had to hate you," she said, "had I not ceased to live from the day my husband died. That is what I wanted—to go on hating with his hatred, for had he known you today or in those days he would undoubtedly have slapped your face. I should have succeeded where he left off, gone on behaving and thinking as he thought and as he taught me to think—to slap the faces of people who have forgotten the war but utter the Christian names of Generals with schoolboy sentimentality."

He made no reply and she noticed that his lips were compressed.

"If only you were honest and glorified war, persisted decently in your frustrated conqueror resentment—but I find it a trifle disgusting that you have to give titles to your well-thought-out lectures like: 'What we can expect from Modern Poetry.'"

Gäseler drove slowly. Between some tall beeches, she recognized the outbuildings of Brernich Castle, a baroque villa, a dovecote and plump doves obviously well fed by the tourists.

An amateurish travel film with bad lighting, without a happy ending, for the kiss which should have been given, with a baroque façade of Brernich Castle as a background, would not take place. She longed for Hähnels ice-cream parlour, for Luigi's smile and the record he put on, as soon as she entered his shop, at the spot where the melody died. She longed for Martin, for Albert and the imaginary Gäseler whom she could have hated. This ambitious little cretin aroused no hatred in her. He was not the bogy man, the spook that Mother had tried to instil into the boy's imagination. He was conceited, not even stupid. He would succeed in life.

"You can drop me here," she said.

He obeyed without a glance at her and, as she opened the door, she said: "Tell them to take my suitcase up to my room." He nodded and she watched his profile and waited in vain for a trace of compassion, just as she had waited in vain for her hatred.

Father Willibrord came towards her with outstretched arms.

"How delightful that you've come, Nella. Isn't this a wonderful place for a conference?"

"Yes," she replied, "Wonderful. Has it begun?"

"Schurbigel has already given a wonderful lecture and we're all waiting impatiently for Gäseler. This is his first appearance in our circle."

"I'd like to go to my room," she said.

"Come," said Father Willibrord. "I'll show you to it."

She saw Gäseler climbing the castle steps carrying his brief-case and her valise, but when she approached with Father Willibrord he had vanished and her suitcase was standing by the porter's desk.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE tram conductor's cap was not hanging on the rack. In the corridor there was a smell of *bouillon* and margarine in which Brielach always fried his potatoes. Frau Borussiak was singing at the top of the house: "The Green grass on my parents' grave." She sang beautifully and clearly and her song flowed down the stairs like refreshing rain. He looked at the scratched wall on which 'the word' had been written more than thirty times. A trace of plaster under the gas meter showed that the silent struggle had recently taken place again. A dull whirr from the planing machine came from the joiner's workshop: a peaceful thunder that made the walls of the house tremble slightly, growing clearer and almost rattling as the plank slipped through the mouth of the machine. Alternately the lighter snarl of the fraise. The lamp in the corridor swayed gently and from above came the powerful, beautiful song, descending upon him like a blessing. The window on to the courtyard stood open. Down below the joiner was piling up wood with his apprentices. The boys whistled to Frau Borussiak's tune and in the right window of the burnt-out back wall an aeroplane flew peacefully in the bright blue sky. A soft drone towing a transparent pennon. The plane disappeared behind the pillars between the two windows, appeared in the second window; grey against the bright sky, it slowly passed from window to window like a dragon-fly dragging too large a tail behind it. As it came into view behind the backyard ruins and circled slowly over the church steeple he could read what was written on the transparent pennon, word for word, as the plane turned and the tail caught the light: ARE YOU PREPARED FOR EVERYTHING?

Frau Borussiak went on singing. Her voice was powerful and warm and listening to her singing meant that he could see her. She was fair-haired like Mother, but plumper, and 'the word'

was unthinkable on her lips. Her husband had been killed, too, and she used to be called Frau Horn. Now she had another husband, a postman who carried the registered mail, and she was legally married to Herr Borussiak just as Grebhake's mother was legally married to Herr Sobik. Herr Borussiak was a friendly soul like his wife. He brought money to Uncle Albert and to Mother too. Frau Borussiak's children had grown up. The eldest was Rolf Horn, who was a server at Mass. On a brass plate in the church stood 'Peter Canisius Horn + 1942' and above this inscription on the same plate, stood 'Raimund Bach + 1942'. Brielach's father was on another brass plate in St. Paul's Church: 'Heinrich Brielach + 1941'. He waited until the planing machine stopped and put his car to Brielach's door. Leo sometimes took his cap inside, but since he could not hear Leo he turned away from the window and waited outside the door for a moment before opening it.

"Wherever have you been?" asked Brielach. "Uncle Albert's been looking for you."

Brielach sat at the table, writing—a sheet of paper in front of him and a pencil in his hand. He now looked up gravely and said: "Or have you been home in the meantime?"

Martin hated Brielach when he put on his grave face, and he hated it when Brielach said, as he often did: 'But you understand nothing about that.' And he knew that Brielach meant MONEY.

Admittedly he knew nothing about MONEY, but he hated it when Brielach put on his serious MONEY face.

"No, I haven't been home."

"Then you must go at once. Uncle Albert's in a stew."

Martin shook his head obstinately and turned to Wilma who was crawling towards him from the corner.

"You're mean," said Brielach. "You're really mean."

He bent over his sheet of paper and went on writing. Wilma crawled over Martin's satchel. He sat on the floor between the door and the bed, took Wilma on his lap, but she freed herself with a laugh, caught hold of the straps and began pulling them sideways. He watched her wearily. The little girl tried to open the satchel. She tore at the strap without undoing the buckle. He took the satchel, unfastened the two buckles and gave it back to her. As she grabbed it, the nickel prong came out of the hole and she shouted for joy, quickly tore the second one open, laughed even

louder and pulled open the flap. Martin leant against the wall and watched her.

"I think you're mean," said Brielach without looking up. And when Martin did not reply he went on: "You're making yourself filthy and ruining your trousers."

He had put on his grave MONEY face. Martin did not reply although it was on the tip of his tongue to say: 'You with your MONEY face.' But he refrained from doing so because it was too dangerous to speak of MONEY. He had done it once to play a trump card against Brielach's MONEY self-importance and remarked that they always had money: Albert, Mother and Grandmother.

After that Brielach had stayed away for six weeks and had not spoken to him for six weeks and Uncle Albert had to persuade him to visit them again. Those six weeks had been dreadful. So he said nothing, put his knees up to his chin and looked at Wilma. She was fully occupied: she pulled out the books, the leather satchel, opened the top book and pointed with her finger to the illustrations of a sum. A cake which could be cut into four, eight, sixteen, thirty-two slices and could cost 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 marks and one had to calculate how much each slice cost. This cake absorbed Wilma's attention. She seemed to understand what it was, for she screamed one of the few words she knew: "Sugar." Then there were also the bananas from South Africa at so much per ton—how many pounds in a ton? If so much per cent were deducted, what was the sale price? The bananas, too, for Wilma were sugar, as well as the big cheese, the bread and the sack of flour. The man who carried the flour was scowling and for Wilma he was Leo, whereas the friendly, smiling baker who weighed the sacks of flour was Papa. Wilma only knew three words: Leo, Papa and Sugar. Papa was the picture on the wall and all the men she liked and Leo was all the men she disliked.

"Can I have a slice of bread and margarine?" Martin asked wearily.

"Yes, do," said Heinrich, "but if I were you I should go home. Uncle Albert was very excited and it's more than an hour since he was here." When Martin did not reply he said angrily: "I tell you, you're mean," and added gently: "Make yourself a slice of bread and margarine."

His face took on an even graver expression and Martin knew

that he would have liked to be asked what weighty problem he had to solve. But he would not ask him at any price. He tried not to think of Uncle Albert, for his rage was gradually turning into a guilty conscience. It was stupid to have gone to the cinema and he tried to revive his anger. Albert had recently become more and more the writer of notes on newspaper margins. These notes were laconic and the decisive word was always underlined three times. This underlining was a habit of Mother's. She always underlined the auxiliary verbs three times: Should, had to, must, could, mustn't.

"Get up," said Brielach irritably. "You're creasing your trousers. Make yourself a slice of bread and margarine."

Martin stood up, banged the dirt from his trousers and smiled at Wilma who had opened another page of the arithmetic book and was pointing triumphantly to the sheep that weighed exactly 64.5 kilos, which the butcher had bought for so and so much per lb., live weight, and sold at so and so much per lb. as meat. He, too, had fallen into the trap because he had forgotten that there were 16 ozs. in a lb. and had thoughtlessly worked out the sum at 64.5 lbs. Whereupon the teacher had triumphantly announced that at this figure various butchers in the city would have gone bankrupt. Wilma was delighted with the sheep and shouted: "Sugar" and turned her attention to the next page where a stupid woman was buying a motor scooter on the instalment plan. Brielach sat at the table doing his calculations with a frown. Martin saw it now: the sheet of white paper was covered with figures, crossed out columns and the totals underlined. He went to the kitchen cupboard and pushed aside the cut-glass dish with the artificial fruits: oranges, glass bananas and grapes which he had always admired because they were so life-like. He knew where everything was. The tin canister with the bread, the butter dish with the margarine, the knife, the silvery tin with the apple puree. He cut a very thick slice of bread, smeared it with margarine and apple puree and took a large bite. He sighed with pleasure. No one at home, apart from Bolda and Glum, understood his love for margarine. Grandmother held up her hands in horror when he ate it and threatened all manner of diseases, dark sinister diseases, the worst of which was CANCER.

'It gives you cancer.' But he loved margarine and spread

himself another slice of bread, remaining by the kitchen cupboard so as not to have to get up a second time. Wilma smiled at him when he sat down again beside her. Upstairs Frau Borussiak was singing: "Dark red roses." Her full husky voice was like a spurting blood. He had a vision of roses, dark red roses, pressed to blood, streaming from her mouth. And he decided to paint them: Fair-haired Frau Borussiak with her rose-blood streaming from her lips.

Wilma had come to the last page of the arithmetic book where it was once more a question of tons: Pictures of ships and railway trucks, lorries and warehouses. Wilma ran her finger over ship's captains, engine drivers, lorry drivers and porters, dividing them into Papas and Leos. There were more Leos than Papas, for nearly all the men had scowling faces. Leo—Leo—Papa—Leo—Leo—Leo—Papa. And the workers streaming out of a factory were all lumped together as Leo. The Catechism disappointed her because it had no pictures—only a few vignettes. Grapes and garlands were described as 'sugar' and then she laid the Catechism aside. The reader was a boon, and obviously held more Papas and Leos. St. Nicholas and St. Martin and children playing kiss-in-the-ring were all Papas.

Martin took Wilma on his knee, broke off bits of his bread and margarine and fed her. Her pale, podgy face beamed and at each bite she said rapturously: "Sugar," until she suddenly grew silly and repeated the word 'sugar' twenty times in succession.

"Hell," said Brielach, "can't you play at something quieter with her?" Wilma gave a start, wrinkled her forehead and put her finger to her lips.

Frau Borussiak had stopped singing and it was silent in the joinery. Suddenly the church bells rang, Wilma closed her eyes and tried to imitate the bells by crooning: "Ding dong, ding dong." Involuntarily he, too, closed his eyes, stopped chewing and the echo of the bells was transformed into pictures behind his closed lids. They formed a pattern in the air, rings which broadened and fell apart, squares and hatching, such as gardeners make with their rakes. Strange bright polygons, in a dark setting, like patterns cut out of tin. Flowers and the shrill 'ding dong' from Wilma's mouth made little white dots on interminable grey surfaces, traces of a little hammer. And the colours: red like

the dark-red blood of the roses—oval, wide-open red mouths, yellow wavy lines and a gigantic green patch when the big base bell rang. Slowly turning to delicate green as the last carillons died away.

Wilma's eyes were still closed and she crooned her 'dong-dong'.

Martin picked up the second slice of bread which he had laid on the side of the bed, broke off a piece and stuck it in Wilma's mouth. She opened her eyes and laughed and stopped saying 'ding-dong'.

With his free hand, Martin pulled the cardboard box full of toys from under the bed. In big russet-brown letters stood the word 'Sunlight'. The carton was full of empty boxes, lumps of wood and broken toy cars.

Wilma clambered on his lap, gravely examined each object he took out and with a serious look in her eyes uttered the one word she knew for objects: "Sugar." But she said it softly, wrinkling her nose and looking at Heinrich who still sat doing his calculations at the table.

Martin wished that Frau Borussiak would start to sing again and he looked out of the corner of his eye at Brielach who sat there with a very serious face. Suddenly he was sorry for Brielach and asked: "Have you got to make a budget again?"

Brielach's face brightened. "I can tell you something. It makes me sick. I've got to save twenty marks a month so that Mother can have some new teeth."

"Oh—teeth are very dear."

"Dear," laughed Brielach, "dear isn't the word for it. Teeth are astronomical. But do you know what I've discovered?"

"No, what?"

"That Uncle Leo has been paying far too little for two years. The midday meal on an average doesn't cost thirty pfennigs as we worked out in those days but nearly forty. And breakfast. . . . It's a shame. We counted margarine at twenty grammes, but he guzzles at least forty and makes sandwiches and the jam isn't counted in and every egg costs twenty pfennigs. Do you know where one can get an egg for twenty pfennigs?" Brielach's voice rose in his anger.

"No," said Martin, "I've no idea where you can get cheap eggs."

"Nor do I. If I did I'd go there so that we could eat one now and again."

Wilma did not seem to be worried about eggs. She kept on counting her treasures and frowning. "Leo, Leo," she said. "Egg." And she suddenly smiled because she had added another word to her vocabulary.

"Why does he have to have an egg every morning?"

"All fathers and all uncles get an egg for breakfast," said Martin hesitantly, but he corrected himself quickly, "nearly all," for he did not know whether it was true. The breakfast egg had always been a symbol of the father and uncle. But now he remembered that Behrendt's uncle never had an egg.

"But I don't see why," said Brielach. He drew a big line with his pencil as though he were striking out Uncle Leo's egg. His face was white with rage as he went on: "Now, figure out how much he's cheated us of. Seven pfennigs more in margarine—even if that's enough—for he sometimes spreads a slice of bread in the evenings, ten pfennigs for lunch and I must add a pfennig for jam. Now take three pfennigs for the egg. Yes, I reckon at least three pfennigs more. That's twenty pfennigs times a thousand days since he's eaten with us. Two hundred marks, my friend. Well, to continue. The bread's not counted because it's given to us. I haven't counted the bread for two years. But I ask you. Should he share our presents, eh?"

"No," said Martin gloomily, and his bread and margarine no longer tasted good.

"So with this glutton you can reckon forty pfennigs for bread. You can safely add another five for electricity, that's five pfennigs for a thousand days—that's fifty marks, and forty pfennigs for 730 days. Do you realize that's another 300 marks?"

"No," said Martin.

Brielach fell silent and went back to his figures.

"Egg," said Wilma, triumphantly. "Leo. Egg." In the reader she had now discovered some scowling men. They were miners working underground, men with dark serious faces. "Leo—Leo—Leo. Egg—egg—egg."

"Haven't you finished yet?"

"No," said Brielach. "Mother must have new teeth and I've got to figure out how much we can save each month. But if we

take the 500 marks Leo has cheated us of, Mother's teeth would already be half paid."

Martin wished that Frau Borussiak would sing or that the bells would peal again. He closed his eyes and thought of the film and of his dream in the pictures: Leo sinking through the green darkness to the bottom of the sea with a millstone round his neck. . . . Wilma's chatter broke his dreams. "Leo—sugar—Papa—egg—Leo." And when Frau Borussiak upstairs now began to sing: "On A Forest Path," forget-me-nots blossomed. He let her voice sink into him, closed his eyes and asked Brielach: "Why don't our mothers marry again?"

Brielach considered this question important enough to lay aside his calculations. He put down his pencil with the air of a man who knows that it is time to have a break, propped himself up on his elbows and said: "Don't you really know why?"

"No."

"Because of the pension, man. If my mother marries, she loses her pension."

"So Frau Borussiak doesn't get a pension."

"No, but her husband earns good money."

"All the same——" He pondered and smiled absent-mindedly at Wilma who had just discovered St. Joseph in the reader and happily described him as a Papa. "All the same, she would get a pension if Herr Borussiak wasn't her husband and she was still called Horn."

"Naturally, but she wouldn't do it, because she's religious. Because it's immoral."

"Isn't your mother religious?"

"No. Is yours?"

"I don't know. Sometimes yes. She can be."

"What about Uncle Albert?"

"Religious? I think so."

Brielach pushed his elbows forward and rested his head on his clenched fists.

"Well," he said, "your mother—the pension doesn't come into the picture. In her case it has nothing to do with money."

"Don't you think so?"

"No."

"Are you sure? Don't you think"—he hesitated, and then

blurted out—"don't you think that my mother also unites with men?"

Brielach turned red and fell silent. Leo had mentioned Martin's mother and used 'the word' with reference to her men but he did not want to tell Martin because he knew that it was more painful for Martin than for himself to know that his mother united with men. "No," he said, "I don't think so." He knew that he was lying, for he REALLY believed it, and he went on hurriedly: "But it has nothing to do with the pension or with the income tax. They're always talking about that, so does the conductor who often comes to see Leo with Frau Hundag. But I know something else."

"What?"

"That the pension is not so important to the women as to the men. The women say: 'We'll get by—other women do.' But the men say 'no'. Leo gets furious when mother mentions marriage."

"And my mother gets furious when Albert speaks of marriage."

"Really?" Brielach looked up in surprise. He certainly did not want Albert to marry Martin's mother. "Really?" he repeated. "Do you know that for certain?"

"Yes," said Martin. "I heard them. Mother doesn't want to marry again."

"That's funny," said Brielach. "That's very funny. All the women I know would love to get married."

"Your mother, too?"

"I think so. Sometimes she says she's sorry. Besides it's immoral."

Martin was sorry, but he had to agree. It was IMMORAL and for a moment he wished that his mother could be proved immoral so that at least he would have this point in common with Brielach, and he said, to console him: "Perhaps my mother is too. What do you think?"

Brielach knew that she was, but he would not admit that he knew. Leo seemed too unreliable a source, so he merely said vaguely: "Perhaps, but I don't think so."

"It's bad when one doesn't know something for certain," said Martin. "Grandmother often says when Mother comes home late: 'Where do you keep flitting off to?' Is that immoral?"

"No," said Brielach. He was pleased that he could now give a straightforward 'no'. "Frau Borussiak also says to her daughter:

'Where do you keep flying off to?' She means the streets, the playground and the cinema. I don't think flitting about is immoral."

"But it sounds so, and then they begin to whisper."

"I suppose it can be immoral."

Martin took Wilma on his knee again. She stuck her finger in her mouth and leaned her head on his chest. "The question is," he said, "whether my mother unites with other men. It would be immoral because she isn't married. It's against the Sixth Commandment."

Brielach avoided the issue. "Yes," he said, "if men and women unite when they're not married, they commit a sin and that's immoral."

Brielach was relieved. The rift in the ice had narrowed and the water was not so deep as he had feared. In any case, it was strange to hear that Martin's mother did not want to get married. It contradicted all his experience. Frau Hundag wanted to marry Leo's friend the conductor. His mother sometimes broached the subject warily to Leo and he knew Behrendt's mother often wept because she was not married to Behrendt's uncle. The woman in the dairy had had a child and was not married, and Leo said: "Hugo won't fall for that one. He won't marry her."

The ice had broken by the bank and the depth of the water was not too alarming. IMMORAL held good above and below the layer of ice. There were three worlds for him: the school and everything he heard at school and in his religious instruction contradicted the Leo world in which he lived. Martin lived in quite another world: a refrigerator world in which women did not want to get married and where MONEY played no part. Three worlds. But he wanted only to live in one—his own. And he said to Martin, on whose lap Wilma was now asleep: "I don't think the word my mother used to the baker is so bad." He REALLY thought it bad but he wanted to bring matters to a head. "It's written on the corridor wall downstairs. Didn't you ever read it?"

Martin had read it and found it worse when read than when heard. But he had ignored it just as he ignored the bloody carcases of calves which the butcher took into his shop from reeking trucks. . . . Just as he ignored his grandmother's performance, ignored the urine when it was held close to his nose, just as he had not quite ignored Grebhake and Wolters when he

had surprised them in the bushes: flushed faces, open flies and the bitter-sweet odour of fresh sap. He clasped the sleeping child to his chest and did not answer Brielach's question. Wilma was warm and heavy.

"Well, you see," said Brielach, "in our house, such words are written on the wall, and they are also spoken, which is not the case in your home." But the ice held because he had lied, for he REALLY thought the word bad although he had denied it. He caught sight of St. Joseph, a mild, pale-faced man: "Take him as your example. Mild, pale-faced man, how do you stand with Uncle Leo? And where do I stand with you?" St. Joseph stood far below, very deep under the ice, a figure who came alive for a moment as he swam slowly upwards, trying in vain to break through the ice. But would he be pulled out if the ice really broke? Would he not ultimately sink to the bottom, waving his arms helplessly and powerlessly against Leo? His patron saint, St. Heinrich, had the same mild yet resolute face: hewn out of stone, photographed and presented to him by the chaplain. 'Take him as your example.'

"Leo," he said harshly to Martin. "Leo writes that word on the wall. I know it now." Bright red face, smelling of shaving lotion, singing remarkable parodies of hymns he did not understand, but which were obviously smutty because Mother always grew angry and said: 'Shut up.'

Martin did not reply. Everything seemed hopeless. Brielach fell silent too. He wanted to refuse the invitation to Bietenhahn. What was the point of this skating on thin ice? Only to have the strange feeling that things would not turn out well . . . Uncle Will and Albert's mother, and when they played football for hours on end—Uncle Albert played with them—when they played or fished in the Brer Valley as far as the coffer-dam. Sunshine and not a care in the world. . . . But that dreadful feeling that everything would go badly. Terror of the decisive moment. . . . At Easter Martin would go to the Upper School. Wilma murmured in her sleep. Toys lay strewn all over the floor and the reader was still open. St. Martin rode through snow and wind; the golden sword cut his cloak in two and the beggar looked really wretched—a naked, bony manikin in the snow.

"You must go now," said Brielach. "Uncle Albert will be off his head with anxiety."

Martin was silent. He was half-asleep. He was tired and hungry and was afraid to go home, not because he was afraid of Albert, but because he knew that he had behaved meanly.

"Oh," said Brielach, "you are mean." But his voice was neither hostile nor self-important, but echoed sadly into his dozing. "If I had an uncle like Albert, I should. . . ." But he did not finish because there was a lump in his throat and he did not want to weep. He tried to think what it would be like if Albert were his uncle. Albert appeared as a tram conductor. He looked well in uniform and Albert was endowed with all the sympathetic traits of Gert, of Karl, with his own added, and the word that Gert had bequeathed them came gently and suitably from Albert's mouth: 'Shit.' 'Shit' was not a typical Albert word but it did not sound strange on his lips.

It was quiet now. Outside the aeroplane droned cosily, dragging its dragon-fly tail through the sky. ARE YOU PREPARED FOR EVERYTHING? And suddenly Frau Borussiak burst into song again. She sang her favourite song in a sweet husky drawl: AVE MARIA. A voice like slow-dropping sweet honey, a heroine who had renounced a pension in order not to be immoral. A beautiful, plump blonde, safely in harbour with sweets in her pocket. . . . Honey-drops. "Vale of woe," she sang. "In this Vale of Woe. . . ."

The plane could vaguely be heard in the distance. "Let's go to the cinema on Monday," said Martin quietly, without opening his eyes. "It still stands. If your mother's not free, Bolda can look after Wilma."

"Yes—that'll be all right," said Brielach. He wanted to say that he would not go to Bietenhahn but he could not. It was too wonderful in Bietenhahn although the feeling of fear which he never felt here at home would be sure to arrive—fear of the third world which was too much for him. The world of school and his own, he could live between these two worlds as he could live between his world and the church. He was not yet immoral and had never done anything immodest. Fear of the church was another trouble. The certainty that that, too, would turn out badly. There was too much below and too little above the ice. "Vale of Woe" was good when Frau Borussiak sang it.

"We won't go to the ATRIUM," said Martin. "It's a rubbishy film."

"As you like."

"What's on at the MONTE CARLO?"

"X Certificate," said Brielach. A bosomy blonde who could have been a scantily clad Frau Borussiak. She would be kissed all-too passionately by a bronzed adventurer. *Beware of Blondes* and the red slip below her bosom X CERTIFICATE—like a dangerous scarf flung round her by the bronzed adventurer. "What about the BOCCACIO?"

"We can see," said Brielach. "The week's programmes are hanging in the bakery."

It was very quiet. The house trembled gently from the constant stream of traffic outside and the windows rattled when a truck or a No. 34 bus passed. "In this Vale of Woe," sang Frau Borussiak.

"You must go home now," said Brielach. "Don't be so mean."

Martin felt mean, tired and unhappy, but he did not open his eyes.

"I'm going to fetch Mother. Come with me and we'll see what's on at the BOCCACIO."

"Wilma's asleep."

"Wake her up or she won't sleep tonight."

Martin opened his eyes. In his reader, St. Martin rode through snow and wind and his golden sword had almost cut through the cloak. . . .

"In our hour of need," sang Frau Borussiak. . . .

Brielach knew that Leo would not pay but he would chalk it up against Leo and take his revenge for having been accused of THEFT. Leo must pay twenty marks more a month and thus he would save another ten marks a month and the dentist would accept thirty marks a month. There remained only the down payment of 300 marks. A difficult obstacle—an inaccessible peak. Only a miracle could get him three hundred marks. But the miracle must happen, for Mother wept because of her teeth. Naturally Leo would not pay another pfennig and there would be a row. If there was not to be another father, then at least let there be another uncle. Any uncle would be preferable to Leo.

"Wake Wilma up, we must go."

Martin shook the child carefully until she opened her eyes. "Mother," he said softly, "come, you're going to Mother."

"And you're going home," said Brielach. "Don't be so mean."

"Let me be," grumbled Martin.

Mother had gone away, Bolda was scrubbing the church and Albert . . . Albert had to be punished. Albert was frightened when he did not come home punctually. Well, let him be frightened. . . . Glum and Bolda were the best. . . . He would give them a present. Oil paints for Glum and a new red leather missal for Bolda, and a blue folder in which to put her film programmes. Neither Mother nor Albert would get anything: Albert, a writer of notes with the auxiliary verbs underlined three times: Shall—had to—could—musn't.

"You go on ahead," said Brielach. "I must lock up."

"No, I'm staying here."

"Can I leave Wilma with you then?"

"No, take her with you."

"As you like. Put the key under the mat when you go. But I think it's mean of you. Oh. . . ." He had put on his self-important money face again. Martin did not answer. He let Brielach go and remained sitting on the floor. Outside on the stairs he heard Frau Borussiak talking to Wilma and to Brielach and then they all went down the stairs together. Now he was alone and Frau Borussiak would not sing any more. But perhaps she had only gone to the dairy to fetch *yoghourt.* Herr Borussiak always ate *yoghourt.*

Other boys had a better life. Poske's mother was always at home, knitting and sewing, and she was never out when Poske came back from school. The soup was ready, the potatoes cooked and there was even a pudding. Frau Poske knitted pullovers, stockings with pretty patterns, socks and dresses, and there was an enlarged photograph of Poske's father on the wall. It was a big enlargement, almost as big as his own father's portrait in the hall. Poske's father had been a sergeant, a laughing sergeant with an Iron Cross ribbon on his chest. Behrendt's uncle and Grebhake's new father, even Welzkam's uncle, were good—not like Uncle Leo. They were almost like real fathers. Uncle Leo was the meanest, and Uncle Albert was a real uncle, not one who united with his mother. Brielach was the worst off, even worse than himself. Brielach had to calculate, had a bad uncle, and Martin prayed in his despair: "Let things be better for Brielach. Life is too difficult for him." Brielach's mother was IMMORAL, but he derived no benefit from her immorality. Behrendt and Welzkam,

through IMMORALITY, had at least good uncles and orderliness: the breakfast egg, slippers and the newspaper. But IMMORALITY did not benefit Brielach. He had to calculate. "Let things be better for Brielach," he prayed. "Better—life is too difficult for him." Calculate, calculate—and Leo did not pay for the margarine, or the egg, or the bread, and the midday meal was too cheap. Brielach was in a bad way. It was really important what he did, but when he did something important did he have to put on that censorious face? He had felt like eating a slice of bread and margarine, but now he was ashamed that he had eaten any. Let things be better for Brielach. . . . He remembered what Grandmother paid when he went with her to Vohwinkel's Wine Restaurant. He had once looked at the bill—18.70 marks. He took Brielach's sheet of paper and read on the debit side: Dentist 900 marks.

On the credit side stood:	Household Exs.	150?
	Cash	100?
	Advance	???
	Balance	???

A jumble of figures all over the paper, little division sums—100: 500 x 40 (Margarine), Bread—vinegar—an illegible scribble and then quite legible: per week to date twenty-eight marks. New rate?

He sat down again. Grandmother had given the waiter 18.70 marks: the rustle of a cheque being torn out, and he began to be afraid because MONEY was closing in on him, taking shape and imposing itself: twenty-eight marks per week, and 18.70 for a dinner. Let things be better for Brielach.

A car drove into the joiner's yard and he heard at once that it was Albert. There was a cry of: "Martin!"

Frau Borussiak came up the steps. She had only been to the dairy to buy *yoghourt* for her husband and honey drops for the children.

Albert called a second time from the courtyard: "Martin!" it was a low, nervous, almost shy call and it upset him far more than a loud shout would have done.

"Ave Maria. . . ." Slow-dropping honey in the voice, good warm and sweet.

Martin stood up, went cautiously to the window and opened it a little. Albert's face gave him a shock. He looked grey, old and

unhappy. The joiner stood at his side. He flung the window open wide.

"Martin," called Albert, "Please come down." Albert's face altered, he smiled, turned red and Martin called down: "I'm coming, I'm coming. . . ." Through the open window he heard Frau Borussiak singing: "Green was the land of my youth . . ." and he had a vision of green: a green Albert, a green joiner, a green car, green courtyard and a green sky. 'Green was the land of my youth'.

"Come, child," called Albert.

Martin stuffed his schoolbooks in the satchel, opened the door, locked it from outside and put the key under the mat. The plane slowly glided past window after window, disappeared behind the ruined wall, now red in the sunset, circled over the church steeple, turned its tail into the green sky, and he could read: ARE YOU PREPARED FOR EVERYTHING. At the same time he heard Frau Borussiak singing: "Green was the land of my youth."

He sighed as he walked down the stairs, and as he crossed the courtyard he heard the joiner say: "The chap's a bloody disgrace." Uncle Albert said nothing. His face was grey and tired and he felt that his hand was hot and sticky.

"Come along," said Albert, "we've a good hour before we call for Heinrich. Is he coming?"

"I think so."

Albert shook hands with the joiner who gave a friendly nod as they got into the car.

Before putting the car into gear Albert laid his hand on Martin's. He said nothing and Martin was still afraid. Not of Albert—but of something else which he did not understand.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

As soon as the apprentices left, the baker put his hand on hers once more. He stood opposite her, pushing over the ready-shaped marzipan rolls which she had to decorate with chocolate, and when she reached for one, he put his hand on hers and she let it remain. Previously she had always shaken it off, laughed and said: 'Don't do that, it's useless.' But now she did not withdraw her hand and was shocked by the effect of this small favour. Dark red flushes rose in the baker's pale face through the flour. A strange, glazed look came into his eyes and suddenly these grey eyes lit up and she was afraid. She tried to withdraw her hand, but the baker held it fast. This was the first time in her life that she had seen a man's eyes really light up. A greenish fire seemed to invade the normally fish-like pupils and the baker's face was now almost puce. She had always considered the word passion ridiculous, but now she knew what it was and knew that it was too late.

Was she really so pretty then? All men had found her pretty and she knew that she still was, although her teeth had begun to work lose. But in no man's eyes had a light suddenly gleamed and no man's face had ever turned puce in colour. The baker bent over her hand and kissed it. Dry, pathetic, rather childish kisses and he murmured something incomprehensible—a deep, fascinating, rhythmic litany of incomprehensible words. Only occasionally did one of them catch her ear: "happy."

My God, was he really so happy that he was allowed to hold her hand? Dry kisses and a heavy warm hand. . . .

The stammered words were as rhythmic as the hymns he sang to love, and she suddenly realized that it was now possible to ask him for an advance. One thousand two hundred marks and such a puce-coloured face. He kissed her arm as far as he could reach across the table, suddenly released her and whispered: "Well, that's enough work for today. We'll close the shop. . . ."

"No, no," she said, seizing a marzipan roll and starting to paint it with chocolate: pretty garlands and a little chocolate hat.

"Why?" he asked. She was surprised at the humility in his voice. "Why—we could go out together."

His eyes lit up and suddenly he laughed and said: "Oh, you!"

"No," she said, "we must go on with the work."

She did not want to be loved so passionately. She was afraid. Gert had never once mentioned love, nor had her husband, laughing Corporal, laughing Sergeant, laughing Sergeant-Major burnt to a cinder somewhere between Saphoroshe and Dnepropetrovsk—not once had he spoken of love, only written about it now and again, but that was different. One could write about it. The word did not exist in Leo's vocabulary and she found this in order. There was love on the films, in novels, on the wireless and in songs. In the films there were men whose eyes suddenly lit up and whose faces, coloured with passion, turned pale or puce-coloured. But she wanted no part of it. "No, no," she said, "let's get on with our work."

He looked at her shyly, took her hand again, and she did not resist. As though a contact had been made, his eyes lit up, his face flushed and once more he kissed her hand, planted kisses up her arm, and muttered rhythmic incomprehensible remarks over them. She caught the words 'hand' and 'happy'.

She shook her head and smiled. It was like in the songs or in the films. The pale, bloated head with the thinning hair, the puce-coloured passion, the greenish happiness and the bitter-sweet odour of melted cooking chocolate, which had to be thick so that it would obey her pencil.

She preferred the flat baked confectionery as large as plates which had a big surface to paint—sand-coloured, freshly-baked dough on which she could paint flowers, shrubs, animals and fishes. The colour was the same as the egg noodles in Bamberger's factory; yellow, ever such clean noodles, deep blue packets and pillar-box red coupons.

Her skill, too, aroused his admiration—her inventive talent for making pretty ornaments and light round chocolate balls on the yellow confectionery. Little windows with curtains. . . .

"You're really an artist, you know."

The upstairs room was empty since his assistant had deserted him. A big room, running water in the corridor and a clean,

newly-tiled lavatory. A roof garden with flower boxes and no neighbours. The Rhine a stone's throw away—ships' funnels, impetuous sirens and bright pennants on the horizon.

His hands trembled as he now cut the large crisp pastry: sand-coloured squares which she decorated with a chocolate border and motifs before they were filled with cream and laid on top of each other. On these she painted little houses, smoking funnels, shop windows and a garden hedge.

"Charming," he cried and his eyes lit up again.

Delicate curtains, bow-shaped aerials, telephone wires, sparrows, clouds and an aeroplane. . . .

"Oh, you're a real artist, you know."

Another minute and perhaps she would not have to pay any rent and next door was a little box-room which could be cleared for the boy. Biscuit tins, cardboard advertising figures, the pale blue rusk boy and the silver cat which drank cocoa. Torn flour sacks lay about and tin boxes of sweets. And the tiny windows—she could already see pretty curtains at them—and a view over the park and the Rhine.

More stutterings of happiness over her hand. But he liked children, would like to have some of his own and she did not want any more children. Pale, shy urchins would play on the roof garden, children with heavy white delicate hands—and Heinrich, an apprentice in three years time. She saw him coming home covered with flour and in the morning he would go on the bread round, placing crisp fresh rolls in paper bags outside the villa gates, or put them in the linen bread sacks.

The baker took little cakes, laid them on rice paper and spooned out the creamy yellow icing, placed the painted half carefully on top and held the finished article up to the light.

"Yes, you should have been an artist."

New teeth, thirteen new snow-white teeth which would not wobble. . . .

"My wife does not mind if you have the room," he said softly. "I've discussed it with her."

"What about the children?" she asked.

"She's not very fond of children, but she'll get used to them."

The horsewoman with the grim smile; brown corduroy jacket and the song of the little trumpeter marching onward—

simple thoughts had inspired her to give her consent. The 'little doll' in the house, who lived rent free, could take over the kitchen work. She would get her board and lodging and a small wage and she herself would be at least free of her husband's attentions. He was already threatening to divorce her for withholding his conjugal rights. But she smiled coldly when he mentioned a divorce. She owned the house while he owned the bakery and he was a capable baker.

"Let's leave things as they are and each go our own ways."

Obviously the deliveries to the monastery would cease when the 'little doll' came to the house. Someone else would deliver bread, cakes and rolls for the religious feasts. But would not the 'little doll' make enchanting cakes for nothing, pretty chocolate decoration to delight the children. Pastry and picture book in one without extra cost.

"The way is free," said the baker, and now without contact there was a greenish glitter in his eyes.

Dark glasses and a deck chair on the tin roof and evenings at the river baths. She stood there dreaming, with the chocolate pencil in the air, and suddenly the light went out. Above, through the cellar windows, two bright shafts of sunlight turned the timber roof to gold, but below everything grey, many-toned darkness. . . . She saw the baker standing by the light switch: grey apron below the yellow shafts, grey face and glittering eyes. Little green points now moving slowly towards her.

"Put the light on," she said.

He came closer. Short sinewy legs and the bloated face. . . .

"Put the light on," she repeated. "The boy's coming."

The baker stood still.

"Yes," she said. "I'll move into the room, but now put on the light."

"Just one kiss," he said humbly. "Happiness—hand—only a kiss . . ." and then, with bowed head, the hymn-like stammer, an incoherent song of praise to love.

"Just one kiss."

"Not today," she said. "Put on the light."

"Tonight then," he suggested.

"All right," she said wearily. "Put on the light."

He shuffled quickly back to the switch and the light came

on, dimming the sharpness of the sunbeams, and colours stood out from the grey and black hatching: the savage yellow of the lemons on the table and the red of the glacé cherries.

"At nine o'clock this evening then," he said, "in the ice-cream bar down by the Rhine."

Bright fairy lights in the darkness, ships with their navigation lights on, songs from the river bank where hordes of young people were playing guitars and banjoes. The "Harry Lime" melody in the green darkness. Oh, Johnny. Cold ice-cream in tall silver beakers with cherries and cream on top.

"Yes," she said, "I'll be there at nine o'clock."

"Oh, you," he whispered.

He went on working, cutting squares from the big pastry round while she decorated them. Chocolate colours on sandy yellow. Fairy lights, trees, stools and beakers of ice cream. . . .

There was a bath, too, upstairs; pale pink tiles, a shower and a geyser. Cleanliness at no cost and warmth in the winter. . . . And thirteen new snow-white teeth.

He garnished the cherry tarts, the pineapple tarts for Andermann's birthday, filled the icing bag and handed it to her. More kisses on her arm, on her hand. She pushed him away with a shake of the head and painted on the cake a 50 with a laurel wreath, garlands and the name Hugo in snow white above the cherries. Flowers on the sand cakes—roses, tulips, marguerites, marguerites, tulips, roses. . . .

"Enchanting," he cried.

He took the cakes upstairs and she heard him laughing in the shop, heard the horsewoman taking the finished confectionery. "More," she said, "more of them. They seize them out of my hands." And the cash register clinked.

He came back with a smile, cut more squares, handed them to her, and from the shop came the murmur of voices, the ding of the cash register and the horsewoman's voice saying: "*Auf wiedersehen.*" The iron door rattled and she heard the little girl's voice shouting excitedly: "Sugar, sugar." She threw down her pencil and ran into the storeroom. Sacks of flour, a small barrow and cartons stood in the half light. She picked up the little girl, kissed her and popped some marzipan from her pocket in her mouth. Wilma, however, freed herself, ran to the baker and screamed as she had never screamed before: "Papa!" and the

baker took Wilma in his arms, kissed her and gave her a pick-a-back round the room.

In the doorway a pale, handsome, deadly serious face which now hesitantly began to smile. The face of the laughing Corporal, the laughing Sergeant, the laughing Sergeant-major.

"But why are you weeping?" asked the baker, who had come in, his hands full of cakes.

"Why am I weeping? Can't you understand?"

He nodded shyly, went over to the boy, took him by the hand and drew him close.

"Now everything will be different," said the baker.

"Perhaps," she said.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE door to the swimming baths was closed and the last entry on the black board showing the heat of the water was 12.9 : 55°. Nella knocked, but no one stirred inside, although she could hear men talking. She went round the cabins, climbed over the wooden fence and stood in the shade of the last cabin. The bathing attendant sat outside his glass veranda watching the workmen repairing the wooden grating in the shower rooms. Nails were pulled out of damp, squeaking wood and the new duckboards lay on the concrete step leading to the veranda. The attendant was packing his stocks in a case: tins of skin cream, suntan oil, rubber animals, bright water balloons, and swimming caps which he folded carefully and wrapped in cellophane. A pile of cork lifebelts lay beside him. He had the face of an old physical training instructor, with an ape-like melancholy in his eyes. His slow, hesitant movements were also reminiscent of a monkey who knows that he is doing something pointless. A little pile of skin cream tins fell from his hands, rolled all over the place and the bathing attendant bent down slowly to pick them up. His bald patch could be seen over the edge of the table, disappeared for a moment until he raised himself, breathing stertorously, with the retrieved tins.

The workmen were replacing the old duckboards with new ones. Blue, gleaming screws were put in and an odour of stagnant water rose from the old boards.

The water was green and the sun was shining and when Nella emerged from the shadow of the cabin into the light the attendant gave a start. Then he smiled, opened the window, and waited for her to approach. Before she could say anything, he shook his head with a smile and said: "The water's too cold really,"

"How many degrees?"

"I don't know, I haven't tested it. No one comes here any more."

"I'd like to try it," said Nella. "See how many degrees it is."

He hesitated. but she turned on her smile and he immediately rummaged about in a drawer until he found a thermometer. The two workmen repairing the boards looked up, returned to work and poked the black slime out of the grooves with their punches. Slippery rot, sweat, filth, water and sediment left by the summer bathers.

Nella went with the attendant to the pool. The water level had sunk, and there was a small green line along the concrete wall.

The attendant walked to the three-feet mark, threw the thermometer on a string into the water. He turned to Nella and smiled.

"I want a costume," said Nella, "and a towel."

He nodded and glanced at the slowly rising thermometer. He had the shoulders of a physical training instructor, a gymnast's muscles and an athletic neck.

Some people were sitting on the café terrace over the way. White coffee pots between green branches and a waiter carrying trays of cakes: white layers of cream on bright yellow pastry. A little girl climbed over the fence which ran in front of the café terrace. The child came across the grass to Nella and a woman cried in the distance: "DON'T GO TOO NEAR."

Nella gave a start. She watched the child as it slowed down its speed and approached hesitantly.

"Can't you hear me?" shouted the mother. "DON'T GO TOO NEAR."

"Fifteen degrees," said the attendant.

"Well, that's all right," replied Nella.

"It's up to you."

She returned slowly to the veranda with the attendant. A man came towards them carrying the door of No. 9 cabin.

"It wants new hinges," he said.

The attendant nodded.

He handed her an orange bathing suit, a white rubber cap and a bath towel. She left her bag with him and went into the cabin. It was very silent and she was afraid. She could no longer recapture her dream. Rai never came, no longer came in the guise she wanted him. Dream rooms were cleared, houses sold, streets in which she had lived in her dreams ceased to exist. The

film track was torn and the pictures revolved flat into the horizon which drew her towards it like bath water disappearing down the drain. A gurgle like the final cry of a drowning man, a last sigh and the stuff of which her dreams were made had disappeared, had been washed away. Something remained, not unlike the odour of the bathroom. Warmth, slightly musty, the smell of cheap scented soap, the little trace of escaping gas, the ill-treated shaving brush standing on the glass shelf and it was time to open the window. Outside awaited her the stark lighting of a travel film without atmosphere or subtleties: murderers had become salaried go-getters giving lectures on poetry and had forgotten the war. "DON'T GO TOO NEAR, CAN'T YOU HEAR ME?" shouted the mother outside and Nella could hear by her voice that her mouth was half full. Cream cakes muffled her maternal warning: a sticky masticated lump of *millefeuille*. But a moment later the voice was shrill and unhampered: "TAKE CARE! TAKE CARE!"

It reached Nella like the final belch of the water vanishing down the drain. The flavour of artificial memory—and Gäseler's voice, his hand, the deadly boredom of his presence. So that is what murderers looked like: Fumblings at the wheel, a trace of army officer's club lechery in the voice, the masterful driving of the car. The cream cakes had been swallowed at last and the mother's voice rang out: "DON'T BE SO ROUGH."

The bank had not yet been swept and everywhere lay the rusty tops of lemonade bottles with jagged edges, and Nella went back, put on her shoes and ran to the pool to get warm. The little girl stood between the terrace and the edge of the pool and over the way the mother, a beflowered mass, leant over the balustrade, keeping her eye on the child.

The steps down to the water were slippery and covered with slime. In the distance, above the treetops behind the café, Nella could see the roof of Schloss Brernich, sporting the flag of the Christian Culture Association: a golden sword, a red book and a blue cross on a white ground. The wind was blowing from the south and the flag trembled slightly beneath a clear blue sky.

She took off her shoes, lay on the grass bank, went down slowly to the water, dipped her hands and splashed herself. It did her good and it was not as cold as she had anticipated. She plunged deeper into the water up to the knees and thighs; the bathing costume became sodden with water and the coolness

trickled between her skin and the costume. She bent slowly forward, dived and swam away with powerful strokes. She laughed softly to herself because it was doing her so much good and she found pleasure in cleaving the calm, green water. The bathing attendant stood at the three-feet mark, shading his eyes with his hand watching her. She waved as she turned for the shore and he waved back. The little girl behind her on the lawn had hardly taken a pace forward before the beflowered mass screamed: "DON'T GO SO NEAR."

The child obediently withdrew its right foot. Nella turned over on her back and swam more slowly. Now she felt quite warm. The hired bathing costume smelled slightly of seaweed. In the sky an invisible aircraft trailed a broad white streamer behind it. A flimsy sinuous trail which expanded and closed. She could not see the plane. Nella tried to imagine the pilot. Crash-helmet and a small, sad, hard-bitten face. She tried to imagine herself in the cockpit. Tiny lakes below, pin-head, fingernail or wrist-watch size, ruffled green expanse between dark forests. Could he see her? He was flying slowly and with obvious effort trailing his heavy streamer behind him—a yellow, unravelled tail against a bright blue sky. He wallowed through the deadly monotony of the blue sky until he disappeared behind the trees. His streamer grew smaller and above Schloss Brernich, over which he had flown, the sky was now empty. But the flag flew there, permanent and proud, fluttering gently in the wind—a golden sword, a red book and a blue cross on a white ground cleverly interwoven to form an attractive symbol.

The members of the conference were now drinking coffee after their meal, shaking their heads in admiration at Gäseler's lecture and maintaining what could now safely be maintained: EVERYTHING IS NOT YET LOST.

Nella swam slowly for the bank on her back. She tasted the bitterness of the stagnant drops which trickled down her face from her cap and almost involuntarily she laughed softly to herself because the water did her so much good. From the forest the mail van's trumpet echoed: artificial posthorn notes on a number of stops. She reached the bank still smiling to herself, climbed out of the water and tried to spot the plane which had disappeared behind the woods in a sudden dive. The attendant grinned at her in recognition as she passed his veranda on the

way to her cabin. There was a smell of decaying summer in the damp wood. White mould between the grooves turning to green below, where the dampness was greater. The yellow paint on the cabin wall had peeled. On a sound patch the size of a plate was written: *To love a woman is more wonderful—for a woman.* Intelligent, educated handwriting, a mixture of strength and tenderness, a handwriting which wrote below essays on William Tell: *Inadequate, Good* or *Satisfactory.*

"DON'T GO SO NEAR," screamed the voice outside, the mouth now full of cream cakes. "How many times have I told you?"

Nella paid the attendant, smiled at him and the man grinned back as he took the wet suit, the cap and the bath towel.

Outside the mail van driver sounded his hooter—gay artificial posthorn notes. Nella waved to the driver and ran towards him.

The conductor waited. He had opened his box of tickets.

"Brunn," she said.

"Centre of the town?"

"No—the Ringstrasse."

"One mark thirty."

She gave him one fifty and said: "Keep the change". The conductor closed the door, pressed a button on the steering wheel and blew his horn once more before he drove away.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"EVERYTHING's going to be quite different," said Albert.

He looked at Martin and seemed to expect an answer, but the boy remained silent. The change in Albert's face disturbed him because he did not know if it was the result of his playing truant; nor did he know whether Albert's question referred to his playing truant.

"Everything's going to be quite different," he repeated. And since he obviously expected an answer, Martin asked shyly: "What?"

But Albert pulled up at the church, got out and said: "We can give Bolda a lift."

Martin knew that Albert was distressed if he did not come home punctually and he now felt very guilty that he had made him waste four hours looking for him in vain. He sensed the power he had over Albert and this knowledge did not make him happy but uncomfortable. It was different in the case of boys who had fathers. Fathers never worried, never looked ill if their sons came home late. They received them in silence, gave them a thrashing or sent them to bed without their supper. That was hard but inevitable and Martin did not want to be thrashed by Albert, but something else which he could not express or put into words. There were words which seemed unclear but conjured up a clear complex of images and thoughts. When he thought of IMMORALITY a door opened on to a room and in his mind's eye he saw all the IMMORAL and MORAL women he knew sitting together. In the entrance stood Brielach's mother where IMMORALITY began and at the end stood Frau Borussiak where MORALITY was at its peak, and near her Poske's mother and Frau Niggemeyer and somewhere in the middle stood his own mother, who had no fixed place in this temple. Mother kept changing places, jumping between Frau Borussiak and Frau Brielach like

the figures in animated cartoons. He looked through the door of the sacristy to see whether the word paternal suited Albert but it did not. The teacher and the joiner were paternal. Glum was almost paternal. Brother was not right and the next image, Uncle, was not quite accurate.

It was nearly five o'clock and he was sick with hunger. At six they were driving to Bietenhahn and he knew that Will was now laying out the rods and testing them carefully; that he had already procured bait and repaired the nets behind the improvised goal in the garden. He had secured the net with washing pegs and run delightedly into the village to invite the boys to play football so that there would be four or five more for a game.

Albert returned from the sacristy with Bolda. Martin got into the back seat and left the place next to Albert free for Bolda. As she got in she caught him by the neck, stroked his cheeks and he felt her cool, moist hand which smelt of scrubbing soap—a small, soft hand, red from cleaning, with white hollows on her fingertips.

"Well, you see, he's turned up," said Bolda. "You mustn't get excited. Just give him a few cuts on his backside. Good for him." She laughed but Albert shook his head and said: "Everything's going to be quite different."

"What?" asked Martin shyly.

"You'll move to Bietenhahn and go to school there. And later to the Gymnasium in Brernich. I'm going to live there too." Bolda wriggled about nervously in her seat: "But why? I shan't be able to bear the house without the boy and without you. Take me along with you. Let me come. I know something about farming."

Albert did not reply. He crossed the avenue carefully, turned into the Hölderlinstrasse, drove past the church and turned off at the Novalisstrasse. Then he circled the park, crossed the Ringstrasse and drove between the harvested fields and through a camp to a little wood. Bolda looked at him out of the corner of her eye. Albert stopped when he reached the edge of the wood.

"Wait here," said Albert. "Stay in the car."

He got out, went back part of the way down the sheep path to the casemate entrance, climbed on to the turf parapet and disappeared among the bushes. Martin saw Albert's head moving above the small bushes towards the spot where a circle had been cleared round a huge oak. Albert stood for a moment by the oak.

and then returned to the casemate, came down at a steeper part of the embankment and climbed up again.

"Don't go away," said Bolda softly, without turning round. "Or take me with you," and Martin was horrified because Bolda was on the verge of tears. "It'll be bad for everyone and for Grandma too. Don't do it."

Martin did not reply. He was watching Albert who was now walking towards the car.

"Come," said Albert to Martin. "Get out, I want to show you something. You can stay here if you like," he said to Bolda. But Bolda got out and they went together down the path which led to the casemate. Martin was ill at ease. He had been here several times with Brielach and in the very bushes into which Albert had disappeared, Grebhake and Wolters had done something IMMODEST. They were half an hour's walk from home and the dried-out moat which ran round the fort was a wonderful playground. They could see the funnels and the pennants of the ships on the Rhine, but not the Rhine itself. Only when one climbed on to the roof of the fort could one see the Rhine, the bombed bridge with the jagged ramp protruding over the river. In the foreground the red tennis courts, the white flannels of the players, and one could sometimes hear a burst of laughter or the voice of the umpire on his white ladder. He did not often come here because Albert was anxious when he strayed too far from home. Now he watched Albert who seemed to have something in mind. While they were in the sunken road it had been quiet, but now below, at the entrance to the casemate, they could hear the noise of children playing on the roof of the fort and a mother cried: "DON'T GO TOO NEAR."

Near the huge black-painted iron door, well-swept concrete steps led to the top. There were the fountain, the rose gardens and the two lime-flanked plateaus and from the surrounding walls there was a splendid view of the Rhine.

Martin ran up the steps but Albert remained by the door and called him back.

Martin looked at Bolda who suddenly said: "I think I'll go back to the car. Are you going to buy any mushrooms?"

"No," said Albert. "I only want to show Martin where his father was once held a prisoner for three days."

"Was it here?" asked Bolda.

Albert nodded. Bolda seemed to shiver and without saying a word she set off down the asphalt path.

Albert drummed on the iron door and Martin read the yellow sign with the black lettering: 'GEORGES BALLAUMAIN, MUSHROOM GROWER.

"Here," said Albert, "they murdered Absalom Billig, the man who painted the portrait of your father."

Martin was afraid. A musty smell came from inside the casemate: horse dung, caves and lack of light. At last the door was opened. A girl with dirty hands appeared, chewing a straw, and when she saw Albert she said, obviously disappointed: "Oh, I thought you were the man with the dung."

Murders only took place in the films, in ghost story books and in the Bible. Cain laid hands on Abel—David killed Goliath. Martin was afraid to follow Albert inside but Albert dragged him along by the hand. Inside semi-darkness reigned. From shafts covered with glass tiles came an unrelieved twilight: weak naked bulbs with cardboard shades illuminated banked-up beds, cut off sheer, with recognizable layers like a cake. A foundation of earth mixed with dung, then a greenish yellow layer of pure horse dung, then darker, almost black earth and from many of the beds peeped the heads of sickly white mushrooms, heads powdered with earth. The beds looked almost like lecterns, mysterious lecterns out of which hateful keynotes grew like the stops of an organ. Stops which seemed to serve dark purposes. A murder had been committed here. Here his father had been beaten, trampled on and so had Albert. THE NAZIS had done it. A word that he could not envisage—a word that in Albert's mouth sounded different from the school version. At school IMMORALITY was considered terrible, but he himself did not find Brielach's mother terrible, only the word she had used. Albert found the Nazis terrible but at school they were portrayed as NOT SO BAD. Other terrors overshadowed the NOT SO BAD NAZIS: the Reds.

The girl with the straw in her mouth had vanished and a man came out of a wooden cabin. He was wearing a grey apron and a beret on his head and grey spirals of cigarette smoke floated into the air from his round friendly face.

"If you could only get me some dung," said the man. "It's almost impossible to obtain horses' dung."

"No," said Albert. "I only just wanted to take a look. I was once imprisoned here with this boy's father and one of our friends was murdered here by the Nazis."

The man stepped back, the cigarette in his mouth trembled, he pushed his beret back from his forehead and said under his breath: "*Mon Dieu.*"

Albert looked to left and right down the passages. Damp, dark masonry with black hollows and in all of them the lectern-shaped beds, organs from which sickly keynotes grew. A light mist curled from them like pain and it seemed to Martin as though wires led from the keynotes into the earth, which could conjure up murder from uncharted depths.

Grey aprons hung on a nail and in the background the girl with the dirty hands was sorting mushrooms in a basket. Behind the glass door of a cabin sat a woman doing the accounts. She had curlers in her hair and was carefully writing numbers and words on little slips.

Overhead a boy drummed on the glass tiles with his stick. The beat came through the shaft as if through a funnel and his mother called in a shrill voice: "TAKE CARE, TAKE CARE."

"He was trampled to death," said Albert, "Trampled to death in one of these passages. The corpse was never found." He suddenly stepped into a side passage, dragged Martin with him and showed him a room where more lecterns with sickly keynotes stood close together. "And here," said Albert in an undertone, "your father was kicked and beaten just as I was. Never forget it."

"*Mon Dieu,*" said the man with the grey apron.

"DON'T BE SO ROUGH," screamed a mother overhead.

Albert stretched out his hand to the man in the grey apron and said: "Thank you. I'm sorry to have disturbed you." He dragged Martin to the open door. The man with the dung, who was waiting in obvious excitement, stood outside. The man with the grey apron rushed up to him with a smile, fiddled with the lock of the trailer attached to a small private car and the two men pushed it inside the casemate. It was full of fresh, steaming horses' dung.

"It was difficult to get it," said the man who had brought it. "We must take care. Someone will report us to the Riding School."

Pushing the trailer, the two men disappeared into the musty-smelling twilight and from inside echoed the words: Riding

School—caution—competition. The girl with the straw in her mouth came out of the main passage and closed the door.

Martin would have liked to climb on to the roof of the fort to see the rosebuds, the fountain and the two plateaus from which there was a view of the Rhine. He would have liked to wander along the old moat where mossy overgrown clumps of concrete lay and ancient poplars and oaks stood round the edges.

But Albert hurried him on, down the steep path past the bushes. Bolda sat on the turf embankment near the car and waved to them.

"DON'T BE SO ROUGH," shouted a mother up there in the park.

"TAKE CARE! TAKE CARE!" shouted another.

"DON'T GO TOO NEAR."

They were silent as they got into the car. This time Bolda sat in the back and from her still emanated a powerful odour of cleanliness. She smelled of fresh water, scrubbing soap and the ammonia which she mixed in her slops.

Martin sat next to Albert and was terrified as he looked at him out of the corner of his eye. Albert seemed to have grown old, quite suddenly, in the course of a single afternoon. He was old, almost as old as the teacher, as old as the joiner and Martin guessed that it had something to do with the Nazis and was ashamed that he himself had such an unclear picture of the word. He knew that Albert never lied and that the NAZIS must have been terrible if Albert said so. But Albert stood alone, opposed to the host of people who maintained that they had NOT BEEN SO BAD.

Albert seized his arm so roughly that it hurt and said: "Never forget it—if you forget it, you. . . ." And Martin said quickly: "No, no, I'll never forget it," and still felt the pain in his arm where Albert had grasped it and felt the picture sink into his memory: damp-smelling twilight, horses' dung, strange lecterns with keynotes like a register leading deep into the earth. Murder had taken place there and the picture sank into him like the memory of Vohwinkel's Wine Restaurant.

"*Mein Gott,*" said Bolda from the back. "Don't take the boy from us. Don't do it. I'll do anything you like and keep the place tidy. But let him stay here."

"Yes," Martin agreed shyly. "Is Brielach coming with us to Bietenhahn?" He pictured Brielach far away from Uncle Leo,

freed of his present burden, next to the butter dish which Will would push over to him and refill with a smile as soon as it was empty. "Does he go with us?" he said persistently. "Is he coming with us or shall I be there alone?"

"I shall be with you," said Albert. "I shall live there and Heinrich can come and visit you as often as he likes. I'll bring him in the car for I shall often have to go to town. There's not enough room out there for two boys and, besides, his mother wouldn't agree. She needs him, you know."

"And Wilma would have to come too, if Heinrich comes," said Martin anxiously. He had a vision of himself in a strange school with strange boys, few of whom knew how to play football.

"Why must Wilma come?"

"Leo hits her when no one's there and she cries when she's left alone with him."

"It can't be done," said Albert. "I can't foist three children on my mother. You won't always be able to be with Heinrich."

Albert changed gear and fell silent. He circled the Evangelical Church and his next words were spoken with the voice of a civil servant giving information. He poured out wisdom without pathos like information given gratis in an utterly colourless voice. "One day you'll have to leave me, your mother and Heinrich—and Bietenhahn isn't the end of the world. It's better for you to be there."

"Are we going to fetch Heinrich now?"

"Later," said Albert. "We'll pick up your things and I must call your mother. We'll pack everything you need for the next few weeks. Come," he said roughly to Bolda. "Don't cry."

But Bolda wept and Martin was afraid—afraid of Bolda's tears. They drove on in silence and the only sound to be heard now was Bolda's weeping.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

NELLA closed her eyes, opened them, closed them, opened them again, but the picture remained—tennis players coming down the avenue in twos, threes and fours. Young heroes in white flannels, they came as though on the producer's orders with instructions not to take their money out of their purses in the shade of the church. Bright, willowy stems swaying in the green half-light of the avenue. A procession of asparagus going its prescribed way—round the church, across the street, and disappearing into the park. Was she crazy or was the tennis club giving a stag party? Was there a tournament in progress? She could hear it. The heavy thud of grey balls on tournament days. Cries, the bright-red hard court, a clink of green glasses in the background, and the bright pennants of invisible ships drawn by an invisible hand from the wings, disappearing with clouds of black smoke on the horizon. She tried to count the asparagus but it was too tiring and she gave up after twenty, and yet more and more of them came. Timeless, slim, white figures swaying down the avenue. The sound of laughter came to her ears and then brighter, hothouse asparagus, alike in every detail—in size, in whiteness and in slimness. They came with a smile from Nadolte's house and she could not possibly tell whether she was dreaming or merely crazy. Nothing helped her to destroy this picture. Albert's grey car did not come and the dream of Rai was no longer effectual—the dream that had so often succeeded. Seeing him come from the tram stop, the gentle grey of the acacia trunks, the broad green stripes and patches of moss at the place where the rain had collected in the potholes—and patches as black as fresh tar, and the greyish green leaves, and Rai coming from the tram-stop. He was tired and desperate, but he came. . . .

The dream was no longer effectual. Asparagus stalks came and they were real: an ageless procession which gave proof of

its reality, for it finally came to an end. The avenue was deserted, an avenue down which Rai no longer came, and to secure the dream there remained only the gold brocade sash and the cigarette. And she seemed to hear the echo, unmasking the lies—-führer, -olk and -atherland, pronounced like a curse upon her head: by-product of the widow factory, not even guilty of being another man's concubine.

The smoke collected between the curtains and the window panes. She was hungry but too disgusted to go to the kitchen, where the crockery had not yet been washed up. Dirty plates, a jumble of cups, the tea-pot full of leaves, half empty jars, cups in which cigarette ends floated in the coffee grounds—everything pointing to a hastily eaten meal and Albert did not come. The house was so empty and silent. No sound even from her mother.

Albert's car had not been standing in front of the door at Bietenhahn. Will, with nails in his mouth and hammer in hand, had erected the improvised goals in the garden and the washing had already dried. A fresh breeze blew from the idyllic valley of the Brer. Green-painted crates full of beer bottles stood outside the door and Albert's mother had taken delivery of a red ham from the butcher's boy: a smiling woman and from the butcher boy's face she could see that he had been given a big tip.

But she had not met Albert's grey car on the way back in her bus. Imitating the sound of a posthorn it gaily neared the city.

Age-old murmurs still rang through her head, -führer, -olk, and -atherland. Decapitated lies pronounced over her head like a curse. They seemed to lie a thousand years in the past. Races long vanished had sacrificed to such idols—burnt, trampled, gassed and clubbed for six uncompleted syllables. . . .

A new crop of fresh asparagus poured from Nadolte's villa into the empty avenue. The last bunch of sprightliness, five identical stalks, white and slender. Tournament reserve players, they swayed round the church, crossed the street and disappeared into the park.

It had been nice to visit Father Willibrord, to hear his pleasant comforting voice, to feed her dreams, just as Schurbigel was sometimes comforting. Compresses of consolation, happiness from the hand of a well meaning barber. It was more pleasant than the monotonous chant of the nuns, their eyes constantly

upturned to the picture of the Crucified Saviour. Eternal prayer, made possible by Albert who left the nuns time to pray by doing their accounts and figures for them. For this work he received touching little gifts—nun-baked cakes, nun-ground coffee, flowers from the garden, bright painted eggs at Easter and aniseed pastry at Christmas. The light in the Lady Chapel where the nuns prayed was dim and oppressive. A blue curtain through which could be seen the black pattern of the grille.

She could no longer make pleasant contact with Willibrord and the idea of ever again having to hear Schurbigel was a torture. Gone the scented dusk and all that remained was the naked light which had illuminated Gäseler's profile. Intelligent, ready-made goods which could always be changed. Murderers were neither gruesome, nor terrifying; they afforded no substance for dreams or for highbrow films. They were cast for travel films; flat light was their perquisite and they were fumblers at the wheel. The echo rang once more in her ears—unmasked by the acoustics of the baptistery, which retained the initial consonants, three 'f's', as tribute for the lie. Decapitated syllables was all they gave back.

A child was now playing in the avenue. A red scooter and a young, fair-haired boy flitted from tree to tree. No new asparagus.

She gave a start when someone knocked on the door.

"Come in," she said mechanically.

She knew what would happen as soon as she saw Bresgote's face. The death she had once seen in Scherbruder's face lay in this face.

The effect of her smile was returned to her from this face like a boomerang.

"Yes," she said, "yes. What is it?"

"I'm Bresgote," said the man. "I've been waiting in the other room for Albert."

She remembered that she had seen his face before. "Haven't we met?" she asked.

"Yes—on Midsummer Eve."

"Oh, of course," said Nella.

He drew closer and the death in his face grew sterner; her smile had been a bull's eye.

"You've only to say the word and I'll kill Gäseler."

"Would you really do that?"

"Yes, I would. At once."

"Gäselr. But why?"

Did desperadoes have to be unshaven? Bristles raked her throat and she tried to spare him what could only be a disappointment, but she could not keep back her tears. He kissed her passionately, dragged her over to the bed and as she slipped sideways her head hit the ventilator button and the soft flapping whirr of the fan drowned Bresgote's strange sobs. Children in tumbledown garages tried like this to free themselves from fear and death and never called it love.

"Go away," she said. "Please go!"

"Can I see you again?" he said, still sobbing.

"If you like—but later."

She kept her eyes closed, heard him go and felt for the button of the ventilator to turn it off. But the silence made her nervous and she turned the fan on again. An odour of Bresgote had remained on her cheek—a salty reek, a mixture of brandy and tobacco. She was a by-product of the widow factory, who had promised eventually to save an unshaven desperado from death.

Albert's car pulled up outside the door and never had her boy Martin's voice sounded so clear and alien as it did now. He rushed into Albert's room, Bolda laughed, Bresgote spoke and then Albert arrived, and suddenly there were a few moments' silence. Then she heard Bresgote say what Albert had long since read on his face: "Frau Bach—Nella is back."

Table tennis balls were tried out in the other room—a light pitter-patter on the floor.

"Shirts!" cried Martin. "I must take some shirts and my school things."

"Leave them," said Albert. "I'll bring them all later."

More tennis balls pattering on the floor, a light tap on the door and Albert's angry voice: "Stay here, don't go in. Let your mother sleep. She'll come later."

"For sure?"

"Yes," said Albert. "She'll come later."

The patter of balls on the plywood table, bouncing between ceiling and floor, and then the noise died away through the hall, and she heard it from the garden, heard Bresgote say to Albert: "So you're not going to do anything?"

"No," replied Albert.

Albert's car drove off, vanished in the distance and the silence returned. She was grateful to Albert that he had gone and had not allowed Martin to visit her. A soft rattle of crockery came from the kitchen. Bolda was piling the dirty dishes in the sink. She was singing, not too loud but terribly out of tune: "Freed is the world from death."

Rushing water and a great noise of tinkling crockery drowned her song. But then the words came through: "Trust yourselves to Him."

Cupboard doors creaked on their hinges, keys were turned in locks and Bolda shuffled slowly up the stairs to her room.

Now, for the first time in this silence, she heard the steps of her mother, pacing up and down like a prisoner in her room, and then the gentle whirr of the fan came to her ears. She switched it off and it seemed to her that the silence forced the tears from her eyes. Nella wept bitterly.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THE appointment in the garden café was postponed and it was decided that the move could take place at once. The transport company had sent a van but it proved far too large. Hardly a fifth of the space was needed to transfer Frau Brielach's wobbly possessions to the baker's house. Her furniture, draped with cloths and disguised with coloured paper, had looked 'quite nice' in the room but it did not stand up to the eyes of critical neighbours who watched the sudden removal with suspicion. A margarine box full of toys, Heinrich's bed—a door nailed to lumps of wood, covered with an old-sea-wrack mattress and adorned with the remains of a curtain—two stools and the table on which Gert, Karl, Leo had rested their elbows. A plank had served for a clothes cupboard; wedged between the kitchen cupboard and the wall and fitted with hooks, it was protected against dust and splashes by a wax cloth strip. The only decent objects were Wilma's little cot, a present from Frau Borussiak who could have no more children of her own, and the mahogany-coloured kitchen sideboard, only two years old. The wireless was in Leo's room and he had locked his door. For eight years this room had been Heinrich's home. It had been cleaned, whitewashed, painted and repaired several times but now it revealed its poverty and Heinrich was horrified. Torn from their moorings, these objects looked like a heap of loot which it was hardly worth while transporting. The baker stood nearby directing the workmen, who could scarcely contain their mockery at such rubbish.

"Careful," said the baker as one of the men lifted up the carton with the cups and plates, "there are breakables in that." Doubt could be seen on his face and he seemed to be wondering whether he had paid too high a price. This sudden removal, two children and the scandal of having such rubbish transported to his fine house.

Heinrich was told to keep Wilma quiet. She had not ceased screaming since the strange men had removed her box of toys. Heinrich held her tightly by the left hand, clutching all his possessions in his right. He could quite easily have put his books, prayer books, leather folder and notebooks in his school satchel. His father's pamphlet: "All the Motor Mechanic needs to know for his Master's Certificate"; Father's photo and eight picture books: *Phantom, Tarzan, Till Eulenspiegel* and *Blondie;* the photo of a woman who had once weighed two hundredweight, the Villa Elisabeth, the tufa grotto, a pipe-smoking man in the window and a vineyard in the background. . . . He was not only shocked at the poverty revealed on the removal of the furniture and when he packed up his things, but also at the speed at which the room was emptied. The whole thing had taken only forty minutes and nothing remained except the patches on the wall where the paper had not faded. The places where Father's photo and the Communion picture had hung, where the sideboard and the improvised clothes cupboard had stood, were surrounded by a light frame of dust—dark yellow bits of wallpaper. Mother swept up the dirt, broken crockery, bits of fluff, paper and a mysterious black substance that seemed to ooze from the cracks in the floorboards. The baker looked distrustfully at the age of the dusty rim round the dark yellow patches of wallpaper. Frau Brielach suddenly began to sob, throwing down her dustpan, and the comforting gestures of the baker, caressing her shoulders and neck, were far from convincing. She picked up the dustpan again and took up the broom; Wilma continued to yell for her vanished box of toys. "Go on ahead with her," said the baker. "Take the pram."

The baker's face was uneasy and distorted, as though he too was shocked at the suddenness with which the removal had taken place. At half-past five he had been allowed to kiss her hands and a little later part of her arm, and now, just before seven, the removal was almost finished. The workmen below were sitting on the tail-board of the truck, which was only a quarter full, and whistling to show that they were ready to leave.

Vague memories came to Heinrich's mind of the only move he had experienced: cold, rain and a pram, his mother cutting slices of bread, dirty army trucks, an army loaf which had fallen off a provision van. . . . His most vivid recollection was the pale

green army mess tin which Gert had later lost at work and his terror of the American bread, which was as white as paper. They had lived there now for eight years—an incredibly long time. He knew every treacherous spot of the flooring where one had to take care when scrubbing not to tear the cloth on the splintering wood; the awkward spots where the beeswax, which was used at Leo's request, would be hopelessly absorbed and others where it kept its polish and had to be dabbed on thinly. The patch on the wall was the place where Father's picture had hung. . . .

"All right, get a move on, boy," shouted the baker.

Heinrich took a few steps along the corridor but turned back and said: "Don't forget that Leo's got our wireless, the cups, the coffee pot and the tin opener."

"No, no," said his mother and he could tell from her voice that he must look upon the radio, coffee pot and tin opener as lost, as well as Mother's dressing-gown which also hung in Leo's room: a pattern of wild roses on a black background.

Frau Borussiak stood on the stairs and wept. She kissed and hugged him, kissed and hugged Wilma, and sobbed gently. "My dear boy, I hope things will go well for you. . . ."

The joiner stood nearby, shaking his head and said: "From one sin to another."

Behind the closed door Mother screamed: "You wanted it, you wanted it, not I." And the baker's deep voice muttered something which did not sound very convincing. The transport men down below whistled harder and Heinrich went to the front corridor window and looked down. The truck resembled an open belly—the belly of a hideous monster which had swallowed an old clothes-dealer's stock; filthy, tattered objects, rickety furniture, a grey clutter of rubbish and on top his bed, turned upside down—a grey-painted door whose place of origin was now revealed as it lay there: FINANCE ADMINISTRATION, ROOM 547. Gert had brought it one evening with four lumps of wood cut from a beam. Gert had brought nails and a hammer and had made the bed within five minutes. 'Isn't it wonderful?' he said. 'Try it.' He had tried it and until half an hour ago had found it wonderful.

The transport men sat on the tail-board, smoked and catcalled up to the window.

'From one sin to another,' the joiner had just said, and

Heinrich remembered the word his mother had used to the baker two weeks ago, the same word that stood on the corridor wall, and he smiled contemptuously at the idea that one could also call that uniting. Mother came out of the room with the dustpan and brush and for the first time he saw on her face what so far he had seen only on other women's faces—dark round red blotches and her smooth black hair tousled. The anger had left the face of the baker, who stood next to the joiner, and once more he looked the picture of good nature.

Heinrich was afraid of good-natured people. They were like complacent teachers upon whom one could not rely. They were good-natured at first—for a long time, in fact—then they grew angry, and at last they were embarrassed and remained so. Swaying between good nature and anger they suddenly looked like actors who had forgotten their parts.

"Get a move on, you young rascal," cried the baker. "Take the pram and get going."

"Why do you shout at the boy like that?" yelled his mother. Weeping bitterly, she put her head on Frau Borussiak's bosom. The joiner took the baker aside and Mother said gently: "Go on, Heinrich, go."

But he was afraid to go downstairs. Everyone was standing in the corridor. The Bresgens stood there, making unflattering comments on the furniture. The proverb, 'Like owner, like goods,' had gone the rounds from door to door, from the dairywoman to the retired Savings Bank official, in whose mouth it had assumed the proportions of a sentence. Now all of them stood below, whispering mockingly, and he was frightened to pass them. In the old days when he had gone to the Black Market the retired official had always been nice, but for a long time he had not greeted Mother, just as Karl no longer greeted her. Incidentally the dairywoman was IMMORAL and the Bresgens, who were the landlords, were, according to the joiner, PIGS.

The only one who could have helped him now would have been Father. Father would have taken him by the arm and gone downstairs with him, past the dairywoman, the retired official and the pigs. He thought of Father as though he had really known him and he found it difficult not to weep. "Yes, yes," he heard the official say, "the old truths still hold good today. 'Like owner, like goods.' "

He hated them all and he smiled contemptuously, but his hatred and contempt were not strong enough to keep back his tears, and that was the last thing he wanted: to pass them, weeping. Evermore hateful their junk now seemed on the truck. The sun shone, groups of people collected, and among the crates and the rubbish could be clearly read on the grey door: FINANCE ADMINISTRATION, ROOM 547. Thank goodness, Wilma had at last stopped screaming. But the transport men whistled, spat out their cigarette butts in the road and he felt DAMNED at the window between the weeping women, the baker's cowardice and the naked bowels of poverty exposed on the truck. It was difficult to hold back his tears, but he held them back and time stood still for him as for the DAMNED. Below, the PIGS were muttering with the dairywoman, behind him, the joiner whispered to the baker. One could hear the head-shaking in the joiner's voice and suddenly an audible word: IMMORAL. At last the ice had broken and it was a good thing that it had broken.

He gave a start when he heard the hooting of Albert's car above the noise and he could not believe his eyes when the old grey Mercedes drove into the courtyard. He saw it but did not believe it and thrust the idea back into the recesses of his mind. He was DAMNED between the pigs and Mother up there with the blotches on her face. The transport men cat-called and the driver got into his cabin and hooted vigorously. Obviously he had stuck a match in the hooter button for it kept wailing: PERPETUAL sign of DAMNATION, and below the pigs tittered.

Albert ran quickly up the stairs and he recognized his footsteps, recognized Martin's voice calling: "Heinrich, what's going on?" But he did not turn round and held Wilma back, who wanted to slip away and run to Martin. He did not move when Albert touched his shoulder. He could not believe that he would not have to go down the stairs alone. He managed to keep back his tears, then he turned round quickly, looked at Albert's face and saw at once that Albert UNDERSTOOD, the only one who could understand such a thing, and he watched Martin closely as he went over to the window and looked down at the truck, watched to see how Martin would react to this sudden ultimate revelation of their poverty. And he was surprised and relieved to notice that Martin DID NOT UNDERSTAND and he realized that Martin was still a child, one of those of whom it was said: IF YE BE NOT AS

THEY. It was good that Martin did not understand, just as it was good that Albert understood.

Martin was very much surprised and said: "Are you moving?"

"Yes," said Heinrich, "we're moving over to the baker's today."

And now Martin understood and they both thought of the word. They looked up to where Albert was now talking to Mother, the baker, Frau Borussiak and the joiner, and they did not find it ridiculous that Brielach's mother wept on Albert's chest, pulled herself together and walked down the stairs, arm in arm with Albert.

"Come," said Heinrich. "Let's go down."

Martin took Heinrich's satchel and Heinrich took Wilma in his arms and step by step, as he slowly went downstairs, he looked the dairywoman straight in the face, looked straight into her large, dark mocking eyes, and he also looked at the Bresgens, four pigs standing close together. Round, fat faces which seemed to be silently chewing the cud . . . and he looked past the shoulders of the dairywoman at the man with whom she was IMMORAL. His name was Hugo and he stood chewing in the background and had just pulled the tail of a sprat out of his mouth. The PIGS lowered their eyes, the dairywoman stood fast and the retired official even whispered: "Aren't you going to say good-bye to me, Heinrich?" But he did not answer and behind him he heard the footsteps of the other members of the triumphant procession. Albert, who seemed to be laughing with Mother, Frau Borussiak with the joiner and, lastly, the baker. The dairywoman jeered: "Looks almost like a wedding, eh?" Hugo went on chewing the cud and put a second golden sprat into his mouth.

He could see already the bright sunshine below coming through the open door and he felt that his thoughts were not really with this triumphal procession but up there, DAMNED between the pigs and the baker's cowardice, He would never forget the sight of the open truck, the feeling of DAMNATION, while below the hooter was stuck at PERPETUAL. Martin had asked him a few times, but he had not replied because he was still up there by the window and all he knew was that Albert had UNDERSTOOD and Martin, too, what both of them had to understand. The look in Albert's eyes, that thousandth of a second, and Martin's understanding at the right moment had rescued him from damnation.

"But tell me," said Martin impatiently. "Are you staying for ever with the baker?"

"Yes," replied Heinrich. "For ever. We're moving over to his house," The transport men were still whistling and courage had now returned to the baker's voice. Courage and self-confidence. "All right, we're coming," he called.

"Come," said Albert, behind him. "Come into the courtyard. You're coming with us and so is Wilma."

He turned in surprise to Mother but she smiled and said: "Yes, it's better like that. You'll come back on Sunday evening with Herr Muchow. By that time we'll have got everything arranged. Thank you very much," she said to Albert, but Albert only nodded and gave her a very strange look. There was a gleam of hope in Mother's eyes. PROMISE, for a moment, lurked in Mother's words and in Albert's eyes and there seemed to be an understanding between them. The thousandth of a second of surprising intuition. And he gave his hand to Mother and Mother kissed Wilma and he followed Albert into the courtyard. Wilma crowed with delight as she saw the grey car.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE truant assistant had not left very much behind him: a pin-up girl on the wall, two pairs of unmended socks, rusty razor blades, a half-used tube of toothpaste, cigarette burns on the edge of the white night table, age-old evening papers in the chest of drawers and cigarette cards: AFRICA AS IT REALLY IS. Zebras grazing in the veldt, giraffes eating the trees, natives in war paint crouching in the bushes hunting lions.

The baker gave orders that Heinrich's bed should remain in the courtyard: lumps of wood nailed to the door and the words: FINANCE ADMINISTRATION, ROOM 547.

"He can have the assistant's bed."

"And what about me?"

"Have you no bed?"

"No."

"Where do you sleep then?"

"With Leo naturally."

"And before that?"

"In a bed which we burnt. It was worn out."

So Heinrich's bed was carried upstairs and she was promised the assistant's bed. It was a white iron bed and almost new.

While the workmen stacked their possessions in the assistant's room, she cleared the little closet which had served as a box-room. Age-old biscuits rattled like stones in tins. She carried everything up into the attic—cartons in which the crumbs of rusks made a gritty noise as they were carried, torn flour sacks, shop window displays from chocolate factories which had gone bankrupt years before, pasteboard with names that had long been struck from the trade register. Enormous bars of chocolate, tin foil kneaded to the size of footballs, white cardboard cooks—smiling cooks waving gigantic spoons bearing the name of some firm which made baking powder, Indian squaws, cut out of tin, offering pralines with a smile, SWEET CHOICE SHERBERT. Bright red cherries in

three-ply wood, green paper fondants and a gigantic tin which still smelt of eucalyptus reminded her of her childhood days when she had coughed during the night. In the room next door Father had sworn and the louder he swore the worse her fits of coughing. And there were the famous pair: the pale blue rusk boy and the silver cat who drank cocoa.

In the bedroom the workmen were stacking her worldly possessions. She heard their laughter, the baker's mild retorts and gave a start when a light yet firm hand was laid on her shoulder—a hand that usually held the cash register handle like the rudder of a ship.

The baker's wife smiled and she looked in vain for any malice behind this smile.

"Make yourself nice and comfortable. Is the boy going to sleep here?"

"Yes."

"Good idea, you must clear all that junk into the attic, but perhaps the kids might like to play with them, eh?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure they'd love to."

The baker's wife selected a huge cardboard bar of chocolate, a toy truck which bore the name of a miller and pointed with a smile to the tin Indian Squaw.

"That ought to please the children."

"It would be wonderful for them."

"Well, take them then."

"Oh, thank you."

"Don't mention it."

Once more a light hand was laid on her shoulder with a friendly, comradely pressure.

"Well, make yourself at home."

"Thank you."

"I hope you'll be happy with us."

"I'm sure I shall."

"I should be only too pleased. *Auf Wiedersehen.*"

"*Auf Wiedersehen.*"

She laid the display cards on top of each other, rolled up the sacks and carried them in bundles into the attic and thought of Martin's uncle. Suddenly, from fear and anger at the baker, she had flung herself without a further thought into the arms of this stranger and, at the very moment she became terrified and wanted

to draw back, she had felt a slight pressure on her arm and for a brief second his cheek had touched her throat. Downstairs in the corridor, before he drove off with the children, he had looked at her as a man does not look at every woman.

She smiled, pulled a torn folding screen aside and gave a start. What she saw was covered with cobwebs, but the vivid colours were quite recognizable; she rubbed her hand over them, freed the three-ply figures of cobwebs. They were painted in the same colour as on the coupons—they were all there. Figures out of the OLD GERMAN SAGAS. Before the war Bamberger had given them to his best customers as calendars. Siegfried was there with his butter-coloured hair, in a green, green apron, aiming his spear at the green, green dragon and looking almost like Saint George. Kriemhild stood at his side, Volker and Hagen were there and the pretty little maiden Giselher, and they were all nailed side by side on a broad brown selvage bearing the words, in yellow ochre: BAMBERGER'S EGG NOODLES.

She had not heard the baker, who now stood behind her touching her shoulder.

"It's all done. Come over and have a look at it. My God, why are you crying again?"

She shook her shoulder free, picked up the big selvage with the three-ply wood figures and carried it past the baker into the assistant's room.

The baker followed her.

"What are you going to do with that?"

"Hang it up," she said with a sob.

"Good Heavens, I'll buy you far better pictures. Lakes," he said timidly, "chapels in the forest, does. . . . I'll buy you everything. You don't want to hang up a thing like that."

"Leave me alone," she said, "I want to hang it up."

Her clothes were already in the assistant's cupboard, the crockery had been put away in the drawers, and Wilma's box of toys pushed under the bed. Wilma's cot was made and everything looked tidy.

"Is the child going to sleep here?"

"Don't you think so?"

"I don't know," she said hesitantly. Placing the advertisement for Bamberger's egg noodles on top of the chest of drawers she said: "That will amuse the children."

"It's trumpery rubbish," he said and turned away as she unpacked her shopping bag.

She brought to light a picture of her husband which she hung over the head of the bed on a spare nail which still bore—like a wreath—a little copper picture hook.

"Over there?"

"Yes," she said. "It stays there."

A lighter came out of her pocket and was banged down on the chest of drawers, then the wrist-watch with the broken leather strap, and she rummaged quickly in Wilma's box of toys and laid the canvas which had once been used on Karl's mess tin beside the wrist-watch.

"Where's my sewing basket?"

"Here," he said, opening a drawer and taking out the sewing basket, and she grabbed it out of his hands, looked for Leo's nail file and laid it next to the canvas cover of Karl's mess tin.

"Go now," she said gently, "and leave me alone."

"I wanted to show you the bathroom and here's the key to the garden."

"For Heaven's sake leave me in peace for a moment."

"Are you going to keep all that old rubbish? I'll buy you a new wrist-watch and the lighter's rusty and doesn't work any more."

"For Heaven's sake go," she said.

He backed towards the door.

She drew the curtains, lay down on the bed with her head at the bottom end so that she could face the laughing Sergeant-major. To her right, gleaming in the dusk, stood Bamberger's OLD GERMAN SAGAS and she looked for her favourite, brown-haired masculine yet gentle volker, with a red cape and a green lyre, who stood next to Hagen. She hardly gave a thought to Leo, hardly gave a thought to her husband, but thought of the stranger whose cheek had for a moment touched her throat, and she knew that she pleased him and that he too was thinking of her. He had understood. He had helped her and she loved him as she had loved no one before. He had held her arm longer than was usual in such a spontaneous embrace. He would return with the children and she would see him. And when the baker came in softly, without knocking, she shouted at him: "Can't you knock? Leave me alone."

He retired shyly, muttered something at the door about the bathroom and the tin roof.

She stood up, locked the door from inside and lay down on the bed. The laughing Sergeant-major was too young: a child, a snotty-nosed boy. The idea of having slept with him seemed almost obscene. The smell of tar at the edge of parade grounds and the deadly earnest sergeant who had bent over her in the bushes, and for the first time had performed 'the other' with her.

Downstairs she heard the shrill laugh of the baker's wife and the baker's voice echoed threatening, almost energetic, in the corridor. He came grumbling up the stairs and rattled the latch of the door.

"Open the door," cried the baker.

She did not answer. She was thinking of the other man, the stranger. Erich and Gert, Karl and Leo sank behind the horizon and she could no longer even visualize the face of the baker although he stood outside her door.

"Are you going to open," he shouted, and she found the threatening note in his voice quite ridiculous.

"Go away," she said quietly. "I'm not opening."

Muttering threats, he made his way down the stairs.

She thought of the stranger and she knew that he would return.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

At first they played with the boys from the village whom Will had invited. The lawn had been cut, the goal posts were in position and they played energetically until Heinrich suddenly called out: "I don't want to play any more." He ran off from the game and joined Albert who was drinking beer on the terrace and reading the papers, but he soon left him and wandered round the house to the wood shed and sat down on the chopping block next to which Will had left his axe.

Here he was alone. Will had gone into the village to confession; Albert was reading the paper and would be some time before he finished it. Wilma was in the kitchen where Albert's mother was baking cakes. Albert's mother kept murmuring old-fashioned culinary proverbs: "Seven things it takes to bake good cakes." She pronounced it slowly and Wilma was supposed to repeat it, but the only words the little girl uttered were 'sugar' and 'egg', and Albert's mother laughed. It smelt warm and sweet, as in the bake house, and a tray full of yellow sponge cakes stood cooling on the window sill.

Then he heard Martin cry: "I don't want to play any more." The village boys went on with the game for a few minutes and then left and Heinrich heard Albert beginning to teach Martin table tennis. The net was secured, the table pushed against the wall and Albert said: "Look, this is how you do it," and then the light, sharp, regular patter of the ball, mixed with the proverbs Albert's mother kept reciting: "Eggs and Malt, Butter and Salt," and Wilma shouted: "Sugar" and "egg" and Albert's mother laughed.

It was all so wonderful: the light regular patter of the tennis ball, Wilma's chuckles, and the kind, gentle voice of Albert's mother. Both Will and Albert were so good. The proverbs sounded so good and beautiful and warm. 'Saffron turns the cakes yellow,' saffron was a good word, which tasted and smelt

good, but all that was for CHILDREN. They could not deceive him. Something was wrong. He knew that the baker was not such a good man as he had originally thought. When Mother had told him that she was going to live with the baker it had seemed WONDERFUL, but now he knew that it would NOT be WONDERFUL. The baker was like the good-natured teacher who always grew angry at the decisive moments, angrier than the others. The baker was not as bad as Leo, and one thing was certain: they would have more money and no rent to pay, etc. . . .

Now he added Leo's nail file to Erich's lighter, Gert's wrist watch and Karl's mess tin cover which had travelled in Mother's sewing basket, and now to the distinguishing odours of Erich, Gert and Karl was added a fourth—Leo's characteristic smell—shaving lotion and beeswax.

Laughter came from the kitchen and a new proverb: "This is the thumb that pulps the plum." Sweet yellow dough was being kneaded and little doggerel verses came like spells from a friendly world: "She picked it up, carried it home and the little girl ate it all up," and Wilma crooned for joy.

Will came, peered into the corner and joined Albert, and Heinrich could hear that they were speaking about him.

"What's the matter with the boy," asked Will, and Albert replied softly, but not softly enough: "Leave him in peace."

"Can't we help him," asked Will.

"Naturally," replied Albert, "but leave him alone now. You can't help him in everything."

Church bells rang out from the village, warm and sonorous, and he knew why the village boys had stopped playing football. Devotions and they had to serve at Mass.

Will called to Martin: "Are you going with them?" And Martin replied: "Yes."

And the noise of the ping-pong ball ceased and Will spoke again to Albert about him and Albert replied: "Leave him now, just leave him. I'm staying here."

The tone of the bass bell was deep and beautiful. Wilma was crooning with pleasure because she had just been given a soft-boiled egg. Everything was wonderful, smooth and round: it was all there, but it was not for him; Something was wrong. The smells, too, were good, a smell of wood and baking and fresh dough, but there was something wrong even with the smells.

He stood up, leant against the wall of the wood shed and looked through the open window of the guest-room. People sat inside drinking beer and eating ham sandwiches, and the young waitress went from the guest-room into the kitchen, but more bread, laid the slices of ham on a plate and popped a piece into Wilma's mouth. Wilma tried it, wrinkled her nose and it was remarkable how her little mouth tried it so seriously; her face suddenly brightened and she chewed the piece of ham and swallowed it. She looked really funny and Albert's mother laughed heartily, and the waitress laughed and he himself had to smile because Wilma looked so funny, but he smiled wearily and realized at this moment that he had smiled wearily, as grown-ups smile when they are worried and are forced to smile all the same.

At this moment the taxi appeared, and he was terrified because he knew that something had happened or was about to happen. Martin's grandmother got out of the taxi, followed by Martin's mother, and Grandmother, with a cigarette in her mouth, ran towards the house, shouting to the driver: "Wait, my friend." Her face was red and angry and she shouted: "Albert, Albert." The guests rushed to the window, the waitress and Albert's mother leant out of the kitchen window and Albert came running out of the house with the newspaper in his hands. He folded it carefully as he went to meet Grandmother with a frown on his face. Martin's mother stood to one side, gossiping with Albert's mother, as though the affair was no concern of theirs.

"So you're doing nothing about it?" Grandmother shouted, flicking her cigarette ash into the air. "But I'm going there. I'll murder him. Are you coming or not?"

"Oh, all right," said Albert wearily, "if you insist."

"I should think so, come, get in."

"All right," said Albert, laying his newspaper down on the window sill. He got into the car and helped Grandmother to get in.

"Are you staying here?" called Grandmother and Martin's mother said: "Yes, I'll wait for you. Bring my suitcase back, do you hear?"

But the taxi was already on the way to the village. The bells had stopped ringing and Albert's mother said to Martin's mother: "Come inside," but the latter nodded and said: "Give

me the little girl." Wilma was handed through the window and Heinrich was very surprised to see Martin's mother take Wilma by the hand and with a smile walk off with her behind the house.

He heard Wilma's laughter and the patter of the ball and everything was good and wonderful, but it was not for him.

Inside, the guests were singing: "German woods, German woods, there's nothing like you in the world". The waitress brought in mugs of beer, Albert's mother stood in the kitchen making potato salad and opening big tins of sausages. Wilma laughed, Martin's mother laughed, and Heinrich was surprised because she suddenly seemed so good to him. Everything and everyone was good but he knew that tonight his mother would unite with the baker. The change over from Leo to the baker was profitable, but rather terrifying.

The yellow post bus arrived and Glum got out, helped Bolda down, and Bolda ran to the open kitchen window and shouted: "As long as nothing happens."

And Albert's mother smiled and said: "What should happen . . . but where on earth are you all going to sleep?"

"I was nervous," said Bolda. "Oh, I can sleep on the old sofa," and Glum, with a laugh, managed to croak out: "Floor, straw," and he went with Bolda to the church to fetch Will and Martin.

"German woods, German woods, there's nothing like you in the world," sang the guests and Albert's mother fished thick sausages out of the tin.

From the terrace Martin's mother shrieked: "DON'T GO TOO NEAR," and Heinrich gave a start when a moment later she laughed shrilly. Her laugh was terrifying and he ran to the back of the house and saw that Wilma had been running towards the duck pond but had now turned back. Martin's mother called him over, took him by the hand and said: "Can you play ping-pong?"

"Not very well," he replied, "I only played it a couple of times."

"Come along then, I'll show you. Would you like me to?"

He said: "Yes," although he did not feel inclined to play.

She stood up, pushed the table away from the wall, tightened the net and picked the bats off the floor.

"Come," she said, "come here." And she showed him how to hit the ball low over the net and how to make his return shots.

Wilma squatted on the floor, crawled about shrieking excitedly when the balls passed overhead, and when one fell near her she picked it up, but never brought the ball to him but always to Martin's mother.

And the whole time he was thinking that his mother was now uniting with the baker, and he considered this even worse, even more IMMORAL than her union with Leo.

The bells rang out joyously, and he knew that in the church the priest was dismissing the congregation with his blessings. Incense, *Tantum Ergo* being sung, and he regretted not being there sitting between the confessional and the door.

He soon managed to drive the ball hard and low over the net and Martin's mother laughed when he managed to beat her defence. She began to play seriously, to count the points, and there was a look of concentration on her face.

It was difficult to keep his eye on the ball and to return her service whilst thinking of the others—of Father, the various uncles and the baker with whom his mother was uniting. Martin's mother was beautiful. She was fair-haired and tall and he liked her now that he could observe her turning suddenly to Wilma during the game, smiling at her, and Wilma's face was radiant when she smiled, and her smile was beautiful, like the smell of the dough, the pealing of the bells, and it COST NOTHING, just as the pealing of bells cost nothing—and yet it was not for him. Leo's characteristic odour came into his mind—shaving lotion, beeswax and Leo's nail file would remain in mother's sewing basket.

He began to play attentively, driving the ball as hard and low as he could over the net and Martin's mother grew flushed in the face from her efforts.

"I shall have to take you seriously, my boy."

They had to stop playing because the others had returned from church. Martin kissed his mother, Glum pushed back the table and Bolda came in with a green table cloth and a tray full of plates. The butter gleamed moist and fresh in the butter dish, and Will said: "Bring some of that plum jam the children like so much," and Albert's mother said: "All right, I'll bring some, but I think you like it as much as the children do."

Will blushed and Glum slapped him on the back and gurgled with a grin: "*Kamerad*" and everyone laughed. Wilma was

allowed to stay up late and during the meal there was an argument as to whom she should sleep with. Everyone said: "With me," except Martin's mother. But when Wilma was asked: "Who would you like to sleep with?" she ran to Heinrich and the boy turned scarlet with pleasure.

More guests had arrived in the restaurant. They called for the waitress and Bolda pushed back her stool, collected the dirty plates and said: "I'll go and give them a hand." Glum went to the stables to fetch straw and to fill a sack, while Will ran sweating through the house looking for blankets.

Heinrich and Martin went up to the bedroom where they were to sleep in the big, broad bed. Wilma would lie between them.

It had grown dark and downstairs in the kitchen Bolda laughed with the waitress, the crockery was washed up and Albert's mother joked with her guests. The red glow of pipes showed that Glum and Will were sitting together on the bench outside the stable.

Martin's mother sat alone on the terrace, smoking and staring into the darkness.

"Get undressed," she called up to the window, "and go to bed."

Martin suddenly remembered Uncle Albert and called down to her: "Where's Uncle Albert?"

"He'll be back soon, he had to go off somewhere with Grandmother."

"Where to?"

"To the Castle."

"What's he doing there?"

Mother was silent for a moment, but then she called out: "Gäseler is there, he's got to talk to him."

Martin fell silent. He remained sitting under the open window and heard Heinrich get into bed and switch off the light.

"Gäseler," he called out into the darkness. "Is he alive then?"

But Mother did not answer and Martin was surprised that he did not feel sufficient interest to ask any more questions about Gäseler. He had never discussed his father's death with Heinrich because the circumstances seemed to him too involved. The whole Gäseler story seemed to him as questionable as all Grandmother's

wisdom—a word, a name which had too often been shouted at him, too often repeated, to cause any more fear.

Worse and closer to him, far clearer, was the other thing that had happened where the mushrooms grew; the man who had painted Father's portrait had been murdered there. Father and Albert had been beaten and tortured by the Nazis—dark and remote now and perhaps NOT SO BAD—but the setting was real, lecterns from which sickly keynotes sprouted, stinking vaults and Albert's face, and the conviction that he was not lying. Albert had rarely spoken of Gäseler.

Below the guests were singing: "There where a hut stands at the forest edge, there where my heart goes at dusk, there where the young does graze, there where a hut stands at the forest edge, there is my home."

He tore himself away from the window seat, climbed carefully into bed and felt Wilma's breath on his shoulder.

He said softly to Heinrich. "Are you asleep?" and Heinrich replied softly but distinctly: "No."

"There is my home, there is my home," sang the guests.

He heard a car pull up outside, and Albert call in a loud and anxious voice: "Nella, Nella," and Mother got up from her stool so quickly that it fell over. Bolda's chatter fell silent in the kitchen and Albert's mother spoke to the guests, and the guests stopped singing, and it was suddenly very quiet in the house. "Something's happened," whispered Heinrich.

A sound of weeping came up the stairs and Martin got up, opened the door and looked out into the small lighted corridor.

Supported by Albert and Bolda, Grandmother came up the stairs and he was terrified to see how old she looked. For the first time she appeared to him really old and never before had he seen her weep. She was hanging on to Albert's shoulder and her face was no longer pink but grey. "I need an injection," she groaned, "I must have an injection," and Albert said: "Yes, Nella is already talking to the doctor."

"Yes, an injection's good," Will's anxious face appeared behind Bolda. Glum pushed his way forward, replaced Bolda beside Grandmother and they carried her into the big bedroom at the end of the corridor. Martin saw his mother coming up the stairs, running fast, calling: "Hurweber is coming, I've telephoned him and he's coming at once."

"He's coming, do you hear," said Albert, but then the door closed and the corridor was empty. It was very quiet and he stared at the big brown door behind which it was also quiet.

Glum was the first to come out, followed by Will, and Mother came out with Albert and only Bolda remained inside, and Heinrich whispered from the bed: "Come back to bed, you'll catch cold." Martin shut the door quietly and crept back to bed in the dark. The guests began to sing again: "There where a hut stands at the forest edge. . . ."

On the terrace below, Uncle Albert sat with Mother, but they spoke so softly that he did not understand them. He felt that Heinrich was still awake and he would have liked to speak to him but he could not find an opening.

The guests stopped singing, he heard chairs being pushed back, heard them laugh as they paid the waitress, and he whispered to Heinrich: "Shall I leave the window open?"

"Yes, if it's not too cold for you."

"No, it's not too cold for me."

"Well, leave it open then."

Heinrich's silence reminded him of everything that had happened during the move and what Heinrich's mother had said to the baker. 'No, I don't let myself be. . . .'

And suddenly he knew what Brielach was thinking and why he had run away from the football game. Brielach's mother would now say to the baker: 'Yes, you can. . . .'

It was a monstrous thought. He felt very sad and would have liked to weep, but he held back the tears, although it was dark. Everything was IMMORAL, and he was terrified that Grandmother would call for an injection without giving the 'I've passed blood' performance. In the old days she had put on this act once every three months, but now, after four days, she had asked for another injection. She had grown old and she had wept and both of these were new and terrifying experiences for him; but the worst was that she had asked for the white, colourless liquid after four days, without bothering to put on her act. Something had come to an end; he did not yet know what but he knew that it had come to an end and that it seemed to have something to do with Gäseler.

"Are you asleep," he asked Heinrich again. "No," replied Heinrich and there seemed to be something unfriendly and off-handish about this 'no', and he thought he understood why

Heinrich was so unhappy: it was the change of IMMORALITY. Leo was Leo, but IMMORALITY in his case had a certain constancy about it. The fact that Heinrich's mother had been able to change so quickly over to the baker seemed to him as bad as the fact that Grandmother had demanded an injection without having passed blood.

"No, no," came Albert's raised voice from the dark terrace below. "No, it's far better that we should give up any idea of marriage." Then Mother spoke in an undertone and Bolda and Glum and Will joined in, and Albert raised his voice—"Yes, she wanted to hit him and pushed everyone aside who tried to interfere. Schurbigel got a couple of good slaps in the face and Father Willibrord was butted in the chest"—here Albert laughed but it was not a pleasant laugh—"and what could I do except stand by her, and I lammed into him and in any case he had recognized me."

"Gäseler?" asked Nella.

"Yes, he recognized me and I'm certain we shan't hear any more of him."

"Naturally," said Glum slowly and ceremoniously. And Mother laughed and her laugh was not very pleasant.

It was silent now below until he heard the peaceful drone of an engine. At first he thought it was the doctor's car but the noise came across the garden, out of the sky. It was the peaceful drone of a plane flying slowly across the sky, and he shouted with surprise when it appeared in the dark window frame: behind its red navigating lights it trailed a streamer. Phosphorescent letters could clearly be read in the sky: ONLY A FOOL MAKES HIS OWN JAM—smoothly and faster than he thought the writing passed the window frame, but a second droning plane followed, trailing its slogan through the dark night sky: HOLSTEGE MAKES IT FOR YOU.

"Look," he said excitedly to Heinrich, "the advertisement for Granny's factory."

But Heinrich did not reply, although he was awake.

Down below Mother was weeping bitterly and Albert was cursing loudly to himself, "Bastards," he said, "bastards."

The aircraft droned away in the direction of Schloss Brernich.

It was silent below and the only sound to be heard was his mother's sobbing and the occasional clink of glass, and he was

frightened because Heinrich did not speak although he was awake. He could hear him breathing, and he was panting heavily like someone who is excited. Wilma was breathing quite peacefully.

He tried to think of Hopalong Cassidy, of Donald Duck, but it seemed foolish. He thought: 'IF THOU, O LORD, SHALT OBSERVE INIQUITIES . . .' and then came that terrible first question of the Catechism: WHY ARE WE PUT ON EARTH? and he thought automatically of the reply: 'To serve God, to love him, and thus reach Heaven.' But to serve, to love and to reach Heaven did not SAY EVERYTHING. The answer did not seem up to the standard of the question and for the first time he experienced doubt and realized that something had come to an end: what it was he did not know, but something had come to an end. He could have wept, sobbed bitterly like Mother down below, but he held back his tears. because Brielach was awake and because he thought he knew what Brielach was thinking: of his mother, of the baker and of the word his mother had used to the baker.

But Heinrich was thinking of no such thing: he was thinking of the hope he had seen for a moment in his mother's face, only FOR A MOMENT, but he knew that A MOMENT is a very long time.