Pan

by Knut Hamsun

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By Knut Hamsun

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KNUT HAMSUN: FROM HUNGER TO HARVEST

Between “Hunger” and “Growth of the Soil” lies the time generally allotted to a generation, but at first glance the two books seem much farther apart. One expresses the passionate revolt of a homeless wanderer against the conventional routine of modern life. The other celebrates a root-fast existence bounded in every direction by monotonous chores. The issuance of two such books from the same pen suggests to the superficial view a complete reversal of position. The truth, however, is that Hamsun stands today where he has always stood. His objective is the same. If he has changed, it is only in the intensity of his feeling and the mode of his attack. What, above all, he hates and combats is the artificial uselessness of existence which to him has become embodied in the life of the city as opposed to that of the country.

Problems do not enter into the novels of Hamsun in the same manner as they did into the plays of Ibsen. Hamsun would seem to take life as it is, not with any pretense at its complete acceptability, but without hope or avowed intention of making it over. If his tolerance be never free from satire, his satire is on the other hand always easily tolerant. One might almost suspect him of viewing life as something static against which all fight would be futile. Even life's worst brutalities are related with an offhandedness of manner that makes you look for the joke that must be at the bottom of them. The word reform would seem to be strangely eliminated from his dictionary, or, if present, it might be found defined as a humorous conception of something intrinsically unachievable.

Hamsun would not be the artist he is if he were less deceptive. He has his problems no less than Ibsen had, and he is much preoccupied with them even when he appears

lost in ribald laughter. They are different from Ibsen's, however, and in that difference lies one of the chief explanations of Hamsun's position as an artist. All of Ibsen's problems became in the last instance reducible to a single relationship—that between the individual and his own self. To be himself was his cry and his task. With this consummation in view, he plumbed every depth of human nature. This one thing achieved, all else became insignificant.

Hamsun begins where Ibsen ended, one might say. The one problem never consciously raised by him as a problem is that of man's duty or ability to express his own nature. That is taken for granted. The figures populating the works of Hamsun, whether centrally placed or moving shadowlike in the periphery, are first of all themselves—agressively, inevitably, unconsciously so, In other words, they are like their creator. They may perish tragically or ridiculously as a result of their common inability to lay violent hand on their own natures. They may go through life warped and dwarfed for lack of an adjustment that to most of us might seem both easy and natural. Their own selves may become more clearly revealed to them by harsh or happy contacts with life, and they may change their surfaces accordingly. The one thing never occurring to them is that they might, for the sake of something or some one outside of themselves, be anything but what they are.

There are interferences, however, and it is from these that Hamsun's problems spring. A man may prosper or suffer by being himself, and in neither case is the fault his own. There are factors that more or less fatally influence and circumscribe the supremely important factor that is his own self. Roughly these fall into three groups suggestive of three classes of relationships: (1) between man and his general environment; (2) between man and that ever-present force of life which we call love; and (3) between man and life in its entirety, as an omnipotence that some of us call God and others leave unnamed. Hamsun's deceptive preference for indirectness is shown by the fact that, while he tries to make us believe that his work is chiefly preoccupied with problems of the second class, his mind is really busy with those of

the first class. The explanation is simple. Nothing helps like love to bring out the unique qualities of a man's nature. On the other hand, there is nothing that does more to prevent a man from being himself than the ruts of habit into which his environment always tends to drive him. There are two kinds of environment, natural and human. Hamsun appears to think that the less you have of one and the more of the other, the better for yourself and for humanity as a whole. The city to him is primarily concentrated human environment, and as such bad. This phase of his attitude toward life almost amounts to a phobia. It must be connected with personal experiences of unusual depth and intensity. Perhaps it offers a key that may be well worth searching for. Hamsun was born in the country, of and among peasants. In such surroundings he grew up. The removal of his parents from the central inland part of Norway to the rocky northern coast meant a change of natural setting, but not a human contact. The sea must have come into his life as a revelation, and yet it plays an astonishingly small part in his work. It is always present, but always in the distance. You hear of it, but you are never taken to it.

At about fifteen, Hamsun had an experience which is rarely mentioned as part of the scant biographical material made available by his reserve concerning his own personality. He returned to the old home of his parents in the Gudbrand Valley and worked for a few months as clerk in a country store—a store just like any one of those that figure so conspicuously in almost every one of his novels. The place and the work must have made a revolutionary impression on him. It apparently aroused longings, and it probably laid the basis for resistances and resentments that later blossomed into weedlike abundance as he came in contact with real city life. There runs through his work a strange sense of sympathy for the little store on the border of the wilderness, but it is also stamped as the forerunner and panderer of the lures of the city.

As a boy of eighteen, when working in a tiny coast town as a cobbler's apprentice, he ventured upon his first literary endeavors and actually managed to get two

volumes printed at his own cost. The art of writing was in his blood, exercising a call and a command that must have been felt as a pain at times, and as a consecration at other times. Books and writing were connected with the city. Perhaps the hatred that later days developed, had its roots in a thwarted passion. Even in the little community where his first scribblings reached print he must have felt himself in urban surroundings, and perhaps those first crude volumes drew upon him laughter and scorn that his sensitive soul never forgot. If something of the kind happened, the seed thus sown was nourished plentifully afterwards, when, as a young man, Hamsun pitted his ambitions against the indifference first of Christiania and then of Chicago. The result was a defeat that seemed the more bitter because it looked like punishment incurred by straying after false gods.

Others have suffered in the same way, although, being less rigidly themselves, they may not, like Hamsun, have taken a perverse pleasure in driving home the point of the agony. Others have thought and said harsh things of the cities. But no one that I can recall has equalled Hamsun in his merciless denunciation of the very principle of urbanity. The truth of it seems to be that Hamsun's pilgrimage to the bee hives where modern humanity clusters typically, was an essential violation of something within himself that mattered even more than his literary ambition to his soul's integrity. Perhaps, if I am right, he is the first genuine peasant who has risen to such artistic mastery, reaching its ultimate heights through a belated recognition of his own proper settings. Hamsun was sixty when he wrote “Growth of the Soil.” It is the first work in which he celebrates the life of the open country for its own sake, and not merely as a contrast to the artificiality and selfishness of the cities. It was written, too, after he had definitely withdrawn himself from the gathering places of the writers and the artists to give an equal share of his time and attention to the tilling of the soil that was at last his own. It is the harvest of his ultimate self-discovery.

The various phases of his campaign against city life are also interesting and

illuminating. Early in his career as a writer he tried an open attack in full force by a couple of novels, “Shallow Soil” and “Editor Lynge”, dealing sarcastically with the literary Bohemia of the Norwegian capital. They were, on the whole, failures—artistically rather than commercially. They are among his poorest books. The attack was never repeated in that form. He retired to the country, so to speak, and tried from there to strike at what he could reach of the ever expanding, ever devouring city. After that the city, like the sea, is always found in the distance. One feels it without ever seeing it. There is fear as well as hatred in his treatment of it.

In the country it is represented not so much by the store, which, after all, fills an unmistakable need on the part of the rural population, as by the representatives of the various professions. For these Hamsun entertains a hostile feeling hardly less marked than that bestowed on their place of origin, whither, to his openly declared disgust, they are always longing. It does not matter whether they are ministers or actors, lawyers or doctors—they are all tarred with the same brush. Their common characteristic is their rootlessness. They have no real home, because to Hamsun a home is unthinkable apart from a space of soil possessed in continuity by successive generations. They are always despising the surroundings in which they find themselves temporarily, and their chief claim to distinction is a genuine or pretended knowledge of life on a large scale. Greatness is to them inseparably connected with crowdedness, and what they call sophistication is at bottom nothing but a wallowing in that herd instinct which takes the place of mankind's ancient antagonist in Hamsun's books. Above all, their standards of judgment are not their own.

From what has just been said one might conclude that the spirit of Hamsun is fundamentally unsocial. So it is, in a way, but only in so far as we have come to think of social and urban as more or less interchangeable terms. He has a social consciousness and a social passion of his own, but it is decentralized, one might say. He knows of no greater man than his own Isak of “Growth of the Soil”—a simple pioneer in whose wake new homes spring up, an inarticulate and uncouth

personification of man's mastery of nature. When Hamsun speaks of Isak passing across the yearning, spring-stirred fields, “with the grain flung in fructifying waves from his reverent hands,” he pictures it deliberately in the light of a religious rite—the oldest and most significant known to man. It is as if the man who starved in Christiania and the western cities of the United States—not figuratively, but literally—had once for all conceived a respect for man's principal food that has colored all subsequent life for him and determined his own attitude toward everything by a reference to its connection or lack of connection with that substance.

Taking it all in all, one may well call Hamsun old-fashioned. The virtues winning his praise and the conditions that stir his longings are not of the present day. There is in him something primitive that forms a sharp contrast to the modernity of his own style. Even in his most romantic exaggerations, as in “Hunger” and “Mysteries,” he is a realist, dealing unrelentingly with life as it appears to us. It would hardly be too much to call his method scientific. But he uses it to aim tremendous explosive charges at those human concentrations that made possible the forging of the weapons he wields so skilfully. Nor does he stop at a wish to see those concentrations scattered. The very ambitions and Utopias bred within them are anathema to his soul, that places simplicity above cleanliness in divine proximity. Characteristically we find that the one art treated with constant sympathy in his writings is that of music, which probably is the earliest and certainly the one least dependent on the herding of men in barracks. In place of what he wishes to take away he offers nothing but peace and the sense of genuine creation that comes to the man who has just garnered the harvests of his own fields into his bulging barns. He is a prophet of plenty, but he has no answer ready when we ask him what we are going to do with it after we have got it. Like a true son of the brooding North, he wishes to set us thinking, but he has no final solutions to offer.

EDWIN BJÖRKMAN.

PAN

I

These last few days I have been thinking and thinking of the Nordland summer, with its endless day. Sitting here thinking of that, and of a hut I lived in, and of the woods behind the hut. And writing things down, by way of passing the time; to amuse myself, no more. The time goes very slowly; I cannot get it to pass as quickly as I would, though I have nothing to sorrow for, and live as pleasantly as could be. I am well content withal, and my thirty years are no age to speak of.

A few days back someone sent me two feathers. Two bird's feathers in a sheet of note-paper with a coronet, and fastened with a seal. Sent from a place a long way off; from one who need not have sent them back at all. That amused me too, those devilish green feathers.

And for the rest I have no troubles, unless for a touch of gout now and again in my left foot, from an old bullet-wound, healed long since.

Two years ago, I remember, the time passed quickly—beyond all comparison more quickly than time now. A summer was gone before I knew. Two years ago it was, in 1855. I will write of it just to amuse myself—of something that happened to me, or something I dreamed. Now, I have forgotten many things belonging to that time, by having scarcely thought of them since. But I remember that the nights were very light. And many things seemed curious and unnatural. Twelve months to the year—but night was like day, and never a star to be seen in the sky. And the people I met were strange, and of a different nature from those I had known before; sometimes a single night was enough to make them blossom out from childhood into the full of their glory, ripe and fully grown. No witchery in this; only I had never seen the like before. No.

In a white, roomy home down by the sea I met with one who busied my thoughts for a little time. I do not always think of her now; not any more. No; I have forgotten her. But I think of all the other things: the cry of the sea-birds, my hunting in the woods, my nights, and all the warm hours of that summer. After all, it was only by the merest accident I happened to meet her; save for that, she would never have been in my thoughts for a day.

From the hut where I lived, I could see a confusion of rocks and reefs and islets, and a little of the sea, and a bluish mountain peak or so; behind the hut was the forest. A huge forest it was; and I was glad and grateful beyond measure for the scent of roots and leaves, the thick smell of the fir-sap, that is like the smell of marrow. Only the forest could bring all things to calm within me; my mind was strong and at ease. Day after day I tramped over the wooded hills with Æsop at my side, and asked no more than leave to keep on going there day after day, though most of the ground was covered still with snow and soft slush. I had no company but Æsop; now it is Cora, but at that time it was Æsop, my dog that I afterwards shot.

Often in the evening, when I came back to the hut after being out shooting all day, I could feel that kindly, homely feeling trickling through me from head to foot—a pleasant little inward shivering. And I would talk to Æsop about it, saying how comfortable we were. “There, now we'll get a fire going, and roast a bird on the hearth,” I would say; “what do you say to that?” And when it was done, and we had both fed, Æsop would slip away to his place behind the hearth, while I lit a pipe and lay down on the bench for a while, listening to the dead soughing of the trees. There was a slight breeze bearing down towards the hut, and I could hear quite clearly the clutter of a grouse far away on the ridge behind. Save for that, all was still.

And many a time I fell asleep there as I lay, just as I was, fully dressed and all, and did not wake till the seabirds began calling. And then, looking out of the window, I could see the big white buildings of the trading station, the landing stage at Girilund,

the store where I used to get my bread. And I would lie there a while, wondering how I came to be there, in a hut on the fringe of a forest, away up in Nordland.

Then Æsop over by the hearth would shake out his long, slender body, rattling his collar, and yawning and wagging his tail, and I would jump up, after those three or four hours of sleep, fully rested and full of joy in everything ... everything.

Many a night passed just that way.

II

Rain and storm—'tis not such things that count. Many a time some little joy can come along on a rainy day, and make a man turn off somewhere to be alone with his happiness—stand up somewhere and look out straight ahead, laughing quietly now and again, and looking round. What is there to think of? One clear pane in a window, a ray of sunlight in the pane, the sight of a little brook, or maybe a blue strip of sky between the clouds. It needs no more than that.

At other times, even quite unusual happenings cannot avail to lift a man from dulness and poverty of mind; one can sit in the middle of a ballroom and be cool, indifferent, unaffected by anything. Sorrow and joy are from within oneself.

One day I remember now. I had gone down to the coast. The rain came on suddenly, and I slipped into an open boathouse to sit down for a while. I was humming a little, but not for any joy or pleasure, only to pass the time. Æsop was with me; he sat up listening, and I stopped humming and listened as well. Voices outside; people coming nearer. A mere chance—nothing more natural. A little party, two men and a girl, came tumbling in suddenly to where I sat, calling to one another and laughing:

“Quick! Get in here till it stops!”

I got up.

One of the men had a white shirt front, soft, and now soaked with rain into the

bargain, and all bagging down; and in that wet shirt front a diamond clasp. Long, pointed shoes he wore, too, that looked somewhat affected. I gave him good-day. It was Mack, the trader; I knew him because he was from the store where I used to get my bread. He had asked me to look in at the house any time, but I had not been there yet.

“Aha, it's you, is it?” said Mack at sight of me. “We were going up to the mill, but had to turn back. Ever see such weather—what? And when are you coming up to see us at Sirilund, Lieutenant?”

He introduced the little black-bearded man who was with him; a doctor, staying down near the church.

The girl lifted her veil the least little bit, to her nose, and started talking to Æsop in a whisper. I noticed her jacket; I could see from the lining and the buttonholes that it had been dyed. Mack introduced me to her as well; his daughter, Edwarda.

Edwarda gave me one glance through her veil, and went on whispering to the dog, and reading on its collar:

“So you're called Æsop, are you? Doctor, who was Æsop? All I can remember is that he wrote fables. Wasn't he a Phrygian? I can't remember.”

A child, a schoolgirl. I looked at her—she was tall, but with no figure to speak of, about fifteen or sixteen, with long, dark hands and no gloves. Like as not she had looked up Æsop in the dictionary that afternoon, to have it ready.

Mack asked me what sport I was having. What did I shoot mostly? I could have one of his boats at any time if I wanted—only let him know. The Doctor said nothing at all. When they went off again, I noticed that the Doctor limped a little, and walked with a stick.

I walked home as empty in mind as before, humming all indifferently. That meeting in the boathouse had made no difference either way to me; the one thing I remembered best of all was Mack's wet shirt front, with a diamond clasp—the

diamond all wet, too, and no great brilliance about it, either.

III

There was a stone outside my hut, a tall grey stone. It looked as if it had a sort of friendly feeling towards me; as if it noticed me when I came by, and knew me again. I liked to go round that way past the stone, when I went out in the morning; it was like leaving a good friend there, who I knew would be still waiting for me when I came back.

Then up in the woods hunting, sometimes finding game, sometimes none...

Out beyond the islands, the sea lay heavily calm. Many a time I have stood and looked at it from the hills, far up above. On a calm day, the ships seemed hardly to move at all; I could see the same sail for three days, small and white, like a gull on the water. Then, perhaps, if the wind veered round, the peaks in the distance would almost disappear, and there came a storm, the south-westerly gale; a play for me to stand and watch. All things in a seething mist. Earth and sky mingled together, the sea flung up into fantastic dancing figures of men and horses and fluttering banners on the air. I stood in the shelter of an overhanging rock, thinking many things; my soul was tense. Heaven knows, I thought to myself, what it is I am watching here, and why the sea should open before my eyes. Maybe I am seeing now the inner brain of earth, how things are at work there, boiling and foaming. Æsop was restless; now and again he would thrust up his muzzle and sniff, in a troubled way, with legs quivering uneasily; when I took no notice, he lay down between my feet and stared out to sea as I was doing. And never a cry, never a word of human voice to be heard anywhere; nothing; only the heavy rush of the wind about my head. There was a reef of rocks far out, lying all apart; when the sea raged up over it the water towered like a crazy screw; nay, like a sea-god rising wet in the air, and snorting, till hair and beard stood out like a wheel about his head. Then he plunged down into the breakers

once more.

And in the midst of the storm, a little coal-black steamer fighting its way in...

When I went down to the quay in the afternoon, the little coal-black steamer had come in; it was the mail-packet. Many people had gathered on the quayside to see the rare visitor; I noticed that all without exception had blue eyes, however different they might be in other ways. A young girl with a white woolen kerchief over her head stood a little apart; she had very dark hair, and the white kerchief showed up strangely against it. She looked at me curiously, at my leather suit, my gun; when I spoke to her, she was embarrassed, and turned her head away. I said:

“You should always wear a white kerchief like that; it suits you well.”

Just then a burly man in an Iceland jersey came up and joined her; he called her Eva. Evidently she was his daughter. I knew the burly man; he was the local smith, the blacksmith. Only a few days back he had mended the nipple of one of my guns...

And rain and wind did their work, and thawed away the snow. For some days a cheerless cold hovered over the earth; rotten branches snapped, and the crows gathered in flocks, complaining. But it was not for long; the sun was near, and one day it rose up behind the forest.

It sends a strip of sweetness through me from head to foot when the sun comes up; I shoulder my gun with quiet delight.

IV

I was never short of game those days, but shot all I cared to—a hare, a grouse, a ptarmigan—and when I happened to be down near the shore and came within range of some seabird or other, I shot it too. It was a pleasant time; the days grew longer and the air clearer; I packed up things for a couple of days and set off up into the hills, up to the mountain peaks. I met reindeer Lapps, and they gave me

cheese—rich little cheeses tasting of herbs. I went up that way more than once. Then, going home again, I always shot some bird or other to put in my bag. I sat down and put Æsop on the lead. Miles below me was the sea; the mountainsides were wet and black with the water running down them, dripping and trickling always with the same little sound. That little sound of the water far up on the hills has shortened many an hour for me when I sat looking about. Here, I thought to myself, is a little endless song trickling away all to itself, and no one ever hears it, and no one ever thinks of it, and still it trickles on nevertheless, to itself, all the time, all the time! And I felt that the mountains were no longer quite deserted, as long as I could hear that little trickling song. Now and again something would happen: a clap of thunder shaking the earth, a mass of rock slipping loose and rushing down towards the sea, leaving a trail of smoking dust behind. Æsop turned his nose to the wind at once, sniffing in surprise at the smell of burning that he could not understand. When the melting of the snow had made rifts in the hillside, a shot, or even a sharp cry, was enough to loosen a great block and send it tumbling down...

An hour might pass, or perhaps more—the time went so quickly. I let Æsop loose, slung my bag over the other shoulder, and set off towards home. It was getting late. Lower down in the forest, I came unfailingly upon my old, well-known path, a narrow ribbon of a path, with the strangest bends and turns. I followed each one of them, taking my time—there was no hurry. No one waiting for me at home. Free as a lord, a ruler, I could ramble about there in the peaceful woods, just as idly as I pleased. All the birds were silent; only the grouse was calling far away—it was always calling.

I came out of the wood and saw two figures ahead, two persons moving. I came up with them. One was Edwarda, and I recognized her, and gave a greeting; the Doctor was with her. I had to show them my gun; they looked at my compass, my bag; I invited them to my hut, and they promised to come some day.

It was evening now. I went home and lit a fire, roasted a bird, and had a meal. To-morrow there would be another day...

All things quiet and still. I lay that evening looking out the window. There was a fairy glimmer at that hour over wood and field; the sun had gone down, and dyed the horizon with a rich red light that stood there still as oil. The sky all open and clean; I stared into that clear sea, and it seemed as if I were lying face to face with the uttermost depth of the world; my heart beating tensely against it, and at home there. God knows, I thought to myself, God knows why the sky is dressed in gold and mauve to-night, if there is not some festival going on up there in the world, some great feast with music from the stars, and boats gliding along river ways. It looks so!—And I closed my eyes, and followed the boats, and thoughts and thoughts floated through my mind...

So more than one day passed.

I wandered about, noting how the snow turned to water, how the ice loosed its hold. Many a day I did not even fire a shot, when I had food enough in the hut—only wandered about in my freedom, and let the time pass. Whichever way I turned, there was always just as much to see and hear—all things changing a little every day. Even the osier thickets and the juniper stood waiting for the spring. One day I went out to the mill; it was still icebound, but the earth around it had been trampled through many and many a year, showing how men and more men had come that way with sacks of corn on their shoulders, to be ground. It was like walking among human beings to go there; and there were many dates and letters cut in the walls.

Well, well...

V

Shall I write more? No, no. Only a little for my own amusement's sake, and because it passes the time for me to tell of how the spring came two years back, and how

everything looked then. Earth and sea began to smell a little; there was a sweetish, rotting smell from the dead leaves in the wood, and the magpies flew with twigs in their beaks, building their nests. A couple of days more, and the brooks began to swell and foam; here and there a butterfly was to be seen, and the fishermen came home from their stations. The trader's two boats came in laden deep with fish, and anchored off the drying grounds; there was life and commotion all of a sudden out on the biggest of the islands, where the fish were to be spread on the rocks to dry. I could see it all from my window.

But no noise reached the hut; I was alone, and remained so. Now and again someone would pass. I saw Eva, the blacksmith's girl; she had got a couple of freckles on her nose.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“Out for firewood,” she answered quietly. She had a rope in her hand to carry the wood, and her white kerchief on her head. I stood watching her, but she did not turn round.

After that I saw no one for days.

The spring was urging, and the forest listened; it was a great delight to watch the thrushes sitting in the tree-tops staring at the sun and crying; sometimes I would get up as early as two in the morning, just for a share of the joy that went out from bird and beast at sunrise.

The spring had reached me too, maybe, and my blood beat at times as if it were footsteps. I sat in the hut, and thought of overhauling my fishing rods and lines and gear, but moved never a finger to any work at all, for a glad, mysterious restlessness that was in and out of my heart all the while. Then suddenly Æsop sprang up, stood and stiffened, and gave a short bark. Someone coming to the hut! I pulled off my cap quickly, and heard Edwarda's voice already at the door. Kindly and without ceremony she and the Doctor had come to pay me a visit, as they had said.

“Yes,” I heard her say, “he is at home.” And she stepped forward, and gave me her hand in her simple girlish way. “We were here yesterday, but you were out,” she said.

She sat down on the rug over my wooden bedstead and looked round the hut; the Doctor sat down beside me on the long bench. We talked, chatted away at ease; I told them things, such as what kinds of animals there were in the woods, and what game I could not shoot because of the closed season. It was the closed season for grouse just now.

The Doctor did not say much this time either, but catching sight of my powder-horn, with a figure of Pan carved on it, he started to explain the myth of Pan.

“But,” said Edwarda suddenly, “what do you live on when it's closed season for all game?”

“Fish,” I said. “Fish mostly. But there's always something to eat.”

“But you might come up to us for your meals,” she said. “There was an Englishman here last year—he had taken the hut—and he often came to us for meals.”

Edwarda looked at me and I at her. I felt at the moment something touching my heart like a little fleeting welcome. It must have been the spring, and the bright day; I have thought it over since. Also, I admired the curve of her eyebrows.

She said something about my place; how I had arranged things in the hut. I had hung up skins of several sorts on the walls, and birds' wings; it looked like a shaggy den on the inside. She liked it. “Yes, a den,” she said.

I had nothing to offer my visitors that they would care about; I thought of it, and would have roasted a bird for them, just for amusement—let them eat it hunter's fashion, with their fingers. It might amuse them.

And I cooked the bird.

Edwarda told about the Englishman. An old man, an eccentric, who talked aloud to

himself. He was a Roman Catholic, and always carried a little prayer-book, with red and black letters, about with him wherever he went.

“Was he an Irishman then?” asked the Doctor.

“An Irishman...?”

“Yes—since he was a Roman Catholic.”

Edwarda blushed, and stammered and looked away.

“Well, yes, perhaps he was an Irishman.”

After that she lost her liveliness. I felt sorry for her, and tried to put matters straight again. I said:

“No, of course you are right: he was an Englishman. Irishmen don't go travelling about in Norway.”

We agreed to row over one day and see the fish-drying grounds...

When I had seen my visitors a few steps on their way, I walked home again and sat down to work at my fishing gear. My hand-net had been hung from a nail by the door, and several of the meshes were damaged by rust; I sharpened up some hooks, knotted them to lengths of line, and looked to the other nets. How hard it seemed to do any work at all to-day! Thoughts that had nothing to do with the business in hand kept coming and going; it occurred to me that I had done wrong in letting Edwarda sit on the bed all the time, instead of offering her a seat on the bench. I saw before me suddenly her brown face and neck; she had fastened her apron a little low down in front, to be long-waisted, as was the fashion; the girlish contour of her thumb affected me tenderly, and the little wrinkles above the knuckle were full of kindliness. Her mouth was large and rich.

I rose up and opened the door and looked out. I could hear nothing, and indeed there was nothing to listen for. I closed the door again; Æsop came up from his resting-place and noticed that I was restless about something. Then it struck me that

I might run after Edwarda and ask her for a little silk thread to mend my net with. It would not be any pretence—I could take down the net and show her where the meshes were spoiled by rust. I was already outside the door when I remembered that I had silk thread myself in my fly-book; more indeed than I wanted. And I went back slowly, discouraged—to think that I had silk thread myself.

A breath of something strange met me as I entered the hut again; it seemed as if I were no longer alone there.

VI

A man asked me if I had given up shooting; he had not heard me fire a shot up in the hills, though he had been out fishing for two days. No, I had shot nothing; I had stayed at home in the hut until I had no more food in the place.

On the third day I went out with my gun. The woods were getting green; there was a smell of earth and trees. The young grass was already springing up from the frozen moss. I was in a thoughtful mood, and sat down several times. For three days I had not seen a soul except the one fisherman I had met the day before. I thought to myself, “Perhaps I may meet someone this evening on the way home, at the edge of the wood, where I met the Doctor and Edwarda before. Perhaps they may be going for a walk that way again—perhaps, perhaps not.” But why should I think of those two in particular? I shot a couple of ptarmigan, and cooked one of them at once; then I tied up the dog.

I lay down on the dry ground to eat. The earth was quiet—only a little breath of wind and the sound of a bird here and there. I lay and watched the branches waving gently in the breeze; the little wind was at its work, carrying pollen from branch to branch and filling every innocent bloom; all the forest seemed filled with delight. A green worm thing, a caterpillar, dragged itself end by end along a branch, dragging along unceasingly, as if it could not rest. It saw hardly anything, for all it had eyes;

often it stood straight up in the air, feeling about for something to take hold of; it looked like a stump of green thread sewing a seam with long stitches along the branch. By evening, perhaps, it would have reached its goal.

Quiet as ever. I get up and move on, sit down and get up again. It is about four o'clock; about six I can start for home, and see if I happen to meet anyone. Two hours to wait; a little restless already, I brush the dust and heather from my clothes. I know the places I pass by, trees and stones stand there as before in their solitude; the leaves rustle underfoot as I walk. The monotonous breathing and the familiar trees and stones mean much to me; I am filled with a strange thankfulness; everything seems well disposed towards me, mingles with my being; I love it all. I pick up a little dry twig and hold it in my hand and sit looking at it, and think my own thoughts; the twig is almost rotten, its poor bark touches me, pity fills my heart. And when I get up again, I do not throw the twig far away, but lay it down, and stand liking it; at last I look at it once more with wet eyes before I go away and leave it there.

Five o'clock. The sun tells me false time today; I have been walking westward the whole day, and come perhaps half an hour ahead of my sun marks at the hut. I am quite aware of all this, but none the less there is an hour yet before six o'clock, so I get up again and go on a little. And the leaves rustle under foot. An hour goes that way.

I look down at the little stream and the little mill that has been icebound all the winter, and I stop. The mill is working; the noise of it wakes me, and I stop suddenly, there and then. “I have stayed out too long,” I say aloud. A pang goes through me; I turn at once and begin walking homewards, but all the time I know I have stayed out too long. I walk faster, then run; Æsop understands there is something the matter, and pulls at the leash, drags me along, sniffs at the ground, and is all haste. The dry leaves crackle about us.

But when we come to the edge of the wood there was no one there. No, all was quiet; there was no one there.

“There is no one here,” I said to myself. And yet it was no worse than I had expected.

I did not stay long, but walked on, drawn by all my thoughts, passed by my hut, and went down to Sirilund with Æsop and my bag and gun—with all my belongings.

Herr Mack received me with the greatest friendliness, and asked me to stay to supper.

VII

I fancy I can read a little in the souls of those about me—but perhaps it is not so. Oh, when my good days come, I feel as if I could see far into others' souls, though I am no great or clever head. We sit in a room, some men, some women, and I, and I seem to see what is passing within them, and what they think of me. I find something in every swift little change of light in their eyes; sometimes the blood rises to their cheeks and reddens them; at other times they pretend to be looking another way, and yet they watch me covertly from the side. There I sit, marking all this, and no one dreams that I see through every soul. For years past I have felt that I could read the souls of all I met. But perhaps it is not so...

I stayed at Herr Mack's house all that evening. I might have gone off again at once—it did not interest me to stay sitting there—but had I not come because all my thoughts were drawing me that way? And how could I go again at once? We played whist and drank toddy after supper; I sat with my back turned to the rest of the room, and my head bent down; behind me Edwarda went in and out. The Doctor had gone home.

Herr Mack showed me the design of his new lamps—the first paraffin lamps to be seen so far north. They were splendid things, with a heavy leaden base, and he lit

them himself every evening—to prevent any accident. He spoke once or twice of his grandfather, the Consul.

“This brooch was given to my grandfather, Consul Mack, by Carl Johan with his own hands,” he said, pointing one finger at the diamond in his shirt. His wife was dead; he showed me a painted portrait of her in one of the other rooms—a distinguished looking woman with a lace cap and a winsome smile. In the same room, also, there was a bookcase, and some old French books, no less, that might have been an heirloom. The bindings were rich and gilded, and many owners had marked their names in them. Among the books were several educational works; Herr Mack was a man of some intelligence.

His two assistants from the store were called in to make up the party at whist. They played slowly and doubtfully, counted carefully, and made mistakes all the same. Edwarda helped one of them with his hand.

I upset my glass, and felt ashamed, and stood up.

“There—I have upset my glass,” I said.

Edwarda burst out laughing, and answered:

“Well, we can see that.”

Everyone assured me laughingly that it did not matter. They gave me a towel to wipe myself with, and we went on with the game. Soon it was eleven o'clock.

I felt a vague displeasure at Edwarda's laugh. I looked at her, and found that her face had become insignificant, hardly even pretty. At last Herr Mack broke off the game, saying that his assistants must go to bed; then he leaned back on the sofa and began talking about putting up a sign in front of his place. He asked my advice about it. What colour did I think would be best? I was not interested, and answered “black,” without thinking at all. And Herr Mack at once agreed:

“Black, yes—exactly what I had been thinking myself. 'Salt and barrels' in heavy

black letters—that ought to look as nice as anything... Edwarda, isn't it time you were going to bed?”

Edwarda rose, shook hands with us both, said good-night, and left the room. We sat on. We talked of the railway that had been finished last year, and of the first telegraph line. “Wonder when we shall have the telegraph up here.”

Pause.

“It's like this,” said Herr Mack. “Time goes on, and here am I, six-and-forty, and hair and beard gone grey. You might see me in the daytime and say I was a young man, but when the evening comes along, and I'm all alone, I feel it a good deal. I sit here mostly playing patience. It works out all right as a rule, if you fudge a little. Haha!”

“If you fudge a little?” I asked.

“Yes.”

I felt as if I could read in his eyes...

He got up from his seat, walked over to the window, and looked out; he stooped a little, and the back of his neck was hairy. I rose in my turn. He looked round and walked towards me in his long, pointed shoes, stuck both thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, waved his arms a little, as if they were wings, and smiled. Then he offered me his boat again if ever I wanted one, and held out his hand.

“Wait a minute—I'll go with you,” he said, and blew out the lamps. “Yes, yes, I feel like a little walk. It's not so late.”

We went out.

He pointed up the road towards the blacksmith's and said:

“This way—it's the shortest.”

“No,” I said. “Round by the quay is the shortest way.”

We argued the point a little, and did not agree. I was convinced that I was right, and

could not understand why he insisted. At last he suggested that we should each go his own way; the one who got there first could wait at the hut.

We set off, and he was soon lost to sight in the wood.

I walked at my usual pace, and reckoned to be there a good five minutes ahead. But when I got to the hut he was there already. He called out as I came up:

“What did I say? I always go this way—it is the shortest.”

I looked at him in surprise; he was not heated, and did not appear to have been running. He did not stay now, but said good-night in a friendly way, and went back the way he had come.

I stood there and thought to myself: This is strange! I ought to be some judge of distance, and I've walked both those ways several times. My good man, you've been fudging again. Was the whole thing a pretence?

I saw his back as he disappeared into the wood again.

Next moment I started off in track of him, going quickly and cautiously; I could see him wiping his face all the way, and I was not so sure now that he had not been running before. I walked very slowly now, and watched him carefully; he stopped at the blacksmith's. I stepped into hiding, and saw the door open, and Herr Mack enter the house.

It was one o'clock; I could tell by the look of the sea and the grass.

VIII

A few days passed as best they could; my only friend was the forest and the great loneliness. Dear God! I had never before known what it was to be so alone as on the first of those days. It was full spring now; I had found wintergreen and milfoil already, and the chaffinches had come (I knew all the birds). Now and again I took a couple of coins from my pocket and rattled them, to break the loneliness. I thought

to myself: “What if Diderik and Iselin were to appear!”

Night was coming on again; the sun just dipped into the sea and rose again, red, refreshed, as if it had been down to drink. I could feel more strangely on those nights than anyone would believe. Was Pan himself there, sitting in a tree, watching me to see what I might do? Was his belly open, and he sitting there bent over as if drinking from his own belly? But all that he did only that he might look up under his brows and watch me; and the whole tree shook with his silent laughter when he saw how all my thoughts were running away with me. There was a rustling everywhere in the woods, beasts sniffing, birds calling one to another; their signals filled the air. And it was flying year for the Maybug; its humming mingled with the buzz of the night moths, sounded like a whispering here and a whispering there, all about in the woods. So much there was to hear! For three nights I did not sleep; I thought of Diderik and Iselin.

“See now,” I thought, “they might come.” And Iselin would lead Diderik away to a tree and say:

“Stand here, Diderik, and keep guard; keep watch; I will let this huntsman tie my shoestring.”

And the huntsman is myself, and she will give me a glance of her eyes that I may understand. And when she comes, my heart knows all, and no longer beats like a heart, but rings as a bell. I lay my hand on her.

“Tie my shoe-string,” she says, with flushed cheeks. ...

The sun dips down into the sea and rises again, red and refreshed, as if it had been to drink. And the air is full of whisperings.

An hour after, she speaks, close to my mouth:

“Now I must leave you.”

And she turns and waves her hand to me as she goes, and her face is flushed still;

her face is tender and full of delight. And again she turns and waves to me.

But Diderik steps out from under the tree and says:

“Iselin, what have you done? I saw you.”

She answers:

“Diderik, what did you see? I have done nothing.”

“Iselin, I saw what you did,” he says again; “I saw you.”

And then her rich, glad laughter rings through the wood, and she goes off with him, full of rejoicing from top to toe. And whither does she go? To the next mortal man; to a huntsman in the woods.

It was midnight. Æsop had broken loose and been out hunting by himself; I heard him baying up in the hills, and when at last I got him back it was one o'clock. A girl came from herding goats; she fastened her stocking and hummed a tune and looked around. But where was her flock? And what was she doing in the woods at midnight? Ah, nothing, nothing. Walking there for restlessness, perhaps, for joy; 'twas her affair. I thought to myself, she had heard Æsop in the woods, and knew that I was out.

As she came up I rose and stood and looked at her, and I saw how slight and young she was. Æsop, too, stood looking at her.

“Where do you come from?” I asked.

“From the mill,” she answered.

But what could she have been doing at the mill so late at night?

“How can you venture into the woods so late?” I said—“you so slight and young?”

She laughed, and said:

“I am not so young—I am nineteen.”

But she could not be nineteen; I am certain she was lying by at least two years, and

was only seventeen. But why should she lie to seem older?

“Sit down,” I said, “and tell me your name.”

And she sat down, blushing, by my side, and told me her name was Henriette.

Then I asked her:

“Have you a lover, Henriette, and has he ever taken you in his arms?”

“Yes,” she said, smiling shyly.

“How many times?”

She was silent.

“How many times?” I asked her again.

“Twice,” she answered softly.

I drew her to me and said:

“How did he do it? Was it like this?”

“Yes,” she whispered, trembling.

IX

I had some talk with Edwarda.

“We shall have rain before long,” I said.

“What time is it?” she asked.

I looked at the sun and answered:

“About five.”

She asked:

“Can you tell so nearly by the sun?”

“Yes,” I answered; “I can.”

Pause.

“But when you can't see the sun, how do you tell the time then?”

“Then I can tell by other things. There's high tide and low tide, and the grass that lies over at certain hours, and the song of the birds that changes; some birds begin to sing when others leave off. Then, I can tell the time by flowers that close in the afternoon, and leaves that are bright green at some times and dull green at others—and then, besides, I can feel it.”

“I see.”

Now I was expecting rain, and for Edwarda's sake I would not keep her there any longer on the road; I raised my cap. But she stopped me suddenly with a new question, and I stayed. She blushed, and asked me why I had come to the place at all? Why I went out shooting, and why this and why that? For I never shot more than I needed for food, and left my dog idle...

She looked flushed and humble. I understood that someone had been talking about me, and she had heard it; she was not speaking for herself. And something about her called up a feeling of tenderness in me; she looked so helpless, I remembered that she had no mother; her thin arms gave her an ill-cared-for appearance. I could not help feeling it so.

Well, I did not go out shooting just to murder things, but to live. I had need of one grouse to-day, and so I did not shoot two, but would shoot the other to-morrow. Why kill more? I lived in the woods, as a son of the woods. And from the first of June it was closed time for hare and ptarmigan; there was but little left for me to shoot at all now. Well and good: then I could go fishing, and live on fish. I would borrow her father's boat and row out in that. No, indeed, I did no go out shooting for the lust of killing things, but only to live in the woods. It was a good place for me; I could lie down on the ground at meals, instead of sitting upright on a chair; I did not upset my glass there. In the woods I could do as I pleased; I could lie down flat on my back and close my eyes if I pleased, and I could say whatever I liked to say.

Often one might feel a wish to say something, to speak aloud, and in the woods it sounded like speech from the very heart...

When I asked her if she understood all this, she said, “Yes.”

And I went on, and told her more, because her eyes were on me. “If you only knew all that I see out in the wilds!” I said. “In winter, I come walking along, and see, perhaps, the tracks of ptarmigan in the snow. Suddenly the track disappears; the bird has taken wing. But from the marks of the wings I can see which way the game has flown, and before long I have tracked it down again. There is always a touch of newness in that for me. In autumn, many a time there are shooting stars to watch. Then I think to myself, being all alone, What was that? A world seized with convulsions all of a sudden? A world going all to pieces before my eyes? To think that I—that I should be granted the sight of shooting stars in my life! And when summer comes, then perhaps there may be a little living creature on every leaf; I can see that some of them have no wings; they can make no great way in the world, but must live and die on that one little leaf where they came into the world.

“Then sometimes I see the blue flies. But it all seems such a little thing to talk about—I don't know if you understand?”

“Yes, yes, I understand.”

“Good. Well, then sometimes I look at the grass, and perhaps the grass is looking at me again—who can say? I look at a single blade of grass; it quivers a little, maybe, and thinks me something. And I think to myself: Here is a little blade of grass all a-quivering. Or if it happens to be a fir tree I look at, then maybe the tree has one branch that makes me think of it a little, too. And sometimes I meet people up on the moors; it happens at times.”

I looked at her; she stood bending forward, listening. I hardly knew her. So lost in attention she was that she took no heed of herself, but was ugly, foolish looking; her underlip hung far down.

“Yes, yes,” she said, and drew herself up.

The first drops of rain began to fall.

“It is raining,” said I.

“Oh! Yes, it is raining,” she said, and went away on the instant.

I did not see her home; she went on her way alone; I hurried up to the hut. A few minutes passed. It began to rain heavily. Suddenly I heard someone running after me. I stopped short, and there was Edwarda.

“I forgot,” she said breathlessly. “We were going over to the islands—the drying grounds, you know. The Doctor is coming to-morrow; will you have time then?”

“To-morrow? Yes, indeed. I shall have time enough.”

“I forgot it,” she said again, and smiled.

As she went, I noticed her thin, pretty calves; they were wet far above the ankle. Her shoes were worn through.

X

There was another day which I remember well. It was the day my summer came. The sun began shining while it was still night, and dried up the wet ground for the morning. The air was soft and fine after the last rain.

In the afternoon I went down to the quay. The water was perfectly still; we could hear talking and laughter away over at the island, where men and girls were at work on the fish. It was a happy afternoon.

Ay, was it not a happy afternoon? We took hampers of food and wine with us; a big party we were, in two boats, with young women in light dresses. I was so happy that I hummed a tune.

And when we were in the boat, I fell to thinking where all these young people came from. There were the daughters of the Lensmand and the district surgeon, a

governess or so, and the ladies from the vicarage. I had not seen them before; they were strangers to me; and yet, for all that, they were as friendly as if we had known each other for years. I made some mistakes! I had grown unaccustomed to being in society, and often said “Du” [Footnote: “Du"=thou, the familiar form of address (tutoyer), instead of “De"=you.] to the young ladies, but they did not seem offended. And once I said “dear,” or “my dear,” but they forgave me that as well, and took no notice of it.

Herr Mack had his unstarched shirt front on as usual, with the diamond stud. He seemed in excellent spirits, and called across to the other boat:

“Hi, look after the hamper with the bottles, you madcaps there. Doctor, I shall hold you responsible for the wine.”

“Right!” cried the Doctor. And just those few words from one boat to another seemed to me pleasant and merry to hear.

Edwarda was wearing the same dress she had, worn the day before, as if she had no other or did not care to put on another. Her shoes, too, were the same. I fancied her hands were not quite clean; but she wore a brand new hat, with feathers. She had taken her dyed jacket with her, and used it to sit on.

At Herr Mack's request I fired a shot just as we were about to land, in fact, two shots, both barrels—and they cheered. We rambled up over the island, the workers greeted us all, and Herr Mack stopped to speak to his folk. We found daisies and corn marigolds and put them in our button-holes; some found harebells.

And there was a host of seabirds chattering and screaming, in the air and on the shore.

We camped out on a patch of grass where there were a few stunted birches with white stems. The hampers were opened, and Herr Mack saw to the bottles. Light dresses, blue eyes, the ring of glasses, the sea, the white sails. And we sang a little.

And cheeks were flushed.

An hour later, my whole being was joy; even little things affected me. A veil fluttering from a hat, a girl's hair coming down, a pair of eyes closing in a laugh—and it touched me. That day, that day!

“I've heard you've such a queer little hut up there, Lieutenant?”

“Yes, a nest. And the very thing for me. Come and see me there one day; there's no such hut anywhere else. And the great forest behind it.”

Another came up and said kindly:

“You have not been up here in the north before?”

“No,” I answered. “But I know all about it already, ladies. At night I am face to face with the mountains, the earth, and the sun. But I will not try to use fine words. What a summer you have here! It bursts forth one night when everyone is asleep, and in the morning there it is. I looked out of my window and saw it myself. I have two little windows.”

A third came up. She was charming by reason of her voice and her small hands. How charming they all were! This one said:

“Shall we change flowers? It brings luck, they say.”

“Yes,” I answered, holding out my hand, “let us change flowers, and I thank you for it. How pretty you are! You have a lovely voice; I have been listening to it all the time.”

But she drew back her harebells and said curtly:

“What are you thinking about? It was not you I meant.”

It was not me she meant! It hurt me to feel that I had been mistaken; I wished myself at home again, far away in my hut, where only the wind could speak to me. “I beg your pardon,” I said; “forgive me.” The other ladies looked at one another and moved away, so as not to humiliate me.

Just at that moment someone came quickly over towards us. All could see her—it

was Edwarda. She came straight to me. She said something, and threw her arms round my neck; clasped her arms round my neck and kissed me again and again on the lips. Each time she said something, but I did not hear what it was. I could not understand it all; my heart stood still; I had only a feeling of her burning look. Then she slipped away from me; her little breast beat up and down. She stood there still, with her brown face and brown neck, tall and slender, with flashing eyes, altogether heedless. They were all looking at her. For the second time I was fascinated by her dark eyebrows, that curved high up into her forehead.

But, Heavens—the girl had kissed me openly in sight of them all!

“What is it, Edwarda?” I asked, and I could hear my blood beating; hear it as it were from down in my throat, so that I could not speak distinctly.

“Nothing,” she answered. “Only—that I wanted to. It doesn't matter.”

I took off my cap and brushed back my hair mechanically as I stood looking at her. “Doesn't matter...?”

Herr Mack was saying something, a good way off; we could not hear his words from where we were. But I was glad to think that Herr Mack had seen nothing, that he knew nothing of this. It was well indeed that he had been away from the party just then. I felt relieved at that, and I stepped over to the others and said with a laugh, and seeming quite indifferent:

“I would ask you all to forgive my unseemly behavior a moment ago; I am myself extremely sorry about it. Edwarda kindly offered to change flowers with me, and I forgot myself. I beg her pardon and yours. Put yourself in my place; I live all alone, and am not accustomed to the society of ladies; besides which, I have been drinking wine, and am not used to that either. You must make allowances for that.”

And I laughed, and showed great indifference to such a trifle, that it might be forgotten; but, inwardly, I was serious. Moreover, what I had said made no impression on Edwarda. She did not try to hide anything, to smooth over the effect

of her hasty action: on the contrary, she sat down close to me and kept looking at me fixedly. Now and again she spoke to me. And afterwards, when we were playing “Enke,” she said:

“I shall have Lieutenant Glahn. I don't care to run after anyone else.”

“Saa for Satan, [Footnote: Expletive, equivalent to “The Devil!” or “Damnation!”] girl, be quiet!” I whispered, stamping my foot.

She gave me a look of surprise, made a wry face as if it hurt, and then smiled bashfully. I was deeply moved at that; the helpless look in her eyes and her little thin figure were more than I could resist; I was drawn to her in that moment, and I took her long, slight hand in mine.

“Afterwards,” I said, “No more now. We can meet again to-morrow.”

XI

In the night I heard Æsop get up from his corner and growl; I heard it through my sleep, but I was dreaming just then of shooting, the growl of the dog fitted into the dream, and it did not wake me, quite. When I stepped out of the hut next morning there were tracks in the grass of a pair of human feet; someone had been there—had gone first to one of my windows, then to the other. The tracks were lost again down on the road.

She came towards me with hot cheeks, with a face all beaming.

“Have you been waiting?” she said. “I was afraid you would have to wait.”

I had not been waiting; she was on the way before me.

“Have you slept well?” I asked. I hardly knew what to say.

“No, I haven't. I have been awake,” she answered. And she told me she had not slept that night, but had sat in a chair with her eyes closed. And she had been out of the house for a little walk.

“Someone was outside my hut last night,” I said. “I saw tracks in the grass this morning.”

And her face colored; she took my hand there, on the road, and made no answer. I looked at her, and said:

“Was it you, I wonder?”

“Yes,” she answered, pressing close to me. “It was I. I hope I didn't wake you—I stepped as quietly as I could. Yes, it was I. I was near you again. I am fond of you!”

XII

Every day, every day I met her. I will tell the truth: I was glad to meet her; aye, my heart flew. It is two years ago this year; now, I think of it only when I please, the whole story just amuses and distracts me. And as for the two green feathers, I will tell about them in good time.

There were several places where we could meet—at the mill, on the road, even in my hut. She came wherever I would. “Goddag!” she cried, always first, and I answered “Goddag!”

“You are happy to-day,” she says, and her eyes sparkle.

“Yes, I am happy,” I answer. “There is a speck there on your shoulder; it is dust, perhaps, a speck of mud from the road; I must kiss that little spot. No—let me—I will. Everything about you stirs me so! I am half out of my senses. I did not sleep last night.”

And that was true. Many a night I lay and could not sleep.

We walk side by side along the road.

“What do you think—am I as you like me to be?” she asks. “Perhaps I talk too much. No? Oh, but you must say what you really think. Sometimes I think to myself this can never come to any good...”

“What can never come to any good?” I ask.

“This between us. That it cannot come to any good. You may believe it or not, but I am shivering now with cold; I feel icy cold the moment I come to you. Just out of happiness.”

“It is the same with me,” I answer. “I feel a shiver, too, when I see you. But it will come to some good all the same. And, anyhow, let me pat you on the back, to warm you.”

And she lets me, half unwillingly, and then I hit a little harder, for a jest, and laugh, and ask if that doesn't make her feel better.

“Oh, please, don't when I ask you; please,” says she.

Those few words! There was something so helpless about her saying it so, the wrong way round: “Please don't when I ask you.”...

Then we went on along the road again. Was she displeased with me for my jest, I wondered? And thought to myself: Well, let us see. And I said:

“I just happened to think of something. Once when I was out on a sledge party, there was a young lady who took a silk kerchief from her neck and fastened it round mine. In the evening, I said to her: 'You shall have your kerchief again to-morrow; I will have it washed.' 'No,' she said, 'give it to me now; I will keep it just as it is, after you have worn it.' And I gave it to her. Three years after, I met the same young lady again. 'The kerchief,' I said. And she brought it out. It lay in a paper, just as before; I saw it myself.”

Edwarda glanced up at me.

“Yes? And what then?”

“That is all,” I said. “There was nothing more. But I thought it was nice of her.”

Pause.

“Where is that lady now?”

“Abroad.”

We spoke no more of that. But when it was time for her to go home, she said:

“Well, good-night. But you won't go thinking of that lady any more, will you? I don't think of anyone but you.”

I believed her. I saw that she meant what she said, and it was more than enough for me that she thought of no one else. I walked after her.

“Thank you, Edwarda,” I said. And then I added with all my heart: “You are all too good for me, but I am thankful that you will have me; God will reward you for that. I'm not so fine as many you could have, no doubt, but I am all yours—so endlessly yours, by my eternal soul.——What are you thinking of now, to bring tears to your eyes?”

“It was nothing,” she answered. “It sounded so strange—that God would reward me for that. You say things that I ... Oh, I love you so!”

And all at once she threw her arms round my neck, there in the middle of the road, and kissed me.

When she had gone, I stepped aside into the woods to hide, to be alone with my happiness. And then I hurried eagerly back to the road to see if anyone had noticed that I had gone in there. But I saw no one.

XIII

Summer nights and still water, and the woods endlessly still. No cry, no footsteps from the road. My heart seemed full as with dark wine.

Moths and night-flies came flying noiselessly in through my window, lured by the glow from the hearth and the smell of the bird I had just cooked. They dashed against the roof with a dull sound, fluttered past my ears, sending a cold shiver through me, and settled on my white powder-horn on the wall. I watched them; they

sat trembling and looked at me—moths and spinners and burrowing things. Some of them looked like pansies on the wing.

I stepped outside the hut and listened. Nothing, no noise; all was asleep. The air was alight with flying insects, myriads of buzzing wings. Out at the edge of the wood were ferns and aconite, the trailing arbutus was in bloom, and I loved its tiny flowers... Thanks, my God, for every heather bloom I have ever seen; they have been like small roses on my way, and I weep for love of them... Somewhere near were wild carnations; I could not see them, but I could mark their scent.

But now, in the night hours, great white flowers have opened suddenly; their chalices are spread wide; they are breathing. And furry twilight moths slip down into their petals, making the whole plant quiver. I go from one flower to another. They are drunken flowers. I mark the stages of their intoxication.

Light footsteps, a human breathing, a happy “Godaften.”

And I answer, and throw myself down on the road.

“Godaften, Edwarda,” I say again, worn out with joy.

“That you should care for me so!” she whispers.

And I answered her: “If you knew how grateful I can be! You are mine, and my heart lies still within me all the day, thinking of you. You are the loveliest girl on earth, and I have kissed you. Often I go red with joy, only to think that I have kissed you.”

“Why are you so fond of me this evening?” she asks.

I was that for endless reasons; I needed only to think of her to feel so. That look of hers, from under the high-arched brows, and her rich, dark skin!

“Should I not be fond of you?” I say again. “I thank every tree in my path because you are well and strong. Once at a dance there was a young lady who sat out dance after dance, and they let her sit there alone. I didn't know her, but her face touched

me, and I bowed to her. Well? But no, she shook her head. Would she not dance, I asked her? 'Can you imagine it?' she said. 'My father was a handsome man, and my mother a perfect beauty, and my father won her by storm. But I was born lame.'"

Edwarda looked at me.

"Let us sit down," she said.

And we sat down in the heather.

"Do you know what my friend says about you?" she began. "Your eyes are like an animal's, she says, and when you look at her, it makes her mad. It is just as if you touched her, she says."

A strange joy thrilled me when I heard that, not for my own sake, but for Edwarda's, and I thought to myself: There is only one whom I care for: what does that one say of the look in my eyes? And I asked her:

"Who was that, your friend?"

"I will not tell you," she said. "But it was one of those that were out on the island that day."

"Very well, then."

And then we spoke of other things.

"My father is going to Russia in a few days," she said. "And I am going to have a party. Have you been out to Korholmerne? We must have two hampers of wine; the ladies from the vicarage are coming again, and father has already given me the wine. And you won't look at her again, will you? My friend, I mean. Please, you won't, will you? Or I shall not ask her at all."

And with no more words she threw herself passionately about my neck, and looked at me, gazing into my face and breathing heavily. Her glance was sheer blackness.

I got up abruptly, and, in my confusion, could only say:

"So your father is going to Russia?"

“What did you get up like that for, so quickly?” she asked.

“Because it is late, Edwarda,” I said. “Now the white flowers are closing again. The sun is getting up; it will soon be day.”

I went with her through the woodland and stood watching her as long as I could; far down, she turned round and softly called good-night. Then she disappeared.

At the same moment the door of the blacksmith's house opened. A man with a white shirt front came out, looked round, pulled his hat down farther over his forehead, and took the road down to Sirilund.

Edwarda's good-night was still in my ears.

XIV

A man can be drunk with joy. I fire off my gun, and an unforgettable echo answers from hill to hill, floats out over the sea and rings in some sleepy helmsman's ears. And what have I to be joyful about? A thought that came to me, a memory; a sound in the woods, a human being. I think of her, I close my eyes and stand still there on the road, and think of her; I count the minutes.

Now I am thirsty, and drink from the stream; now I walk a hundred paces forward and a hundred paces back; it must be late by now, I say to myself.

Can there be anything wrong? A month has passed, and a month is no long time; there is nothing wrong. Heaven knows this month has been short. But the nights are often long, and I am driven to wet my cap in the stream and let it dry, only to pass the time, while I am waiting.

I reckoned my time by nights. Sometimes there would be an evening when Edwarda did not come—once she stayed away two evenings. Nothing wrong, no. But I felt then that perhaps my happiness had reached and passed its height.

And had it not?

“Can you hear, Edwarda, how restless it is in the woods to-night? Rustling incessantly in the undergrowth, and the big leaves trembling. Something brewing, maybe—but it was not that I had in mind to say. I hear a bird away up on the hill—only a tomtit, but it has sat there calling in the same place two nights now. Can you hear—the same, same note again?”

“Yes, I hear it. Why do you ask me that?”

“Oh, for no reason at all. It has been there two nights now. That was all... Thanks, thanks for coming this evening, love. I sat here, expecting you this evening, or the next, looking forward to it, when you came.”

“And I have been waiting too. I think of you, and I have picked up the pieces of the glass you upset once, and kept them—do you remember? Father went away last night. I could not come, there was so much to do with the packing, and reminding him of things. I knew you were waiting here in the woods, and I cried, and went on packing.”

But it is two evenings, I thought to myself. What was she doing the first evening? And why is there less joy in her eyes now than before?

An hour passed. The bird up in the hills was silent, the woods lay dead. No, no, nothing wrong; all as before; she gave me her hand to say good-night, and looked at me with love in her eyes.

“To-morrow?” I said.

“No, not to-morrow,” she answered.

I did not ask her why.

“To-morrow is our party,” she said with a laugh. “I was only going to surprise you, but you looked so miserable, I had to tell you at once. I was going to send you an invitation all on paper.”

And my heart was lightened unspeakably.

She went off, nodding farewell.

“One thing more,” said I, standing where I was. “How long is it since you gathered up the pieces of that glass and put them away?”

“Why—a week ago, perhaps, or a fortnight. Yes, perhaps a fortnight. But why do you ask? Well, I will tell you the truth—it was yesterday.”

Yesterday! No longer ago than yesterday she had thought of me. All was well again now.

XV

The two boats lay ready, and we stepped on board. Talking and singing. The place, Korholmerne, lay out beyond the islands; it took a good while to row across, and on the way we talked, one party with another, from boat to boat. The Doctor wore light things, as the ladies did; I had never seen him so pleased before; he talked with the rest, instead of listening in silence. I had an idea he had been drinking a little, and so was in good humor to-day. When we landed, he craved the attention of the party for a moment, and bade us welcome. I thought to myself: This means that Edwarda has asked him to act as host.

He fell to entertaining the ladies in the most amiable manner. To Edwarda he was polite and kind, often fatherly, and pedantically instructive, as he had been so many times before. She spoke of some date or other, saying: “I was born in '38,” and he asked, “Eighteen hundred and thirty-eight, I suppose you mean?” And if she had answered, “No, in nineteen hundred and thirty-eight,” he would have shown no embarrassment, but only corrected her again, and said, “I think you must be mistaken.” When I said anything myself, he listened politely and attentively, and did not ignore me.

A young girl came up to me with a greeting. I did not recognize her; I could not remember her at all, and I said a few words in surprise, and she laughed. It was one

of the Dean's daughters. I had met her the day we went to the island before, and had invited her to my hut. We talked together a little.

An hour or so passed by. I was feeling dull, and drank from the wine poured out for me, and mixed with the others, chatting with them all. Again I made a mistake here and there: I was on doubtful ground, and could not tell at the moment how to answer any little civility; now and then I talked incoherently, or even found nothing at all to say, and this troubled me. Over by the big rock which we were using as a table sat the Doctor, gesticulating.

“Soul—what is the soul?” he was saying. The Dean's daughter had accused him of being a free-thinker—well, and should not a man think freely? People imagined hell as a sort of house down under the ground, with the devil as host—or rather as sovereign lord. Then he spoke of the altar picture in the chapel, a figure of the Christ, with a few Jews and Jewesses; water into wine—well and good. But Christ had a halo round His head. And what was a halo? Simply a yellow hoop fixed on three hairs.

Two of the ladies clasped their hands aghast, but the Doctor extricated himself, and said jestingly:

“Sounds horrible, doesn't it? I admit it. But if you repeat it and repeat it again to yourself seven or eight times, and then think it over a little, it soon sounds easier... Ladies, your very good health!”

And he knelt on the grass before the two ladies, and instead of taking his hat off and laying it before him he held it straight up in the air with one hand, and emptied his glass with his head bent back. I was altogether carried away by his wonderful ease of manner, and would have drunk with him myself but that his glass was empty.

Edwarda was following him with her eyes. I placed myself near her, and said:

“Shall we play 'Enke' to-day?”

She started slightly, and got up.

“Be careful not to say 'Du' to each other now,” she whispered.

Now I had not said “Du” at all. I walked away.

Another hour passed. The day was getting long; I would have rowed home alone long before if there had been a third boat; Æsop lay tied up in the hut, and perhaps he was thinking of me. Edwarda's thoughts must surely be far away from me; she talked of how lovely it would be to travel, and see strange places; her cheeks flushed at the thought, and she even stumbled in her speech:

“No one could be more happier than I the day ...”

“'More happier'...?” said the Doctor.

“What?” said she.

“'More happier.'”

“I don't understand.”

“You said 'more happier,' I think.”

“Did I? I'm sorry. No one could be happier than I the day I stood on board the ship. Sometimes I long for places I do not know myself.”

She longed to be away; she did not think of me. I stood there, and read in her face that she had forgotten me. Well, there was nothing to be said—but I stood there myself and saw it in her face. And the minutes dragged so miserably slowly by! I asked several of the others if we ought not to row back now; it was getting late, I said, and Æsop was tied up in the hut. But none of them wanted to go back.

I went over again to the Dean's daughter, for the third time; I thought she must be the one that had said I had eyes like an animal's. We drank together; she had quivering eyes, they were never still; she kept looking at me and then looking away, all the time.

“Fröken,” I said, “do you not think people here in these parts are like the short summer itself? In their feeling, I mean? Beautiful, but lasting only a little while?”

I spoke loudly, very loudly, and I did so on purpose. And I went on speaking loudly, and asked that young lady once more if she would not like to come up one day and see my hut. “Heaven bless you for it,” I said in my distress, and I was already thinking to myself how, perhaps, I might find something to give her as a present if she came. Perhaps I had nothing to give her but my powder-horn, I thought.

And she promised to come.

Edwarda sat with her face turned away and let me talk as much as I pleased. She listened to what the others said, putting in a word herself now and again. The Doctor told the young ladies' fortunes by their hands, and talked a lot; he himself had small, delicate hands, with a ring on one finger. I felt myself unwanted, and sat down by myself awhile on a stone. It was getting late in the afternoon. Here I am, I said to myself, sitting all alone on a stone, and the only creature that could make me move, she lets me sit. Well, then, I care no more than she.

A great feeling of forsakenness came over me. I could hear them talking behind me, and I heard how Edwarda laughed; and at that I got up suddenly and went over to the party. My excitement ran away with me.

“Just a moment,” I said. “It occurred to me while I was sitting there that perhaps you might like to see my fly-book.” And I took it out. “I am sorry I did not think of it before. Just look through it, if you please; I should be only too delighted. You must all see it; there are both red and yellow flies in it.” And I held my cap in my hand as I spoke. I was myself aware that I had taken off my cap, and I knew that this was wrong, so I put it on again at once.

There was deep silence for a moment, and no one offered to take the book. At last the Doctor reached out his hand for it and said politely:

“Thanks very much; let us look at the things. It's always been a marvel to me how those flies were put together.”

“I make them myself,” I said, full of gratitude. And I went on at once to explain how

it was done. It was simple enough: I bought the feathers and the hooks. They were not well made, but they were only for my own use. One could get ready-made flies in the shops, and they were beautiful things.

Edwarda cast one careless glance at me and my book, and went on talking with her girl friends.

“Ah, here are some of the feathers,” said the Doctor. “Look, these are really fine.”

Edwarda looked up.

“The green ones are pretty,” she said; “let me look, Doctor.”

“Keep them,” I cried. “Yes, do, I beg you, now. Two green feathers. Do, as a kindness, let them be a keepsake.”

She looked at them and said:

“They are green and gold, as you turn them in the sun. Thank you, if you will give me them.”

“I should be glad to,” I said.

And she took the feathers.

A little later the Doctor handed me the book and thanked me. Then he got up and asked if it were not nearly time to be getting back.

I said: “Yes, for Heaven's sake. I have a dog tied up at home; look you, I have a dog, and he is my friend; he lies there thinking of me, and when I come home he stands with his forepaws at the window to greet me. It has been a lovely day, and now it is nearly over; let us go back. I am grateful to you all.”

I waited on the shore to see which boat Edwarda chose, and made up my mind to go in the other one myself. Suddenly she called me. I looked at her in surprise; her face was flushed. Then she came up to me, held out her hand, and said tenderly:

“Thank you for the feathers. You will come in the boat with me, won't you?”

“If you wish it,” I said.

We got into the boat, and she sat down beside me on the same seat, her knee touching mine. I looked at her, and she glanced at me for a moment in return. I began to feel myself repaid for that bitter day, and was growing happy again, when she suddenly changed her position, turned her back to me, and began talking to the Doctor, who was sitting at the rudder.

For a full quarter of an hour I did not exist for her. Then I did something I repent of, and have not yet forgotten. Her shoe fell off: I snatched it up and flung it far out into the water, for pure joy that she was near, or from some impulse to make myself remarked, to remind her of my existence—I do not know. It all happened so suddenly I did not think, only felt that impulse.

The ladies set up a cry. I myself was as if paralyzed by what I had done, but what was the good of that? It was done. The Doctor came to my help; he cried “Row,” and steered towards the shoe. And the next moment the boatman had caught hold of the shoe just as it had filled with water and was sinking; the man's arm was wet up to the elbow. Then there was a shout of “Hurra” from many in the boats, because the shoe was saved.

I was deeply ashamed, and felt that my face changed color and winced, as I wiped the shoe with my handkerchief. Edwarda took it without a word. Not till a little while after did she say:

“I never saw such a thing!”

“No, did you ever?” I said. And I smiled and pulled myself together, making as if I had played that trick for some particular reason—as if there were something behind it. But what could there be? The Doctor looked at me, for the first time, contemptuously.

A little time passed; the boats glided homeward; the feeling of awkwardness among the party disappeared; we sang; we were nearing the land. Edwarda said:

“Oh, we haven't finished the wine: there is ever so much left. We must have another

party, a new party later on; we must have a dance, a ball in the big room."

When we went ashore I made an apology to Edwarda.

"If you knew how I wished myself back in my hut!" I said. "This has been a long and painful day."

"Has it been a painful day for you, Lieutenant?"

"I mean," said I, trying to pass it off, "I mean, I have caused unpleasantness both to myself and others. I threw your shoe into the water."

"Yes—an extraordinary thing to do."

"Forgive me," I said.

XVI

What worse things might still happen? I resolved to keep calm, whatever might come; Heaven is my witness. Was it I who had forced myself on her from the first? No, no; never! I was but standing in her way one week-day as she passed. What a summer it was here in the north! Already the cockchafers had ceased to fly, and people were grown more and more difficult to understand, for all that the sun shone on them day and night. What were their blue eyes looking for, and what were they thinking behind their mysterious lashes? Well, after all, they were all equally indifferent to me. I took out my lines and went fishing for two days, four days; but at night I lay with open eyes in the hut...

"Edwarda, I have not seen you for four days."

"Four days, yes—so it is. Oh, but I have been so busy. Come and look."

She led me into the big room. The tables had been moved out, the chairs set round the walls, everything shifted; the chandelier, the stove, and the walls were fantastically decorated with heather and black stuff from the store. The piano stood in one corner.

These were her preparations for “the ball.”

“What do you think of it?” she asked.

“Wonderful,” I said.

We went out of the room.

I said: “Listen, Edwarda—have you quite forgotten me?”

“I can't understand you,” she answered in surprise. “You saw all I had been doing—how could I come and see you at the same time?”

“No,” I agreed; “perhaps you couldn't.” I was sick and exhausted with want of sleep, my speech grew meaningless and uncontrolled; I had been miserable the whole day. “No, of course you could not come. But I was going to say ... in a word, something has changed; there is something wrong. Yes. But I cannot read in your face what it is. There is something very strange about your brow, Edwarda. Yes, I can see it now.”

“But I have not forgotten you,” she cried, blushing, and slipped her arm suddenly into mine.

“No? Well, perhaps you have not forgotten me. But if so, then I do not know what I am saying. One or the other.”

“You shall have an invitation to-morrow. You must dance with me. Oh, how we will dance!”

“Will you go a little way with me?” I asked.

“Now? No, I can't,” she answered. “The Doctor will be here presently. He's going to help me with something; there is a good deal still to be done. And you think the room will look all right as it is? But don't you think...?”

A carriage stops outside.

“Is the Doctor driving to-day?” I ask.

“Yes, I sent a horse for him. I wanted to ...”

“Spare his bad foot, yes. Well, I must be off. Goddag, Goddag, Doctor. Pleased to see you again. Well and fit, I hope? Excuse my running off...”

Once down the steps outside, I turned round. Edwarda was standing at the window watching me; she stood holding the curtains aside with both hands, to see; and her look was thoughtful. A foolish joy thrilled me; I hurried away from the house light-footed, with a darkness shading my eyes; my gun was light as a walking-stick in my hand. If I could win her, I should become a good man, I thought. I reached the woods and thought again: If I might win her, I would serve her more untiringly than any other; and even if she proved unworthy, if she took a fancy to demand impossibilities, I would yet do all that I could, and be glad that she was mine... I stopped, fell on my knees, and in humility and hope licked a few blades of grass by the roadside, and then got up again.

At last I began to feel almost sure. Her altered behavior of late—it was only her manner. She had stood looking after me when I went; stood at the window following with her eyes till I disappeared. What more could she do? My delight upset me altogether; I was hungry, and no longer felt it.

Æsop ran on ahead; a moment afterward he began to bark. I looked up; a woman with a white kerchief on her head was standing by the corner of the hut. It was Eva, the blacksmith's daughter.

“Goddag, Eva!” I called to her.

She stood by the big grey stone, her face all red, sucking one finger.

“Is it you, Eva? What is the matter?” I asked.

“Æsop has bitten me,” she answered, with some awkwardness, and cast down her eyes.

I looked at her finger. She had bitten it herself. A thought flashed into my mind, and I asked her:

“Have you been waiting here long?”

“No, not very long,” she answered.

And without a word more from either of us, I took her by the hand and let her into the hut.

XVII

I came from my fishing as usual, and appeared at the “ball” with the gun and bag—only I had put on my best leather suit. It was late when I got to Sirilund; I heard them dancing inside. Someone called out: “Here's the hunter, the Lieutenant.” A few of the young people crowded round me and wanted to see my catch; I had shot a brace of seabirds and caught a few haddock. Edwarda bade me welcome with a smile; she had been dancing, and was flushed.

“The first dance with me,” she said.

And we danced. Nothing awkward happened; I turned giddy, but did not fall. My heavy boots made a certain amount of noise; I could hear it myself, the noise, and resolved not to dance any more; I had even scratched their painted floor. But how glad I was that I had done nothing worse!

Herr Mack's two assistants from the store were there, laboriously and with a solemn concentration. The Doctor took part eagerly in the set dances. Besides these gentlemen, there were four other youngish men, sons of families belonging to the parish, the Dean, and the district surgeons. A stranger, a commercial traveller, was there too; he made himself remarked by his fine voice, and tralala'ed to the music; now and again he relieved the ladies at the piano.

I cannot remember now what happened the first few hours, but I remember everything from the latter part of the night. The sun shone redly in through the windows all the time, and the seabirds slept. We had wine and cakes, we talked loud

and sang, Edwarda's laugh sounded fresh and careless through the room. But why had she never a word for me now? I went towards where she was sitting, and would have said something polite to her, as best I could; she was wearing a black dress, her confirmation dress, perhaps, and it was grown too short for her, but it suited her when she danced, and I thought to tell her so.

“That black dress...” I began.

But she stood up, put her arm round one of her girl friends, and walked off with her. This happened two or three times. Well, I thought to myself, if it's like that... But then why should she stand looking sorrowfully after me from the window when I go? Well, 'tis her affair!

A lady asked me to dance. Edwarda was sitting near, and I answered loudly:

“No; I am going home directly.”

Edwarda threw a questioning glance at me, and said: “Going? Oh, no, you mustn't go.”

I started, and felt that I was biting my lip. I got up.

“What you said then seemed very significant to me, Edwarda,” I said darkly, and made a few steps towards the door.

The Doctor put himself in my way, and Edwarda herself came hurrying up.

“Don't misunderstand me,” she said warmly. “I meant to say I hoped you would be the last to go, the very last. And besides, it's only one o'clock... Listen,” she went on with sparkling eyes, “you gave our boatmen five daler for saving my shoe. It was too much.” And she laughed heartily and turned round to the rest.

I stood with open mouth, disarmed and confused.

“You are pleased to be witty,” I said. “I never gave your boatman five daler at all.”

“Oh, didn't you?” She opened the door to the kitchen, and called the boatmen in. “Jakob, you remember the day you rowed us out to Korholmerne, and you picked up

my shoe when it fell into the water?”

“Yes,” answered Jakob.

“And you were given five daler for saving it?”

“Yes, you gave me...”

“Thanks, that will do, you can go.”

Now what did she mean by that trick? I thought she was trying to shame me. She should not succeed; I was not going to have that to blush for. And I said loudly and distinctly:

“I must point out to all here that this is either a mistake or a lie. I have never so much as thought of giving the boatman five daler for your shoe. I ought to have done so, perhaps, but up to now it has not been done.”

“Whereupon we shall continue the dance,” she said, frowning. “Why aren't we dancing?”

“She owes me an explanation of this,” I said to myself, and watched for an opportunity to speak with her. She went into a side room, and I followed her.

“Skaal,” I said, and lifted a glass to drink with her.

“I have nothing in my glass,” she answered shortly.

But her glass was standing in front of her, quite full.

“I thought that was your glass.”

“No, it is not mine,” she answered, and turned away, and was in deep conversation with someone else.

“I beg your pardon then,” said I.

Several of the guests had noticed this little scene.

My heart was hissing within me. I said offendedly: “But at least you owe me an explanation...”

She rose, took both my hands, and said earnestly:

“But not to-day; not now. I am so miserable. Heavens, how you look at me. We were friends once...”

Overwhelmed, I turned right about, and went in to the dancers again.

A little after, Edwarda herself came in and took up her place by the piano, at which the travelling man was seated, playing a dance; her face at that moment was full of inward pain.

“I have never learned to play,” she said, looking at me with dark eyes. “If I only could!”

I could make no answer to this. But my heart flew out towards her once more, and I asked:

“Why are you so unhappy all at once, Edwarda? If you knew how it hurts me to see—”

“I don't know what it is,” she said. “Everything, perhaps. I wish all these people would go away at once, all of them. No, not you—remember, you must stay till the last.”

And again her words revived me, and my eyes saw the light in the sun-filled room. The Dean's daughter came over, and began talking to me; I wished her ever so far away, and gave her short answers. And I purposely kept from looking at her, for she had said that about my eyes being like an animal's. She turned to Edwarda and told her that once, somewhere abroad—in Riga I think it was—a man had followed her along the street.

“Kept walking after me, street after street, and smiling across at me,” she said.

“Why, was he blind, then?” I broke in, thinking to please Edwarda. And I shrugged my shoulders as well.

The young lady understood my coarseness at once, and answered:

“He must have been blind indeed, to run after any one so old and ugly as I am.”

But I gained no thanks from Edwarda for that: she drew her friend away; they whispered together and shook their heads. After that, I was left altogether to myself.

Another hour passed. The seabirds began to wake out on the reefs; their cries sounded in through the open windows. A spasm of joy went through me at this first calling of the birds, and I longed to be out there on the islands myself...

The Doctor, once more in good humor, drew the attention of all present. The ladies were never tired of his society. Is that thing there my rival? I thought, noting his lame leg and miserable figure. He had taken to a new and amusing oath: he said Död og Pinsel, [Footnote: A slight variation of the usual Död og Pine (death and torture).] and every time he used that comical expression I laughed aloud. In my misery I wished to give the fellow every advantage I could, since he was my rival. I let it be “Doctor” here and “Doctor” there, and called out myself: “Listen to the Doctor!” and laughed aloud at the things he said.

“I love this world,” said the Doctor. “I cling to life tooth and nail. And when I come to die, then I hope to find a corner somewhere straight up over London and Paris, where I can hear the rumble of the human cancan all the time, all the time.”

“Splendid!” I cried, and choked with laughter, though I was not in the least bit drunk.

Edwarda too seemed delighted.

When the guests began to go, I slipped away into the little room at the side and sat down to wait. I heard one after another saying good-bye on the stairs; the Doctor also took his leave and went. Soon all the voices had died away. My heart beat violently as I waited.

Edwarda came in again. At sight of me she stood a moment in surprise; then she said with a smile:

“Oh, are you there? It was kind of you to wait till the last. I am tired out now.”

She remained standing.

I got up then, and said: “You will be wanting rest now. I hope you are not displeased any more, Edwarda. You were so unhappy a while back, and it hurt me.”

“It will be all right when I have slept.”

I had no more to add. I went towards the door.

“Thank you,” she said, offering her hand. “It was a pleasant evening.” She would have seen me to the door, but I tried to prevent her.

“No need,” I said; “do not trouble, I can find my way...”

But she went with me all the same. She stood in the passage waiting patiently while I found my cap, my gun, and my bag. There was a walking-stick in the corner; I saw it well enough; I stared at it, and recognized it—it was the Doctor's. When she marked what I was looking at, she blushed in confusion; it was plain to see from her face that she was innocent, that she knew nothing of the stick. A whole minute passed. At last she turned, furiously impatient, and said tremblingly:

“Your stick—do not forget your stick.”

And there before my eyes she handed me the Doctor's stick.

I looked at her. She was still holding out the stick; her hand trembled. To make an end of it, I took the thing, and set it back in the corner. I said:

“It is the Doctor's stick. I cannot understand how a lame man could forget his stick.”
“You and your lame man!” she cried bitterly, and took a step forward towards me. “You are not lame—no; but even if you were, you could not compare with him; no, you could never compare with him. There!”

I sought for some answer, but my mind was suddenly empty; I was silent. With a deep bow, I stepped backwards out of the door, and down on to the steps. There I stood a moment looking straight before me; then I moved off.

“So, he has forgotten his stick,” I thought to myself. “And he will come back this way to fetch it. He would not let me be the last man to leave the house...” I walked up the road very slowly, keeping a lookout either way, and stopped at the edge of the wood. At last, after half an hour's waiting, the Doctor came walking towards me; he had seen me, and was walking quickly. Before he had time to speak I lifted my cap, to try him. He raised his hat in return. I went straight up to him and said:

“I gave you no greeting.”

He came a step nearer and stared at me.

“You gave me no greeting...?”

“No,” said I.

Pause.

“Why, it is all the same to me what you did,” he said, turning pale. “I was going to fetch my stick; I left it behind.” I could say nothing in answer to this, but I took my revenge another way; I stretched out my gun before him, as if he were a dog, and said:

“Over!”

And I whistled, as if coaxing him to jump over.

For a moment he struggled with himself; his face took on the strangest play of expression as he pressed his lips together and held his eyes fixed on the ground. Suddenly he looked at me sharply; a half smile lit up his features, and he said:

“What do you really mean by all this?”

I did not answer, but his words affected me.

Suddenly he held out his hand to me, and said gently:

“There is something wrong with you. If you will tell me what it is, then perhaps...”

I was overwhelmed now with shame and despair; his calm words made me lose my balance. I wished to show him some kindness in return, and I put my arm round him,

and said:

“Forgive me this! No, what could be wrong with me? There is nothing wrong; I have no need of your help. You are looking for Edwarda, perhaps? You will find her at home. But make haste, or she will have gone to bed before you come; she was very tired, I could see it myself. I tell you the best news I can, now; it is true. You will find her at home—go, then!” And I turned and hurried away from him, striking out with a long stride up through the woods and back to the hut.

For a while I sat there on the bed just as I had come in, with my bag over my shoulder and my gun in my hand. Strange thoughts passed through my mind. Why ever had I given myself away so to that Doctor? The thought that I had put my arm round him and looked at him with wet eyes angered me; he would chuckle over it, I thought; perhaps at that very moment he might be sitting laughing over it, with Edwarda. He had set his stick aside in the hall. Yes, even if I were lame, I could not compare with the Doctor. I could never compare with him—those were her words...

I stepped out into the middle of the floor, cocked my gun, set the muzzle against my left instep, and pulled the trigger. The shot passed through the middle of the foot and pierced the floor. Æsop gave a short terrified bark.

A little after there came a knock at the door.

It was the Doctor.

“Sorry to disturb you,” he began. “You went off so suddenly, I thought it might do no harm if we had a little talk together. Smell of powder, isn't there...?”

He was perfectly sober. “Did you see Edwarda? Did you get your stick?” I asked.

“I found my stick. But Edwarda had gone to bed... What's that? Heavens, man, you're bleeding!”

“No, nothing to speak of. I was just putting the gun away, and it went off; it's nothing. Devil take you, am I obliged to sit here and give you all sorts of

information about that...? You found your stick?”

But he did not heed my words; he was staring at my torn boot and the trickle of blood. With a quick movement he laid down his stick and took off his gloves.

“Sit still—I must get that boot off. I thought it was a shot I heard.”

XVIII

How I repented of it afterward—that business with the gun. It was a mad thing to do. It was not worth while any way, and it served no purpose, only kept me tied down to the hut for weeks. I remember distinctly even now all the discomfort and annoyance it caused; my washerwoman had to come every day and stay there nearly all the time, making purchases of food, looking after my housekeeping, for several weeks. Well, and then...

One day the Doctor began talking about Edwarda. I heard her name, heard what she had said and done, and it was no longer of any great importance to me; it was as if he spoke of some distant, irrelevant thing. So quickly one can forget, I thought to myself, and wondered at it.

“Well, and what do you think of Edwarda yourself, since you ask? I have not thought of her for weeks, to tell the truth. Wait a bit—it seems to me there must have been something between you and her, you were so often together. You acted host one day at a picnic on the island, and she was hostess. Don't deny it, Doctor, there was something—a sort of understanding. No, for Heaven's sake don't answer me. You owe me no explanation, I am not asking to be told anything at all—let us talk of something else if you like. How long before I can get about again?”

I sat there thinking of what I had said. Why was I inwardly afraid lest the Doctor should speak out? What was Edwarda to me? I had forgotten her.

And later the talk turned on her again, and I interrupted him once more—God knows

what it was I dreaded to hear.

“What do you break off like that for?” he asked. “Is it that you can't bear to hear me speak her name?”

“Tell me,” I said, “what is your honest opinion of Edwarda? I should be interested to know.”

He looked at me suspiciously.

“My honest opinion?”

“Perhaps you may have something new to tell me to-day. Perhaps you have proposed, and been accepted. May I congratulate you? No? Ah, the devil trust you—haha!”

“So that was what you were afraid of?”

“Afraid of? My dear Doctor!”

Pause.

“No,” he said, “I have not proposed and been accepted. But you have, perhaps. There's no proposing to Edwarda—she will take whomever she has a fancy for. Did you take her for a peasant girl? You have met her, and seen for yourself. She is a child that's had too little whipping in her time, and a woman of many moods. Cold? No fear of that! Warm? Ice, I say. What is she, then? A slip of a girl, sixteen or seventeen—exactly. But try to make an impression on that slip of a girl, and she will laugh you to scorn for your trouble. Even her father can do nothing with her; she obeys him outwardly, but, in point of fact, 'tis she herself that rules. She says you have eyes like an animal...”

“You're wrong there—it was someone else said I had eyes like an animal.”

“Someone else? Who?”

“I don't know. One of her girl friends. No, it was not Edwarda said that. Wait a bit though; perhaps, after all, it was Edwarda...”

“When you look at her, it makes her feel so and so, she says. But do you think that brings you a hairbreadth nearer? Hardly. Look at her, use your eyes as much as you please—but as soon as she marks what you are doing, she will say to herself—'Ho, here's this man looking at me with his eyes, and thinks to win me that way.' And with a single glance, or a word, she'll have you ten leagues away. Do you think I don't know her? How old do you reckon her to be?” “She was born in '38, she said.”

“A lie. I looked it up, out of curiosity. She's twenty, though she might well pass for fifteen. She is not happy; there's a deal of conflict in that little head of hers. When she stands looking out at the hills and the sea, and her mouth gives that little twitch, that little spasm of pain, then she is suffering; but she is too proud, too obstinate for tears. She is more than a bit romantic; a powerful imagination; she is waiting for a prince. What was that about a certain five-daler note you were supposed to have given someone?”

“A jest. It was nothing...”

“It was something all the same. She did something of the same sort with me once. It's a year ago now. We were on board the mail-packet while it was lying here in the harbour. It was raining, and very cold. A woman with a child in her arms was sitting on deck, shivering. Edwarda asked her: 'Don't you feel cold?' Yes, she did. 'And the little one too?' Yes, the little one was cold as well. 'Why don't you go into the cabin?' asks Edwarda. 'I've only a steerage ticket,' says the woman. Edwarda looks at me. 'The woman here has only a steerage ticket,' she says. 'Well, and what then?' I say to myself. But I understand her look. I'm not a rich man; what I have I've worked to earn, and I think twice before I spend it; so I move away. If Edwarda wants someone to pay for the woman, let her do it herself; she and her father can better afford it than I. And sure enough, Edwarda paid. She's splendid in that way—no one can say she hasn't a heart. But as true as I'm sitting here she expected me to pay for a saloon passage for the woman and child; I could see it in her eyes. And what then, do you

think? The woman gets up and thanks her for her kindness. 'Don't thank me—it was that gentleman there,' says Edwarda, pointing to me as calmly as could be. What do you think of that? The woman thanks me too; and what can I say? Simply had to leave it as it was. That's just one thing about her. But I could tell you many more. And as for the five daler to the boatman—she gave him the money herself. If you had done it, she would have flung her arms round you and kissed you on the spot. You should have been the lordly cavalier that paid an extravagant sum for a worn-out shoe—that would have suited her ideas; she expected it. And as you didn't—she did it herself in your name. That's her way—reckless and calculating at the same time."

"Is there no one, then, that can win her?" I asked.

"Severity's what she wants," said the Doctor, evading the question. "There's something wrong about it all; she has too free a hand; she can do as she pleases, and have her own way all the time. People take notice of her; no one ever disregards her; there is always something at hand for her to work on with effect. Have you noticed the way I treat her myself? Like a schoolgirl, a child; I order her about, criticise her way of speaking, watch her carefully, and show her up now and again. Do you think she doesn't understand it? Oh, she's stiff and proud, it hurts her every time; but then again she is too proud to show it. But that's the way she should be handled. When you came up here I had been at her for a year like that, and it was beginning to tell; she cried with pain and vexation; she was growing more reasonable. Then you came along and upset it all. That's the way it goes—one lets go of her and another takes her up again. After you, there'll be a third, I suppose—you never know."

"Oho," thought I to myself, "the Doctor has something to revenge." And I said:

"Doctor, what made you trouble to tell me all that long story? What was it for? Am I to help you with her upbringing?"

"And then she's fiery as a volcano," he went on, never heeding my question. "You

asked if no one could ever win her? I don't see why not. She is waiting for her prince, and he hasn't come yet. Again and again she thinks she's found him, and finds out she's wrong; she thought you were the one, especially because you had eyes like an animal. Haha! I say, though, Herr Lieutenant, you ought at least to have brought your uniform with you. It would have been useful now. Why shouldn't she be won? I have seen her wringing her hands with longing for someone to come and take her, carry her away, rule over her, body and soul. Yes ... but he must come from somewhere—turn up suddenly one day, and be something out of the ordinary. I have an idea that Herr Mack is out on an expedition; there's something behind this journey of his. He went off like that once before, and brought a man back with him."

"Brought a man back with him?"

"Oh, but he was no good," said the Doctor, with a wry laugh. "He was a man about my own age, and lame, too, like myself. He wouldn't do for the prince."

"And he went away again? Where did he go?" I asked, looking fixedly at him.

"Where? Went away? Oh, I don't know," he answered confusedly. "Well, well, we've been talking too long about this already. That foot of yours—oh, you can begin to walk in a week's time. Au revoir."

XIX

A woman's voice outside the hut. The blood rushed to my head—it was Edwarda. "Glahn—Glahn is ill, so I have heard."

And my washerwoman answered outside the door:

"He's nearly well again now."

That "Glahn—Glahn" went through me to the marrow of my bones; she said my name twice, and it touched me; her voice was clear and ringing.

She opened my door without knocking, stepped hastily in, and looked at me. And

suddenly all seemed as in the old days. There she was in her dyed jacket and her apron tied low in front, to give a longer waist. I saw it all at once; and her look, her brown face with the eyebrows high-arched into the forehead, the strangely tender expression of her hands, all came on me so strongly that my brain was in a whirl. I have kissed her! I thought to myself.

I got up and remained standing.

“And you get up, you stand, when I come?” she said. “Oh, but sit down. Your foot is bad, you shot yourself. Heavens, how did it happen? I did not know of it till just now. And I was thinking all the time: What can have happened to Glahn? He never comes now. I knew nothing of it all. And you had shot yourself, and it was weeks ago, they tell me, and I knew never a word. How are you now? You are very pale: I should hardly recognize you. And your foot—will you be lame now? The Doctor says you will not be lame. Oh, I am so fond of you because you are not going to be lame! I thank God for that. I hope you will forgive me for coming up like this without letting you know; I ran nearly all the way...”

She bent over me, she was close to me, I felt her breath on my face; I reached out my hands to hold her. Then she moved away a little. Her eyes were still dewy.

“It happened this way,” I stammered out. “I was putting the gun away in the corner, but I held it awkwardly—up and down, like that; then suddenly I heard the shot. It was an accident.”

“An accident,” she said thoughtfully, nodding her head. “Let me see—it is the left foot—but why the left more than the right? Yes, of course, an accident...”

“Yes, an accident,” I broke in. “How should I know why it just happened to be the left foot? You can see for yourself—that's how I was holding the gun—it couldn't be the right foot that way. It was a nuisance, of course.” She looked at me curiously.

“Well, and so you are getting on nicely,” she said, looking around the hut. “Why didn't you send the woman down to us for food? What have you been living on?”

We went on talking for a few minutes. I asked her:

“When you came in, your face was moved, and your eyes sparkled; you gave me your hand. But now your eyes are cold again. Am I wrong?”

Pause.

“One cannot always be the same...”

“Tell me this one thing,” I said. “What is it this time that I have said or done to displease you? Then, perhaps, I might manage better in future.”

She looked out the window, towards the far horizon; stood looking out thoughtfully and answered me as I sat there behind her:

“Nothing, Glahn. Just thoughts that come at times. Are you angry now? Remember, some give a little, but it is much for them to give; others can give much, and it costs them nothing—and which has given more? You have grown melancholy in your illness. How did we come to talk of all this?” And suddenly she looked at me, her face flushed with joy. “But you must get well soon, now. We shall meet again.”

And she held out her hand. Then it came into my head not to take her hand. I stood up, put my hands behind my back, and bowed deeply; that was to thank her for her kindness in coming to pay me a visit.

“You must excuse me if I cannot see you home,” I said.

When she had gone, I sat down again to think it all over. I wrote a letter, and asked to have my uniform sent.

XX

The first day in the woods.

I was happy and weary; all the creatures came up close and looked at me; there were insects on the trees and oil-beetles crawling on the road. Well met! I said to myself. The feeling of the woods went through and through my senses; I cried for love of it

all, and was utterly happy; I was dissolved in thanksgiving. Dear woods, my home, God's peace with you from my heart... I stopped and turned all ways, named the things with tears. Birds and trees and stones and grass and ants, I called them all by name, looked round and called them all in their order. I looked up to the hills and thought: Now, now I am coming, as if in answer to their calling. Far above, the dwarf falcon was hacking away—I knew where its nests were. But the sound of those falcons up in the hills sent my thoughts far away.

About noon I rowed out and landed on a little island, an islet outside the harbour. There were mauve-coloured flowers with long stalks reaching to my knees; I waded in strange growths, raspberry and coarse grass; there were no animals, and perhaps there had never been any human being there. The sea foamed gently against the rocks and wrapped me in a veil of murmuring; far up on the egg-cliffs, all the birds of the coast were flying and screaming. But the sea wrapped me round on all sides as in an embrace. Blessed be life and earth and sky, blessed be my enemies; in this hour I will be gracious to my bitterest enemy, and bind the latchet of his shoe...

“Hiv ... ohoi...” Sounds from one of Herr Mack's craft. My heart was filled with sunshine at the well-known song. I rowed to the quay, walked up past the fishers' huts and home. The day was at an end. I had my meal, sharing it with Æsop, and set out into the woods once more. Soft winds breathed silently in my face. And I blessed the winds because they touched my face; I told them that I blessed them; my very blood sang in my veins for thankfulness. Æsop laid one paw on my knee.

Weariness came over me; I fell asleep.

Lul! lul! Bells ringing! Some leagues out at sea rose a mountain. I said two prayers, one for my dog and one for myself, and we entered into the mountain there. The gate closed behind us; I started at its clang, and woke.

Flaming red sky, the sun there stamping before my eyes; the night, the horizon, echoing with light. Æsop and I moved into the shade. All quiet around us. “No, we

will not sleep now," I said to the dog, "we will go out hunting tomorrow; the red sun is shining on us, we will not go into the mountain." ... And strange thoughts woke to life in me, and the blood rose to my head.

Excited, yet still weak, I felt someone kissing me, and the kiss lay on my lips. I looked round: there was nothing visible. "Iselin!" A sound in the grass—it might be a leaf falling to the ground, or it might be footsteps. A shiver through the woods—and I told myself it might be Iselin's breathing. Here in these woods she has moved, Iselin; here she has listened to the prayers of yellow-booted, green-cloaked huntsmen. She lived out on my farm, two miles away; four generations ago she sat at her window, and heard the echo of horns in the forest. There were reindeer and wolf and bear, and the hunters were many, and all of them had seen her grow up from a child, and each and all of them had waited for her. One had seen her eyes, another heard her voice. When she was twelve years old came Dundas. He was a Scotsman, and traded in fish, and had many ships. He had a son. When she was sixteen, she saw young Dundas for the first time. He was her first love...

And such strange fancies flowed through me, and my head grew very heavy as I sat there; I closed my eyes and felt for Iselin's kiss. Iselin, are you here, lover of life? And have you Diderik there? ... But my head grew heavier still, and I floated off on the waves of sleep.

Lul! lul! A voice speaking, as if the Seven Stars themselves were singing through my blood; Iselin's voice:

"Sleep, sleep! I will tell you of my love while you sleep. I was sixteen, and it was springtime, with warm winds; Dundas came. It was like the rushing of an eagle's flight. I met him one morning before the hunt set out; he was twenty-five, and came from far lands; he walked by my side in the garden, and when he touched me with his arm I began to love him. Two red spots showed in his forehead, and I could have kissed those two red spots.

“In the evening after the hunt I went to seek him in the garden, and I was afraid lest I should find him. I spoke his name softly to myself, and feared lest he should hear. Then he came out from the bushes and whispered: 'An hour after midnight!' And then he was gone.

“'An hour after midnight,' I said to myself—'what did he mean by that? I cannot understand. He must have meant he was going away to far lands again; an hour after midnight he was going away—but what was it to me?'

“An hour after midnight he came back.”

“'May I sit there by you?' he said.

“'Yes,' I told him. 'Yes.'

“We sat there on the sofa; I moved away. I looked down.

“'You are cold,' he said, and took my hand. A little after he said: 'How cold you are!' and put his arm round me.

“And I was warmed with his arm. So we sat a little while. Then a cock crew.

“'Did you hear,' he said, 'a cock crow? It is nearly dawn.'

“'Are you quite sure it was the cock crow?' I stammered.

“Then the day came—already it was morning. Something was thrilling all through me. What hour was it that struck just now?

“My maid came in.

“'Your flowers have not been watered,' she said.

“I had forgotten my flowers.

“A carriage drove up to the gate.

“'Your cat has had no milk,' said the maid.

“But I had no thought for my flowers, or my cat; I asked:

“'Is that Dundas outside there? Ask him to come in here to me at once; I am

expecting him; there was something...'

“He knocked. I opened the door.

“'Iselin!' he cried, and kissed my lips a whole minute long.

“'I did not send for you,' I whispered to him.

“'Did you not?' he asked.

“Then I answered:

“'Yes, I did—I sent for you. I was longing so unspeakably for you again. Stay here with me a little.'

“And I covered my eyes for love of him. He did not loose me; I sank forward and hid myself close to him.

“'Surely that was something crowing again,' he said, listening.

“But when I heard what he said, I cut off his words as swiftly as I could, and answered:

“'No, how can you imagine it? There was nothing crowing then.'

“He kissed me.

“Then it was evening again, and Dundas was gone. Something golden thrilling through me. I stood before the glass, and two eyes all alight with love looked out at me; I felt something moving in me at my own glance, and always that something thrilling and thrilling round my heart. Dear God! I had never seen myself with those eyes before, and I kissed my own lips, all love and desire, in the glass...

“And now I have told you. Another time I will tell you of Svend Herlufsen. I loved him too; he lived a league away, on the island you can see out there, and I rowed out to him myself on calm summer evenings, because I loved him. And I will tell you of Stamer. He was a priest, and I loved him. I love all...”

Through my helf-sleep I heard a cock crowing down at Sirilund.

“Iselin, hear! A cock is crowing for us too!” I cried joyfully, and reached out my arms. I woke. Æsop was already moving. “Gone!” I said in burning sorrow, and looked round. There was no one—no one there. It was morning now; the cock was still crowing down at Sirilund.

By the hut stood a woman—Eva. She had a rope in her hand; she was going to fetch wood. There was the morning of life in the young girl's figure as she stood there, all golden in the sun.

“You must not think...” she stammered out.

“What is it I must not think, Eva?”

“I—I did not come this way to meet you; I was just passing...”

And her face darkened in a blush.

XXI

My foot continued to trouble me a good deal. It often itched at nights, and kept me awake; a sudden spasm would shoot through it, and in changeable weather it was full of gout. It was like that for many days. But it did not make me lame, after all.

The days went on.

Herr Mack had returned, and I knew it soon enough. He took my boat away from me, and left me in difficulties, for it was still the closed season, and there was nothing I could shoot. But why did he take the boat away from me like that? Two of Herr Mack's folk from the quay had rowed out with a stranger in the morning.

I met the Doctor.

“They have taken my boat away,” I said.

“There's a new man come,” he said. “They have to row him out every day and back in the evening. He's investigating the sea-floor.”

The newcomer was a Finn. Herr Mack had met him accidentally on board the

steamer; he had come from Spitzbergen with some collections of scales and small sea-creatures; they called him Baron. He had been given a big room and another smaller one in Herr Mack's house. He caused quite a stir in the place.

“I am in difficulties about meat; I might ask Edwarda for something for this evening,” I thought. I walked down to Sirilund. I noticed at once that Edwarda was wearing a new dress. She seemed to have grown; her dress was much longer now.

“Excuse my not getting up,” she said, quite shortly, and offered her hand.

“My daughter is not very well, I'm sorry to say,” said Herr Mack. “A chill—she has not been taking care of herself... You came to ask about your boat, I suppose? I shall have to lend you another one instead. It's not a new one, but as long as you bail it out every now and then ... We've a scientist come to stay with us, you see, and with a man like that, of course, you understand... He has no time to spare; works all day and comes home in the evening. Don't go now till he comes; you will be interested in meeting him. Here's his card, with coronet and all; he's a Baron. A very nice man. I met him quite by accident.”

Aha, I thought, so they don't ask you to supper. Well, thank Heaven, I only came down by way of a trial; I can go home again—I've still some fish left in the hut. Enough for a meal, I daresay. Basta!

The Baron came in. A little man, about forty, with a long, narrow face, prominent cheek bones, and a thinnish black beard. His glance was sharp and penetrating, but he wore strong glasses. His shirt studs, too, were ornamented with a little five-pointed coronet, like the one on his card. He stooped a little, and his thin hands were blue-veined, but the nails were like yellow metal.

“Delighted, Herr Lieutenant. Have you been here long, may I ask?”

“A few months.”

A pleasant man. Herr Mack asked him to tell us about his scales and sea-things, and he did so willingly—told us what kind of clay there was round Korholmerne—went

into his room and fetched a sample of weed from the White Sea. He was constantly lifting up his right forefinger and shifting his thick gold spectacles back and forward on his nose. Herr Mack was most interested. An hour passed.

The Baron spoke of my accident—that unfortunate shot. Was I well again now? Pleased to hear it.

Now who had told him of that? I asked:

“And how did you hear of that, Baron?”

“Oh, who was it, now? Fröken Mack, I think. Was it not you, Fröken Mack?”

Edwarda flushed hotly.

I had come so poor! for days past, a dark misery had weighed me down. But at the stranger's last words a joy fluttered through me on the instant. I did not look at Edwarda, but in my mind I thanked her: Thanks, for having spoken of me, named my name with your tongue, though it be all valueless to you. Godnat.

I took my leave. Edwarda still kept her seat, excusing herself, for politeness' sake, by saying she was unwell. Indifferently she gave me her hand.

And Herr Mack stood chatting eagerly with the Baron. He was talking of his grandfather, Consul Mack:

“I don't know if I told you before, Baron; this diamond here was a gift from King Carl Johan, who pinned it to my grandfather's breast with his own hands.”

I went out to the front steps; no one saw me to the door. I glanced in passing through the windows of the sitting-room; and there stood Edwarda, tall, upright, holding the curtains apart with both hands, looking out. I did not bow to her: I forgot everything; a swirl of confusion overwhelmed me and drew me hurriedly away.

“Halt! Stop a moment!” I said to myself, when I reached the woods. God in Heaven, but there must be an end of this! I felt all hot within on a sudden, and I groaned. Alas, I had no longer any pride in my heart; I had enjoyed Edwarda's favour for a

week, at the outside, but that was over long since, and I had not ordered my ways accordingly. From now on, my heart should cry to her: Dust, air, earth on my way; God in Heaven, yes...

I reached the hut, found my fish, and had a meal.

Here are you burning out your life for the sake of a worthless schoolgirl, and your nights are full of desolate dreams. And a hot wind stands still about your head, a close, foul wind of last year's breath. Yet the sky is quivering with the most wonderful blue, and the hills are calling. Come, Æsop, Hei...

A week passed. I hired the blacksmith's boat and fished for my meals. Edwarda and the Baron were always together in the evening when he came home from his sea trips. I saw them once at the mill. One evening they both came by my hut; I drew away from the window and barred the door. It made no impression on me whatever to see them together; I shrugged my shoulders. Another evening I met them on the road, and exchanged greetings; I left it to the Baron to notice me first, and merely put up two fingers to my cap, to be discourteous. I walked slowly past them, and looked carelessly at them as I did so.

Another day passed.

How many long days had not passed already? I was downcast, dispirited; my heart pondered idly over things; even the kindly grey stone by the hut seemed to wear an expression of sorrow and despair when I went by. There was rain in the air; the heat seemed gasping before me wherever I went, and I felt the gout in my left foot; I had seen one of Herr Mack's horses shivering in its harness in the morning; all these things were significant to me as signs of the weather. Best to furnish the house well with food while the weather holds, I thought.

I tied up Æsop, took my fishing tackle and my gun, and went down to the quay. I was quite unusually troubled in mind.

“When will the mail-packet be in?” I asked a fisherman there.

“The mail-packet? In three weeks' time,” he answered.

“I am expecting my uniform,” I said.

Then I met one of Herr Mack's assistants from the store. I shook hands with him, and said:

“Tell me, do you never play whist now at Sirilund?”

“Yes, often,” he answered.

Pause.

“I have not been there lately,” I said.

I rowed out to my fishing grounds. The weather was mild, but oppressive. The gnats gathered in swarms, and I had to smoke all the time to keep them off. The haddock were biting; I fished with two hooks and made a good haul. On the way back I shot a brace of guillemots.

When I came in to the quay the blacksmith was there at work. A thought occurred to me; I asked him:

“Going up my way?”

“No,” said he, “Herr Mack's given me a bit of work to do here that'll keep me till midnight.”

I nodded, and thought to myself that it was well.

I took my fish and went off, going round by way of the blacksmith's house. Eva was there alone.

“I have been longing for you with all my heart,” I told her. And I was moved at the sight of her. She could hardly look me in the face for wonder. “I love your youth and your good eyes,” I said. “Punish me to-day because I have thought more of another than of you. I tell you, I have come here only to see you; you make me happy, I am fond of you. Did you hear me calling for you last night?”

“No,” she answered, frightened.

“I called Edwarda, but it was you I meant. I woke up and heard myself. Yes, it was you I meant; it was only a mistake; I said 'Edwarda,' but it was only by accident. By Heaven, you are my dearest, Eva! Your lips are so red to-day. Your feet are prettier than Edwarda's—just look yourself and see.”

Joy such as I had never seen in her lit up her face; she made as if to turn away, but hesitated, and put one arm round my neck.

We talked together, sitting all the time on a long bench, talking to each other of many things. I said:

“Would you believe it? Edwarda has not learnt to speak properly yet; she talks like a child, and says 'more happier.' I heard her myself. Would you say she had a lovely forehead? I do not think so. She has a devilish forehead. And she does not wash her hands.”

“But we weren't going to talk of her any more.”

“Quite right. I forgot.”

A little pause. I was thinking of something, and fell silent.

“Why are your eyes wet?” asked Eva.

“She has a lovely forehead, though,” I said, “and her hands are always clean. It was only an accident that they were dirty once. I did not mean to say what I did.” But then I went on angrily, with clenched teeth: “I sit thinking of you all the time, Eva; but it occurs to me that perhaps you have not heard what I am going to tell you now. The first time Edwarda saw Æsop, she said: 'Æsop—that was the name of a wise man—a Phrygian, he was.' Now wasn't that simply silly? She had read it in a book the same day, I'm sure of it.”

“Yes,” says Eva; “but what of it?”

“And as far as I remember, she said, too, that Æsop had Xanthus for his teacher. Hahaha!”

“Yes?”

“Well, what the devil is the sense of telling a crowd of people that Æsop had Xanthus for his teacher? I ask you. Oh, you are not in the mood to-day, Eva, or you would laugh till your sides ached at that.”

“Yes, I think it is funny,” said Eva, and began laughing forcedly and in wonder. “But I don't understand it as well as you do.”

I sit silent and thoughtful, silent and thoughtful.

“Do you like best to sit still and not talk?” asked Eva softly. Goodness shone in her eyes; she passed her hand over my hair.

“You good, good soul,” I broke out, and pressed her close to me. “I know for certain I am perishing for love of you; I love you more and more; the end of it will be that you must go with me when I go away. You shall see. Could you go with me?”

“Yes,” she answered.

I hardly heard that yes, but I felt it in her breath and all through her. We held each other fiercely.

An hour later I kissed Eva good-bye and went away. At the door I meet Herr Mack.

Herr Mack himself.

He started—stared into the house—stopped there on the doorstep, staring in. “Ho!” said he, and could say no more; he seemed thrown altogether off his balance.

“You did not expect to find me here,” I said, raising my cap.

Eva did not move.

Herr Mack regained his composure; a curious confidence appeared in his manner, and he answered:

“You are mistaken: I came on purpose to find you. I wish to point out to you that from the 1st of April it is forbidden to fire a shot within half a mile of the bird-cliffs. You shot two birds out at the island to-day; you were seen doing so.”

“I shot two guillemots,” I said helplessly. I saw at once that the man was in the right.

“Two guillemots or two eiderducks—it is all the same. You were within the prohibited limit.”

“I admit it,” I said. “It had not occurred to me before.”

“But it ought to have occurred to you.”

“I also fired off both barrels once in May, at very nearly the same spot. It was on a picnic one day. And it was done at your own request.”

“That is another matter,” answered Herr Mack shortly.

“Well, then, devil take it, you know what you have to do, I suppose?”

“Perfectly well,” he answered.

Eva held herself in readiness; when I went out, she followed me; she had put on a kerchief, and walked away from the house; I saw her going down towards the quay. Herr Mack walked back home.

I thought it over. What a mind, to hit on that all at once, and save himself! And those piercing eyes of his. A shot, two shots, a brace of guillemots—a fine, a payment. And then everything, everything, would be settled with Herr Mack and his house. After all, it was going off so beautifully quickly and neatly...

The rain was coming down already, in great soft drops. The magpies flew low along the ground, and when I came home and turned Æsop loose he began eating the grass. The wind was beginning to rustle.

XXII

A league below me is the sea. It is raining, and I am up in the hills. An overhanging rock shelters me from the rain. I smoke my pipe, smoke one pipe after another; and every time I light it, the tobacco curls up like little worms crawling from the ash. So also with the thoughts that twirl in my head. Before me, on the ground, lies a bundle

of dry twigs, from the ruin of a bird's nest. And as with that nest, so also with my soul.

I remember every trifle of that day and the next. Hoho! I was hard put to it then! ...

I sit here up in the hills and the sea and the air are voiceful, a seething and moaning of the wind and weather, cruel to listen to. Fishing boats and small craft show far out with reefed sails, human beings on board—making for somewhere, no doubt, and Heaven knows where all those lives are making for, think I. The sea flings itself up in foam, and rolls and rolls, as if inhabited by great fierce figures that fling their limbs about and roar at one another; nay, a festival of ten thousand piping devils that duck their heads down between their shoulders and circle about, lashing the sea white with the tips of their wings. Far, far out lies a hidden reef, and from that hidden reef rises a white merman, shaking his head after a leaky sailboat making out to sea before the wind. Hoho! out to sea, out to the desolate sea...

I am glad to be alone, that none may see my eyes. I lean securely against the wall of rock, knowing that no one can observe me from behind. A bird swoops over the crest with a broken cry; at the same moment a boulder close by breaks loose and rolls down towards the sea. And I sit there still for a while, I sink into restfulness; a warm sense of comfort quivers in me because I can sit so pleasantly under shelter while the rain pours down outside. I button up my jacket, thanking God for the warmth of it. A little while more. And I fall asleep.

It was afternoon. I went home; it was still raining. Then—an unexpected encounter. Edwarda stood there before me on the path. She was wet through, as if she had been out in the rain a long time, but she smiled. Ho! I thought to myself, and my anger rose; I gripped my gun and walked fiercely although she herself was smiling.

“Goddag!” she called, speaking first.

I waited till I had come some paces nearer, and said:

“Fair one, I give you greeting.”

She started in surprise at my jesting tone. Alas, I knew not what I was saying. She smiled timidly, and looked at me.

“Have you been up in the hills to-day?” she asked. “Then you must be wet. I have a kerchief here, if you care for it; I can spare it... Oh, you don't know me.” And she cast down her eyes and shook her head when I did not take her kerchief.

“A kerchief?” I answer, grinning in anger and surprise. “But I have a jacket here—won't you borrow it? I can spare it—I would have lent it to anyone. You need not be afraid to take it. I would have lent it to a fishwife, and gladly.”

I could see that she was eager to hear what I would say. She listened with such attention that it made her look ugly; she forgot to hold her lips together. There she stood with the kerchief in her hand—a white silk kerchief which she had taken from her neck. I tore off my jacket in turn.

“For Heaven's sake put it on again,” she cried. “Don't do that! Are you so angry with me? Herregud! put your jacket on, do, before you get wet through.”

I put on my jacket again.

“Where are you going?” I asked sullenly.

“No—nowhere ... I can't understand what made you take off your jacket like that ...”

“What have you done with the Baron to-day?” I went on. “The Count can't be out at sea on a day like this.”

“Glahn, I just wanted to tell you something ...”

I interrupted her:

“May I beg you to convey my respects to the Duke?”

We looked at each other. I was ready to break in with further interruptions as soon as she opened her mouth. At last a twinge of pain passed over her face; I turned away and said:

“Seriously, you should send His Highness packing, Edwarda. He is not the man for

you. I assure you, he has been wondering these last few days whether to make you his wife or not—and that is not good enough for you."

"No, don't let us talk about that, please. Glahn, I have been thinking of you; you could take off your jacket and get wet through for another's sake; I come to you ..."

I shrugged my shoulders and went on:

"I should advise you to take the Doctor instead. What have you against him? A man in the prime of life, and a clever head—you should think it over."

"Oh, but do listen a minute ..."

Æsop, my dog, was waiting for me in the hut. I took off my cap, bowed to her again, and said:

"Fair one, I give you farewell."

And I started off.

She gave a cry:

"Oh, you are tearing my heart out. I came to you to-day; I waited for you here, and I smiled when you came. I was nearly out of my mind yesterday, because of something I had been thinking of all the time; my head was in a whirl, and I thought of you all the time. To-day I was sitting at home, and someone came in; I did not look up, but I knew who it was. 'I rowed half a mile to-day,' he said. 'Weren't you tired?' I asked. 'Oh yes, very tired, and it blistered my hands,' he said, and was very concerned about it. And I thought: Fancy being concerned about that! A little after he said: 'I heard someone whispering outside my window last night; it was your maid and one of the store men talking very intimately indeed.' 'Yes, they are to be married,' I said. 'But this was at two o'clock in the morning!' 'Well, what of it?' said I, and, after a little: 'The night is their own.' Then he shifted his gold spectacles a little up his nose, and observed: 'But don't you think, at that hour of night, it doesn't look well?' Still I didn't look up, and we sat like that for ten minutes. 'Shall I bring

you a shawl to put over your shoulders?' he asked. 'No, thank you,' I answered. 'If only I dared take your little hand,' he said. I did not answer—I was thinking of something else. He laid a little box in my lap. I opened the box, and found a brooch in it. There was a coronet on the brooch, and I counted ten stones in it... Glahn, I have that brooch with me now; will you look at it? It is trampled to bits—come, come and see how it is trampled to bits... 'Well, and what am I to do with this brooch?' I asked. 'Wear it,' he answered. But I gave him back the brooch, and said, 'Let me alone—it is another I care for.' 'What other?' he asked. 'A hunter in the woods,' I said. 'He gave me two lovely feathers once, for a keepsake. Take back your brooch.' But he would not. Then I looked at him for the first time; his eyes were piercing. 'I will not take back the brooch. You may do with it as you please; tread on it,' he said. I stood up and put the brooch under my heel and trod on it. That was this morning... For four hours I waited and waited; after dinner I went out. He came to meet me on the road. 'Where are you going?' he asked. 'To Glahn,' I answered, 'to ask him not to forget me...' Since one o'clock I have been waiting here. I stood by a tree and saw you coming—you were like a god. I loved your figure, your beard, and your shoulders, loved everything about you... Now you are impatient; you want to go, only to go; I am nothing to you, you will not look at me ...” I had stopped. When she had finished speaking I began walking on again. I was worn out with despair, and I smiled; my heart was hard.

“Yes?” I said, and stopped again. “You had something to say to me?”

But at this scorn of mine she wearied of me.

“Something to say to you? But I have told you—did you not hear? No, nothing—I have nothing to tell you any more...”

Her voice trembled strangely, but that did not move me.

Next morning Edwarda was standing outside the hut when I went out.

I had thought it all over during the night, and taken my resolve. Why should I let

myself be dazzled any longer by this creature of moods, a fisher-girl, a thing of no culture? Had not her name fastened for long enough on my heart, sucking it dry? Enough of that!—though it struck me that, perhaps, I had come nearer to her by treating her with indifference and scorn. Oh, how grandly I had scorned her—after she had made a long speech of several minutes, to say calmly: “Yes? You had something to say to me...?”

She was standing by the big stone. She was in great excitement, and would have run towards me; her arms were already opened. But she stopped, and stood there wringing her hands. I took off my cap and bowed to her without a word.

“Just one thing I wanted to say to you to-day, Glahn,” she said entreatingly. And I did not move, but waited, just to hear what she would say next. “I hear you have been down at the blacksmith's. One evening it was. Eva was alone in the house.”

I started at that, and answered:

“Who told you that?”

“I don't go about spying,” she cried. “I heard it last evening; my father told me. When I got home all wet through last night, my father said: 'You were rude to the Baron to-day.' 'No,' I answered. 'Where have you been now?' he asked again. I answered: 'With Glahn.'

“And then my father told me.”

I struggled with my despair; I said:

“What is more, Eva has been here.”

“Has she been here? In the hut?”

“More than once. I made her go in. We talked together.”

“Here too?”

Pause. “Be firm!” I said to myself; and then, aloud:

“Since you are so kind as to mix yourself up in my affairs, I will not be behindhand.

I suggested yesterday that you should take the Doctor; have you thought it over? For really, you know, the prince is simply impossible."

Her eyes lit with anger. "He is not, I tell you," she cried passionately. "No, he is better than you; he can move about in a house without breaking cups and glasses; he leaves my shoes alone. Yes! He knows how to move in society; but you are ridiculous—I am ashamed of you—you are unendurable—do you understand that?"

Her words struck deep; I bowed my head and said:

"You are right; I am not good at moving in society. Be merciful. You do not understand me; I live in the woods by choice—that is my happiness. Here, where I am all alone, it can hurt no one that I am as I am; but when I go among others, I have to use all my will power to be as I should. For two years now I have been so little among people at all..."

"There's no saying what mad thing you will do next," she went on. "And it is intolerable to be constantly looking after you."

How mercilessly she said it! A very bitter pain passed through me. I almost toppled before her violence. Edwarda had not yet done; she went on:

"You might get Eva to look after you, perhaps. It's a pity though, that she's married."

"Eva! Eva married, did you say?"

"Yes, married!"

"Why, who is her husband?"

"Surely you know that. She is the blacksmith's wife."

"I thought she was his daughter."

"No, she is his wife. Do you think I am lying to you?"

I had not thought about it at all; I was simply astonished. I just stood there thinking: Is Eva married?

"So you have made a happy choice," says Edwarda.

Well, there seemed no end to the business. I was trembling with indignation, and I said:

“But you had better take the Doctor, as I said. Take a friend's advice; that prince of yours is an old fool.” And in my excitement I lied about him, exaggerated his age, declared he was bald, that he was almost totally blind; I asserted, moreover, that he wore that coronet thing in his shirt front wholly and solely to show off his nobility. “As for me, I have not cared to make his acquaintance, there is nothing in him of mark at all; he lacks the first principles; he is nothing.”

“But he is something, he is something,” she cried, and her voice broke with anger. “He is far more than you think, you thing of the woods. You wait. Oh, he shall talk to you—I will ask him myself. You don't believe I love him, but you shall see you are mistaken. I will marry him; I will think of him night and day. Mark what I say: I love him. Let Eva come if she likes—hahaha! Heavens, let her come—it is less than nothing to me. And now let me get away from here...”

She began walking down the path from the hut; she took a few small hurried steps, turned round, her face still pale as death, and moaned: “And let me never see your face again.”

XXIII

Leaves were yellowing; the potato-plants had grown to full height and stood in flower; the shooting season came round again; I shot hare and ptarmigan and grouse; one day I shot an eagle. Calm, open sky, cool nights, many clear, clear tones and dear sounds in the woods and fields. The earth was resting, vast and peaceful...

“I have not heard anything from Herr Mack about the two guillemots I shot,” I said to the Doctor.

“You can thank Edwarda for that,” he said. “I know. I heard that she set herself against it.”

“I do not thank her for it,” said I...

Indian summer—Indian summer. The stars lay like belts in through the yellowing woods; a new star came every day. The moon showed like a shadow; a shadow of gold dipped in silver...

“Heaven help you, Eva, are you married?”

“Didn't you know that?”

“No, I didn't know.”

She pressed my hand silently.

“God help you, child, what are we to do now?” “What you will. Perhaps you are not going away just yet; I will be happy as long as you are here.”

“No, Eva.”

“Yes, yes—only as long as you are here.”

She looked forsaken, kept pressing my hand.

“No, Eva. Go—never any more!”

Nights pass and days come—three days already since this last talk. Eva comes by with a load. How much wood has that child carried home from the forest this summer alone?

“Set the load down, Eva, and let me see if your eyes are as blue as ever.”

Her eyes were red.

“No—smile again, Eva! I can resist no more; I am your, I am yours...”

Evening. Eva sings, I hear her singing, and a warmth goes through me.

“You are singing this evening, child?”

“Yes, I am happy.”

And being smaller than I, she jumps up a little to put her arms round my neck.

“But, Eva, you have scratched your hands. Herregud! oh, if you had not scratched

them so!”

“It doesn't matter.”

Her face beams wonderfully.

“Eva, have you spoken to Herr Mack?”

“Yes, once.”

“What did he say, and what did you?”

“He is so hard with us now; he makes my husband work day and night down at the quay, and keeps me at all sorts of jobs as well. He has ordered me to do man's work now.”

“Why does he do that?”

Eva looks down.

“Why does he do that, Eva?”

“Because I love you.”

“But how could he know?”

“I told him.”

Pause.

“Would to Heaven he were not so harsh with you, Eva.”

“But it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter at all now.”

And her voice is like a little tremulous song in the woods.

The woods more yellow still. It is drawing towards autumn now; a few more stars have come in the sky, and from now on the moon looks like a shadow of silver dipped in gold. There is no cold; nothing, only a cool stillness and a flow of life in the woods. Every tree stands in silent thought. The berries are ripe.

Then—the twenty-second of August and the three iron nights. [Footnote: Joernnætter. Used of the nights in August when the first frosts appear.]

XXIV

The first iron night.

At nine the sun sets. A dull darkness settles over the earth, a star or so can be seen; two hours later there is a glow of the moon. I wander up in the woods with my gun and my dog. I light a fire, and the light of the flames shines in between the fir-trunks. There is no frost.

“The first iron night!” I say. And a confused, passionate delight in the time and the place sends a strange shiver through me...

“Hail, men and beasts and birds, to the lonely night in the woods, in the woods! Hail to the darkness and God's murmuring between the trees, to the sweet, simple melody of silence in my ears, to green leaves and yellow! Hail to the life-sound I hear; a snout against the grass, a dog sniffing over the ground! A wild hail to the wildcat lying crouched, sighting and ready to spring on a sparrow in the dark, in the dark! Hail to the merciful silence upon earth, to the stars and the half moon; ay, to them and to it!” ...

I rise and listen. No one has heard me. I sit down again.

“Thanks for the lonely night, for the hills, the rush of the darkness and the sea through my heart! Thanks for my life, for my breath, for the boon of being alive to-night; thanks from my heart for these! Hear, east and west, oh, hear. It is the eternal God. This silence murmuring in my ears is the blood of all Nature seething; it is God weaving through the world and me. I see a glistening gossamer thread in the light of my fire; I hear a boat rowing across the harbour; the northern lights flare over the heavens to the north. By my immortal soul, I am full of thanks that it is I who am sitting here!”

Silence. A fir cone falls dully to the ground. A fir cone fell! I think to myself. The moon is high, the fire flickers over the half-burned brands and is dying. And in the

late night I wander home.

The second iron night; the same stillness and mild weather. My soul is pondering. I walk mechanically over to a tree, pull my cap deep down over my eyes, and lean against that tree, with hands clasped behind my neck. I gazed and think; the flame from my fire dazzles my eyes, and I do not feel it. I stand in that stupor for a while, looking at the fire; my legs fail me first, and grow tired; thoroughly stiff, I sit down. Not till then do I think of what I have been doing. Why should I stare so long at the fire?

Æsop lifts his head and listens; he hears footsteps; Eva appears among the trees.

“I am very thoughtful and sad this evening,” I say.

And in sympathy she makes no answer.

“I love three things,” I go on. “I love a dream of love I once had; I love you; and I love this spot of ground.”

“And which do you love most?”

“The dream.”

All still again. Æsop knows Eva; he lays his head on one side and looks at her. I murmur:

“I saw a girl on the road to-day; she walked arm in arm with her lover. The girl looked towards me, and could scarcely keep from laughing as I passed.”

“What was she laughing at?”

“I don't know. At me, I suppose. Why do you ask?”

“Did you know her?”

“Yes. I bowed.”

“And didn't she know you?”

“No, she acted as if she didn't know me... But why do you sit there worming things

out of me? It is not a nice thing to do. You will not get me to tell you her name.”

Pause.

I murmur again:

“What was she laughing at? She is a flirt; but what was she laughing at? What had I done to harm her?”

Eva answers:

“It was cruel of her to laugh at you.”

“No, it was not cruel of her,” I cry. “How dare you sit there speaking ill of her? She never did an unkind thing; it was only right that she should laugh at me. Be quiet, devil take you, and leave me in peace—do you hear?”

And Eva, terrified, leaves me in peace. I look at her, and repent my harsh words at once; I fall down before her; wringing my hands.

“Go home, Eva. It is you I love most; how could I love a dream? It was only a jest; it is you I love. But go home now; I will come to you to-morrow; remember, I am yours; yes, do not forget it. Good-night.”

And Eva goes home.

The third iron night, a night of extremes! tension. If only there were a little frost! Instead, still heat after the sun of the day; the night is like a lukewarm marsh. I light my fire...

“Eva, it can be a delight at times to be dragged by the hair. So strangely can the mind of a man be warped. He can be dragged by the hair over hill and dale, and if asked what is happening, can answer in ecstasy: 'I am being dragged by the hair!' And if anyone asks: 'But shall I not help you, release you?' he answers: 'No.' And if they ask: 'But how can you endure it?' he answers: 'I can endure it, for I love the hand that drags me.' Eva, do you know what it is to hope?”

“Yes, I think so.”

“Look you, Eva, hope is a strange thing, a very strange thing. You can go out one morning along the road, hoping to meet one whom you are fond of. And do you? No. Why not? Because that one is busy that morning—is somewhere else, perhaps... Once I got to know an old blind Lapp up in the hills. For fifty-eight years he had seen nothing, and now he was over seventy. It seemed to him that his sight was getting better little by little; getting on gradually, he thought. If all went well he would be able to make out the sun in a few years' time. His hair was still black, but his eyes were quite white. When we sat in his hut, smoking, he would tell of all the things he had seen before he went blind. He was hardy and strong; without feeling, indestructible; and he kept his hope. When I was going, he came out with me, and began pointing in different ways. 'There's the south,' he said, 'and there's north. Now you go that way first, and when you get a little way down, turn off that way.' 'Quite right,' I said. And at that the Lapp laughed contentedly, and said: 'There! I did not know that forty or fifty years back, so I must see better now than I used to—yes, it is improving all the time.' And then he crouched down and crept into his hut again—the same old hut, his home on earth. And he sat down by the fire as before, full of hope that in some few years he would be able to make out the sun... Eva, 'tis strange about hope. Here am I, for instance, hoping all the time that I may forget the one I did not meet on the road this morning...”

“You talk so strangely.”

“It is the third of the iron nights. I promise you, Eva, to be a different man to-morrow. Let me be alone now. You will not know me again to-morrow, I shall laugh and kiss you, my own sweet girl. Just think—only this one night more, a few hours—and then I shall be a different man. Godnat, Eva.”

“Godnat.”

I lie down closer to the fire, and look at the flames. A pine cone falls from the branch; a dry twig or so falls too. The night is like a boundless depth. I close my

eyes.

After an hour, my senses begin swinging in a certain rhythm. I am ringing in tune with the great stillness—ringing with it. I look at the half-moon; it stands in the sky like a white scale, and I have a feeling of love for it; I can feel myself blushing. “It is the moon!” I say softly and passionately; “it is the moon!” and my heart strikes toward it in a soft throbbing. So for some minutes. It is blowing a little; a stranger wind comes to me a mysterious current of air. What is it? I look round, but see no one. The wind calls me, and my soul bows acknowledging the call; and I feel myself lifted into the air, pressed to an invisible breast; my eyes are dewed, I tremble—God is standing near, watching me. Again several minutes pass. I turn my head round; the stranger wind is gone, and I see something like the back of a spirit wandering silently in through the woods...

I struggle a short while with a heavy melancholy; I was worn out with emotions; I am deathly tired, and I sleep.

When I awoke the night was past. Alas, I had been going about for a long time in a sad state, full of fever, on the verge of falling down stricken with some sickness or other. Often things had seemed upside down. I had been looking at everything through inflamed eyes. A deep misery had possessed me.

It was over now.

XXV

It was autumn. The summer was gone. It passed as quickly as it had come; ah, how quickly it was gone! The days were cold now. I went out shooting and fishing—sang songs in the woods. And there were days with a thick mist that came floating in from the sea, damming up everything behind a wall of murk.

One such day something happened. I lost my way, blundered through into the woods of the annexe, and came to the Doctor's house. There were visitors there—the young

ladies I had met before—young people dancing, just like madcap foals.

A carriage came rolling up and stopped outside the gate; Edwarda was in it. She started at sight of me. “Good-bye,” I said quietly. But the Doctor held me back. Edwarda was troubled by my presence at first, and looked down when I spoke; afterwards, she bore with me, and even went so far as to ask me a question about something or other. She was strikingly pale; the mist lay grey and cold upon her face. She did not get out of the carriage.

“I have come on an errand,” she said. “I come from the parish church, and none of you were there to-day; they said you were here. I have been driving for hours to find you. We are having a little party to-morrow—the Baron is going away next week—and I have been told to invite you all. There will be dancing too. To-morrow evening.”

They all bowed and thanked her.

To me, she went on:

“Now, don't stay away, will you? Don't send a note at the last minute making some excuse.” She did not say that to any of the others. A little after she drove away.

I was so moved by this unexpected meeting that for a little while I was secretly mad with joy. Then I took leave of the Doctor and his guests and set off for home. How gracious she was to me, how gracious she was to me! What could I do for her in return? My hands felt helpless; a sweet cold went through my wrists. Herregud! I thought to myself, here am I with my limbs hanging helpless for joy; I cannot even clench my hands; I can only find tears in my eyes for my own helplessness. What is to be done about it?

It was late in the evening when I reached home. I went round by the quay and asked a fisherman if the post-packet would not be in by to-morrow evening. Alas, no, the post-packet would not be in till some time next week. I hurried up to the hut and began looking over my best suit. I cleaned it up and made it look decent; there were

holes in it here and there, and I wept and darned them.

When I had finished, I lay down on the bed. This rest lasted only a moment. Then a thought struck me, and I sprang up and stood in the middle of the floor, dazed. The whole thing was just another trick! I should not have been invited if I had not happened to be there when the others were asked. And, moreover, she had given me the plainest possible hint to stay away—to send a note at the last moment, making some excuse...

I did not sleep all that night, and when morning came I went to the woods cold, sleepless, and feverish. Ho, having a party at Sirilund! What then? I would neither go nor send any excuse. Herr Mack was a very thoughtful man; he was giving this party for the Baron; but I was not going—let them understand that! ...

The mist lay thick over valley and hills; a clammy rime gathered on my clothes and made them heavy, my face was cold and wet. Only now and then came a breath of wind to make the sleeping mists rise and fall, rise and fall.

It was late in the afternoon, and getting dark; the mist hid everything from my eyes, and I had no sun to show the way. I drifted about for hours on the way home, but there was no hurry. I took the wrong road with the greatest calmness, and came upon unknown places in the woods. At last I stood my gun against a tree and consulted my compass. I marked out my way carefully and started off. It would be about eight or nine o'clock.

Then something happened.

After half an hour, I heard music through the fog, and a few minutes later I knew where I was: quite close to the main building at Sirilund. Had my compass misled me to the very place I was trying to avoid? A well-known voice called me—the Doctor's. A minute later I was being led in.

My gun-barrel had perhaps affected the compass and, alas, set it wrong. The same thing has happened to me since—one day this year. I do not know what to think.

Then, too, it may have been fate.

XXVI

All the evening I had a bitter feeling that I should not have come to that party. My coming was hardly noticed at all, they were all so occupied with one another; Edwarda hardly bade me welcome. I began drinking hard because I knew I was unwelcome; and yet I did not go away.

Herr Mack smiled a great deal and put on his most amiable expression; he was in evening dress, and looked well. He was now here, now there, mingling with his half a hundred guests, dancing one dance now and then, joking and laughing. There were secrets lurking in his eyes.

A whirl of music and voices sounded through the house. Five of the rooms were occupied by the guests, besides the big room where they were dancing. Supper was over when I arrived. Busy maids were running to and fro with glasses and wines, brightly polished coffee-pots, cigars and pipes, cakes and fruit. There was no sparing of anything. The chandeliers in the rooms were filled with extra-thick candles that had been made for the occasion; the new oil lamps were lit as well. Eva was helping in the kitchen; I caught a glimpse of her. To think that Eva should be here too!

The Baron received a great deal of attention, though he was quiet and modest and did not put himself forward. He, too, was in evening dress; the tails of his coat were miserably crushed from the packing. He talked a good deal with Edwarda, followed her with his eyes, drank with her, and called her Fröken, as he did the daughters of the Dean and of the district surgeon. I felt the same dislike of him as before, and could hardly look at him without turning my eyes away with a wretched silly grimace. When he spoke to me, I answered shortly and pressed my lips together after.

I happen to remember one detail of that evening. I stood talking to a young lady, a

fair-haired girl; and I said something or told some story that made her laugh. It can hardly have been anything remarkable, but perhaps, in my excited state, I told it more amusingly than I remember now—at any rate, I have forgotten it. But when I turned round, there was Edwarda standing behind me. She gave me a glance of recognition.

Afterwards I noticed that she drew the fair girl aside to find out what I had said. I cannot say how that look of Edwarda's cheered me, after I had been going about from room to room like a sort of outcast all the evening; I felt better at once, and spoke to several people, and was entertaining. As far as I am aware, I did nothing awkward or wrong...

I was standing outside on the steps. Eva came carrying some things from one of the rooms. She saw me, came out, and touched my hands swiftly with one of hers; then she smiled and went in again. Neither of us had spoken. When I turned to go in after her, there was Edwarda in the passage, watching me. She also said nothing. I went into the room.

“Fancy—Lieutenant Glahn amuses himself having meetings with the servants on the steps!” said Edwarda suddenly, out loud. She was standing in the doorway. Several heard what she said. She laughed, as if speaking in jest, but her face was very pale.

I made no answer to this; I only murmured:

“It was accidental; she just came out, and we met in the passage...”

Some time passed—an hour, perhaps. A glass was upset over a lady's dress. As soon as Edwarda saw it, she cried:

“What has happened? That was Glahn, of course.”

I had not done it: I was standing at the other end of the room when it happened. After that I drank pretty hard again, and kept near the door, to be out of the way of the dancers.

The Baron still had the ladies constantly round him. He regretted that his collections were packed away, so that he could not show them—that bunch of weed from the White Sea, the clay from Korholmerne, highly interesting stone formations from the bottom of the sea. The ladies peeped curiously at his shirt studs, the five-pointed coronets—they meant that he was a Baron, of course. All this time the Doctor created no sensation; even his witty oath, Död og Pinsel, no longer had any effect. But when Edwarda was speaking, he was always on the spot, correcting her language, embarrassing her with little shades of meaning, keeping her down with calm superiority.

She said:

"... until I go over the valley of death."

And the Doctor asked:

"Over what?"

"The valley of death. Isn't that what it's called—the valley of death?"

"I have heard of the river of death. I presume that is what you mean."

Later on, she talked of having something guarded like a ...

"Dragon," put in the Doctor.

"Yes, like a dragon," she answered.

But the Doctor said:

"You can thank me for saving you there. I am sure you were going to say Argus."

The Baron raised his eyebrows and looked at the Doctor in surprise through his thick glasses, as if he had never heard such ridiculous things. But the Doctor paid no heed. What did he care for the Baron?

I still lurked by the door. The dancers swept through the room. I managed to start a conversation with the governess from the vicarage. We talked about the war, the state of affairs in the Crimea, the happenings in France, Napoleon as Emperor, his

protection of the Turks; the young lady had read the papers that summer, and could tell me the news. At last we sat down on a sofa and went on talking.

Edwarda, passing, stopped in front of us. Suddenly she said:

“You must forgive me, Lieutenant, for surprising you outside like that. I will never do it again.”

And she laughed again, and did not look at me.

“Edwarda,” I said, “do stop.”

She had spoken very formally, which meant no good, and her look was malicious. I thought of the Doctor, and shrugged my shoulders carelessly, as he would have done. She said:

“But why don't you go out in the kitchen? Eva is there. I think you ought to stay there.”

And there was hate in her eyes.

I had not been to parties often; certainly I had never before heard such a tone at any of the few I had been to. I said:

“Aren't you afraid of being misunderstood, Edwarda?”

“Oh, but how? Possibly, of course, but how?”

“You sometimes speak without thinking. Just now, for instance, it seemed to me as if you were actually telling me to go to the kitchen and stay there; and that, of course, must be a misunderstanding—I know quite well that you did not intend to be so rude.”

She walked a few paces away from us. I could see by her manner that she was thinking all the time of what I had said. She turned round, came back, and said breathlessly:

“It was no misunderstanding, Lieutenant; you heard correctly—I did tell you to go to the kitchen.”

“Oh, Edwarda!” broke out the terrified governess.

And I began talking again about the war and the state of affairs in the Crimea; but my thoughts were far distant. I was no longer intoxicated, only hopelessly confused. The earth seemed fading from under my feet, and I lost my composure, as at so many unfortunate times before. I got up from the sofa and made as if to go out. The Doctor stopped me.

“I have just been hearing your praises,” he said.

“Praises! From whom?”

“From Edwarda. She is still standing away off there in the corner, looking at you with glowing eyes. I shall never forget it; her eyes were absolutely in love, and she said out loud that she admired you.”

“Good,” I said with a laugh. Alas, there was not a clear thought in my head.

I went up to the Baron, bent over him as if to whisper something—and when I was close enough, I spat in his ear. He sprang up and stared idiotically at me. Afterwards I saw him telling Edwarda what had occurred; I saw how disgusted she was. She thought, perhaps, of her shoe that I had thrown into the water, of the cups and glasses I had so unfortunately managed to break, and of all the other breaches of good taste I had committed; doubtless all those things flashed into her mind again. I was ashamed. It was all over with me; whichever way I turned, I met frightened and astonished looks. And I stole away from Sirilund, without a word of leave-taking or of thanks.

XXVII

The Baron is going away. Well and good: I will load my gun, go up into the hills, and fire a salvo in his honour and Edwarda's. I will bore a deep hole in a rock and blow up a mountain in his honour and Edwarda's. And a great boulder shall roll

down the hillside and dash mightily into the sea just as his ship is passing by. I know a spot—a channel down the hillside—where rocks have rolled before and made a clean road to the sea. Far below there is a little boat-house.

“Two mining drills,” I say to the smith.

And the smith whets two drills...

Eva has been put to driving back and forth between the mill and the quay, with one of Herr Mack's horses. She has to do a man's work, transporting sacks of corn and flour. I meet her; her face is wonderfully fresh and glowing. Dear God, how tender and warm is her smile! Every evening I meet her.

“You look as if you had no troubles, Eva, my love.”

“You call me your love! I am an ignorant woman, but I will be true to you. I will be true to you if I should die for it. Herr Mack grows harsher and harsher every day, but I do not mind it; he is furious, but I do not answer him. He took hold of my arm and went grey with fury. One thing troubles me.”

“And what is it that troubles you?” “Herr Mack threatens you. He says to me: 'Aha, it's that lieutenant you've got in your head all the time!' I answer: 'Yes, I am his.' Then he says: 'Ah, you wait. I'll soon get rid of him.' He said that yesterday.”

“It doesn't matter; let him threaten...” And with closed eyes she throws her arms about my neck. A quiver passes through her. The horse stands waiting.

XXVIII

I sit up in the hills, mining. The autumn air is crystal about me. The strokes of my drill ring steady and even. Æsop looks at me with wondering eyes. Wave after wave of content swells through my breast. No one knows that I am here among the lonely hills.

The birds of passage have gone; a happy journey and welcome back again!

Titmouse and blackcap and a hedge-sparrow or so live now alone in the bush and undergrowth: tuitui! All is so curiously changed—the dwarf birch bleeds redly against the grey stones, a harebell here and there shows among the heather, swaying and whispering a little song: sh! But high above all hovers an eagle with outstretched neck, on his way to the inland ridges.

And the evening comes; I lay my drill and my hammer in under the rock and stop to rest. All things are glooming now. The moon glides up in the north; the rocks cast gigantic shadows. The moon is full; it looks like a glowing island, like a round riddle of brass that I pass by and wonder at. Æsop gets up and is restless.

“What is it, Æsop? As for me, I am tired of my sorrow; I will forget it, drown it. Lie still, Æsop, I tell you; I will not be pestered. Eva asks: 'Do you think of me sometimes?' I answer: 'Always.' Eva asks again: 'And is it any joy to you, to think of me?' I answer: 'Always a joy, never anything but a joy.' Then says Eva: 'Your hair is turning grey.' I answer: 'Yes, it is beginning to turn grey.' But Eva says: 'Is it something you think about, that is turning it grey?' And to that I answer: 'Maybe.' At last Eva says: 'Then you do not think only of me...' Æsop, lie still; I will tell you about something else instead...”

But Æsop stands sniffing excitedly down towards the valley, pointing, and dragging at my clothes. When at last I get up and follow, he cannot get along fast enough. A flush of red shows in the sky above the woods. I go on faster; and there before my eyes is a glow, a huge fire. I stop and stare at it, go on a few steps and stare again.

My hut is ablaze.

XXIX

The fire was Herr Mack's doing. I saw through it from the first. I lost my skins and my birds' wings, I lost my stuffed eagle; everything was destroyed. What now? I lay out for two nights under the open sky, without going to Sirilund to ask for shelter. At

last I rented a deserted fisher-hut by the quay. I stopped the cracks with dried moss, and slept on a load of red horseberry ling from the hills. Once more my needs were filled.

Edwarda sent me a message to say she had heard of my misfortune and that she offered me, on her father's behalf, a room at Sirilund. Edwarda touched! Edwarda generous! I sent no answer. Thank Heaven, I was no longer without shelter, and it gave me a proud joy to make no answer to Edwarda's offer. I met her on the road, with the Baron; they were walking arm in arm. I looked them both in the face and bowed as I passed. She stopped, and asked:

“So you will not come and stay with us, Lieutenant?”

“I am already settled in my new place,” I said, and stopped also.

She looked at me; her bosom was heaving. “You would have lost nothing by coming to us,” she said.

Thankfulness moved in my heart, but I could not speak.

The Baron walked on slowly.

“Perhaps you do not want to see me any more,” she said.

“I thank you, Edwarda, for offering me shelter when my house was burned,” I said. “It was the kinder of you, since your father was hardly willing.” And with bared head I thanked her for her offer.

“In God's name, will you not see me again, Glahn?” she said suddenly.

The Baron was calling.

“The Baron is calling,” I said, and took off my hat again respectfully.

And I went up into the hills, to my mining. Nothing, nothing should make me lose my self-possession any more. I met Eva. “There, what did I say?” I cried. “Herr Mack cannot drive me away. He has burned my hut, and I already have another hut...” She was carrying a tar-bucket and brush. “What now, Eva?”

Herr Mack had a boat in a shed under the cliff, and had ordered her to tar it. He watched her every step—she had to obey.

“But why in the shed there? Why not at the quay?”

“Herr Mack ordered it so..

“Eva, Eva, my love, they make a slave of you and you do not complain. See! now you are smiling again, and life streams through your smile, for all that you are a slave.”

When I got up to my mining work, I found a surprise. I could see that someone had been on the spot. I examined the tracks and recognised the print of Herr Mack's long, pointed shoes. What could he be ferreting about here for? I thought to myself, and looked round. No one to be seen—I had no suspicion.

And I fell to hammering with my drill, never dreaming what harm I did.

XXX

The mail-packet came; it brought my uniform; it was to take the Baron and all his cases of scales and seaweeds on board. Now it was loading up barrels of herrings and oil at the quay; towards evening it would be off again.

I took my gun and put a heavy load of powder in each barrel. When I had done that, I nodded to myself. I went up into the hills and filled my mine with powder as well; I nodded again. Now everything was ready. I lay down to wait.

I waited for hours. All the time I could hear the steamer's winches at work hoisting and lowering. It was already growing dusk. At last the whistle sounded: the cargo was on board, the ship was putting off. I still had some minutes to wait. The moon was not up, and I stared like a madman through the gloom of the evening.

When the first point of the bow thrust out past the islet, I lit my slow match and stepped hurriedly away. A minute passed. Suddenly there was a roar—a spurt of

stone fragments in the air—the hillside trembled, and the rock hurtled crashing down the abyss. The hills all round gave echo. I picked up my gun and fired off one barrel; the echo answered time and time again. After a moment I fired the second barrel too; the air trembled at the salute, and the echo flung the noise out into the wide world; it was as if all the hills had united in a shout for the vessel sailing away.

A little time passed; the air grew still, the echoes died away in all the hills, and earth lay silent again. The ship disappeared in the gloom.

I was still trembling with a strange excitement. I took my drills and my gun under my arm and set off with slack knees down the hillside. I took the shortest way, marking the smoking track left by my avalanche. Æsop followed me, shaking his head all the time and sneezing at the smell of burning.

When I came down to the shed, I found a sight that filled me with violent emotion. A boat lay there, crushed by the falling rock. And Eva—Eva lay beside it, mangled and broken, dashed to pieces by the shock—torn beyond recognition. Eva—lying there, dead.

XXXI

What more have I to write? I fired no shot for many days; I had no food, and did not eat at all; I sat in my shed. Eva was carried to the church in Herr Mack's white-painted house-boat. I went there overland on foot...

Eva is dead. Do you remember her little girlish head, with hair like a nun's? She came so quietly, laid down her head and smiled. And did you see how full of life that smile was? Be still, Æsop; I remember a strange saga story, of four generations ago, of Iselin's time, when Stamer was a priest.

A girl sat captive in a stone tower. She loved a lord. Why? Ask the winds and the stars, ask the God of life, for there is none that knows such things. The lord was her friend and lover; but time went on, and one fine day he saw another and his liking

changed.

Like a youth he loved his maid. Often he called her his blessing and his dove, and said: “Give me your heart!” And she did so. He said: “May I ask for something, love?” And, wild with joy, she answered “Yes.” And she gave him all, and yet he did not thank her.

The other he loved as a slave, as a madman and a beggar. Why? Ask the dust of the road and the leaves that fall, ask the mysterious God of life, for there is no other that knows such things. She gave him nothing—no, nothing did she give him—and yet he thanked her. She said, “Give me your peace and your understanding!” and he was only sorry that she did not ask his life.

And his maid was set in the tower...

“What do you there, maiden, sitting and smiling?”

“I think of something ten years back. It was then I met him.”

“You remember him still?”

“I remember him still.”

And time goes on.

“What do you there, maiden? And why do you sit and smile?”

“I am embroidering his name on a cloth.”

“Whose name? His who shut you up here?”

“Yes, the one I met twenty years ago.”

“You remember him still?”

“I remember him as I did before.”

And time goes on...

“What do you there, prisoner?”

“I grow old, and can no longer see to sew; I scrape the plaster from the walls. And of

that I am making an urn to be a little gift for him.”

“Of whom are you speaking?”

“Of my lover, who shut me in the tower.”

“And do you smile at that, because he locked you in the tower?”

“I am thinking of what he will say now. 'Look, look,' he will say, 'my maiden has sent me a little urn; she has not forgotten me in thirty years.'”

And time goes on...

“What, prisoner! sit you there idle, and smile?”

“I grow old, I grow old, my eyes are blind, I am only thinking.”

“Of him that you met forty years ago?”

“Of him whom I met when I was young. Maybe it was forty years ago.”

“But do you not know, then, that he is dead? ... Pale beldam, you do not answer; your lips are white, you breathe no more...”

There! That was the strange tale of the girl in the tower. Wait, Æsop, wait a little: there was something I forgot. One day she heard her lover's voice in the courtyard, and she fell on her knees and blushed. And that was when she was forty years...

I bury you, Eva, and in humility kiss the sand above your grave. A luxuriant, rose-red memory flowers in me when I think of you; I am as if drenched in blessing at the memory of your smile. You gave all; all did you give, and it cost you nothing, for you were the wild child of life itself. But others, the miserly ones who begrudge even a glance, can have all my thoughts. Why? Ask the twelve months and the ships on the sea; ask the mysterious God of the heart...

XXXII

A man said:

“You never go out shooting now? Æsop is running loose in the woods; he is after a hare.”

I said:

“Go and shoot it for me.”

Some days passed. Herr Mack looked me up. He was hollow-eyed; his face was grey. I thought: Is it true that I can see through my fellows, or is it not? I do not know, myself.

Herr Mack spoke of the landslip, the catastrophe. It was a misfortune, a sad accident; I was in no way to blame.

I said:

“If it was someone who wished to separate Eva and me at any price, he has gained his end. God's curse be on him!”

Herr Mack looked at me suspiciously. He murmured something about the fine funeral. Nothing had been spared.

I sat admiring the alertness of his mind. He would have no compensation for the boat that my landslide had crushed.

“Oh, but surely,” I said, “will you not have some payment for the boat and the tar-bucket and the brush?”

“No, my dear Lieutenant,” he answered. “How could you think of such a thing?” And he looked at me with hatred in his eyes.

For three weeks I saw nothing of Edwarda. Yes, once I met her at the store: when I went to buy some bread, she stood inside the counter looking over some different sorts of cloth stuff. Only the two assistants were there besides.

I greeted her aloud, and she looked up, but did not answer. It occurred to me that I could not ask for bread while she was there; I turned to the assistants and asked for powder and shot. While they were weighing it out, I watched her.

A grey dress, much too small for her, with the buttonholes worn; her flat breast heaved restlessly. How she had grown that summer! Her brow was knit in thought; those strangely curved eyebrows stood in her face like two riddles; all her movements were grown more mature. I looked at her hands; the contour of her long, delicate fingers moved me violently, made me tremble. She was still turning over the stuffs.

I stood wishing that Æsop would run to her behind the counter—then I could call him back at once and apologise. What would she say then?

“Here you are,” said the storekeeper.

I paid for the things, took up my parcels, and took my leave of her. She looked up, but again without speaking. Good, I thought to myself. She is the Baron's bride already, as like as not. And I went, without my bread.

When I got outside, I looked up at the window. No one was watching me.

XXXIII

Then one night the snow came, and it began to be cold in my hut. There was a fireplace where I cooked my food, but the wood burned poorly and it was very draughty, though I had caulked the walls as well as I could. The autumn was past, and the days were growing shorter. The first snow was still melting under the rays of the sun. Presently the ground was bare again, but the nights were cold, and the water froze. And all the grass and all the insects died.

A secret stillness fell upon people; they pondered and were silent; their eyes awaited the winter. No more calling from the drying grounds: the harbour lay quiet. Everything was moving towards the eternal winter of the northern lights, when the sun sleeps in the sea. Dull came the sound of the oars from a lonely boat.

A girl came rowing.

“Where have you been, my girl?”

“Nowhere.”

“Nowhere? Look, I recognize you: I met you last summer.”

She brought the boat in, stepped ashore, made fast.

“You were herding goats. You stopped to fasten your stocking. I met you one night.”

A little flush rose to her cheeks, and she laughed shyly.

“Little goat-girl, come into the hut and let me look at you. I knew your name, too—it is Henriette.”

But she walked past me without speaking. The autumn, the winter, had laid hold of her too; her senses drowsed.

Already the sun had gone to sea.

XXXIV

And I put on my uniform for the first time, and went down to Sirilund. My heart was beating.

I remembered everything from the day when Edwarda had come hurrying to me and embraced me before them all. Now she had thrown me hither and thither for many months, and made my hair turn grey. My own fault? Yes, my star had led me astray. I thought: How she would chuckle if I were to throw myself at her feet and tell her the secret of my heart to-day! She would offer me a chair and have wine brought in, and just as she was raising the glass to her lips to drink with me, she would say: “Lieutenant, I thank you for the time we have been together. I shall never forget it!” But when I grew glad and felt a little hope, she'd pretend to drink, and set down the glass untouched. And she wouldn't hide from me that she'd only been pretending to drink; she'd be careful to let me see it. That was her way.

Good—it was nearing the last hour now.

And as I walked down the road I thought further: My uniform will impress her; the trappings are new and handsome. The sword will rattle against the floor. A nervous joy thrilled me, and I whispered to myself: Who knows what may happen yet? I raised my head and threw out a hand. No more humility now—a man's honour and pride! Whatever came of it, I would make no more advances now. Pardon me, my fair one, for not asking your hand...

Herr Mack met me in the courtyard, greyer still, more hollow-eyed.

“Going away? So? I suppose you've not been very comfortable lately, eh? Your hut burned down...” And Herr Mack smiled.

In a moment it seemed as if the wisest man in the world stood before my eyes.

“Go indoors, Lieutenant; Edwarda is there. Well, I will say good-bye. See you on the quay, I suppose, when the vessel sails.” He walked off, with head bowed in thought, whistling.

Edwarda was sitting indoors, reading. At the instant of my entering, she started at my uniform; she looked at me sideways like a bird, and even blushed. She opened her mouth.

“I have come to say good-bye,” I managed to get out at last.

She rose quickly to her feet, and I saw that my words had had some effect.

“Glahn, are you going away? Now?”

“As soon as the boat comes.” I grasped her hand—both her hands—a senseless delight took possession of me—I burst out, “Edwarda!” and stared at her.

And in a moment she was cold—cold and defiant. Her whole being resisted me; she drew herself up. I found myself standing like a beggar before her. I loosed her hand and let her go. I remember that from that moment I stood repeating mechanically: “Edwarda, Edwarda!” again and again without thinking, and when she asked: “Yes?

What were you going to say?" I explained nothing.

"To think you are going already," she said again. "Who will come next year, I wonder?"

"Another," I answered. "The hut will be built up again, no doubt."

Pause. She was already reaching for her book.

"I am sorry my father is not in," she said. "But I will tell him you were here."

I made no answer to this. I stepped forward, took her hand once more, and said:

"Farvel, Edwarda."

"Farvel," she answered.

I opened the door as if to go. Already she was sitting with the book in her hand, reading—actually reading and turning the page. Nothing affected, not the least in the world affected by my saying good-bye.

I coughed.

She turned and said in surprise:

"Oh, are you not gone? I thought you were."

Heaven alone knows, but it struck me that her surprise was too great; that she was not careful, that she overdid it. And it came into my head that perhaps she had known all the time that I was standing behind her.

"I am going now," I said.

Then she rose and came over to me.

"I should like to have something to remember you by when you go," she said. "I thought of asking you for something, but perhaps it is too much. Will you give me Æsop?"

I did not hesitate. I answered "Yes."

"Then, perhaps, you would come and bring him to-morrow," she said.

I went.

I looked up at the window. No one there.

It was all over now...

The last night in the hut. I sat in thought, I counted the hours; when the morning came I made ready my last meal. It was a cold day.

Why had she asked me to come myself and bring the dog? Would she tell me something, speak to me, for the last time? I had nothing more to hope for. And how would she treat Æsop? Æsop, Æsop, she will torture you! For my sake she will whip you, caress you too, perhaps, but certainly whip you, with and without reason; ruin you altogether...

I called Æsop to me, patted him, put our two heads together, and picked up my gun. He was already whining with pleasure, thinking we were going out after game. I put our heads together once more; I laid the muzzle of the gun against Æsop's neck and fired...

I hired a man to carry Æsop's body to Edwarda.

XXXV

The mail-packet was to sail in the afternoon.

I went down to the quay. My things were already on board. Herr Mack pressed my hand, and said encouragingly that it would be nice weather, pleasant weather; he would not mind making the trip himself in such weather. The Doctor came walking down. Edwarda was with him; I felt my knees beginning to tremble.

“Came to see you safely off,” said the Doctor.

I thanked him.

Edwarda looked me straight in the face and said:

“I must thank you for your dog.” She pressed her lips together; they were quite

white. Again she had called me “Eder.” [Footnote: The most formal mode of address.]

“When does the boat go?” the Doctor asked a man.

“In half an hour.”

I said nothing.

Edwarda was turning restlessly this way and that.

“Doctor, don't you think we may as well go home again?” she said. “I have done what I came for to do.”

“You have done what you came to do,” said the Doctor.

She laughed, humiliated by his everlasting correction, and answered:

“Wasn't that almost what I said?”

“No,” he answered shortly.

I looked at him. The little man stood there cold and firm; he had made a plan, and he carried it out to the last. And if he lost after all? In any case, he would never show it; his face never betrayed him.

It was getting dusk.

“Well, good-bye,” I said. “And thanks for—everything.”

Edwarda looked at me dumbly. Then she turned her head and stood looking out at the ship.

I got into the boat. Edwarda was still standing on the quay. When I got on board, the Doctor called out “Good-bye!” I looked over to the shore. Edwarda turned at the same time and walked hurriedly away from the quay, the Doctor far behind. That was the last I saw of her.

A wave of sadness went through my heart...

The vessel began to move; I could still see Herr Mack's sign: “Salt and Barrels.” But

soon it disappeared. The moon and the stars came out; the hills towered round about, and I saw the endless woods. There is the mill; there, there stood my hut, that was burned; the big grey stone stands there all alone on the site of the fire. Iselin, Eva...

The night of the northern lights spreads over valley and hill.

XXXVI

I have written this to pass the time. It has amused me to look back to that summer in Nordland, when I often counted the hours, but when time flew nevertheless. All is changed. The days will no longer pass.

I have many a merry hour even yet. But time—it stands still, and I cannot understand how it can stand so still. I am out of the service, and free as a prince; all is well; I meet people, drive in carriages; now and again I shut one eye and write with one finger up in the sky; I tickle the moon under the chin, and fancy that it laughs—laughs broadly at being tickled under the chin. All things smile. I pop a cork and call gay people to me.

As for Edwarda, I do not think of her. Why should I not have forgotten her altogether, after all this time? I have some pride. And if anyone asks whether I have any sorrows, then I answer straight out, “No—none.”

Cora lies looking at me. Æsop, it used to be, but now it is Cora that lies looking at me. The clock ticks on the mantel; outside my open window sounds the roar of the city. A knock at the door, and the postman hands me a letter. A letter with a coronet. I know who sent it; I understand it at once, or maybe I dreamed it one sleepless night. But in the envelope there is no letter at all—only two green bird's feathers.

An icy horror thrills me; I turn cold. Two green feathers! I say to myself: Well, and what of it? But why should I turn cold? Why, there is a cursed draught from those windows.

And I shut the windows.

There lie two bird's feathers, I think to myself again. I seem to know them; they remind me of a little jest up in Nordland, just a little episode among a host of others. It is amusing to see those two feathers again. And suddenly I seem to see a face and hear a voice, and the voice says: “Her, Herr Lieutenant: here are your feathers.”

“Your feathers.”...

Cora, lie still—do you hear? I will kill you if you move!

The weather is hot, an intolerable heat is in the room; what was I thinking of to close the windows? Open them again—open the door too; open it wide—this way, merry souls, come in! Hey, messenger, an errand—go out and fetch me a host of people...

And the day passes; but time stands still.

Now I have written this for my own pleasure only, and amused myself with it as best I could. No sorrow weighs on me, but I long to be away—where, I do not know, but far away, perhaps in Africa or India. For my place is in the woods, in solitude...

GLAHN'S DEATH

A DOCUMENT OF 1861

I

The Glahn family can go on advertising as long as they please for Lieutenant Thomas Glahn, who disappeared; but he will never come back. He is dead, and, what is more, I know how he died.

To tell the truth, I am not surprised that his people should still keep on seeking information; for Thomas Glahn was in many ways an uncommon and likable man. I admit this, for fairness' sake, and despite the fact that Glahn is still repellant to my

soul, so that the bare memory of him arouses hatred. He was a splendidly handsome man, full of youth, and with an irresistible manner. When he looked at you with his hot animal eyes, you could not but feel his power; even I felt it so. A woman, they say, said: “When he looks at me, I am lost; I feel a sensation as if he were touching me.”

But Thomas Glahn had his faults, and I have no intention of hiding them, seeing that I hate him. He could at times be full of nonsense like a child, so kindly natured was he; and perhaps it was that which made him so irresistible to women. God knows! He could chat with them and laugh at their senseless twaddle; and so he made an impression. Once, speaking of a very corpulent man in the place, he said that he looked as if he went about with his breeches full of lard. And he laughed at that joke himself, though I should have been ashamed of it. Another time, after we had come to live in the same house together, he showed his foolishness in an unmistakable way. My landlady came in one morning and asked what I would have for breakfast, and in my hurry I happened to answer: “A bread and a slice of egg.” Thomas Glahn was sitting in my room at the time—he lived in the attic up above, just under the roof—and he began to chuckle and laugh childishly over my little slip of the tongue. “A bread and a slice of egg!” he repeated time over and over, until I looked at him in surprise and made him stop.

Maybe I shall call to mind other ridiculous traits of his later on. If so, I will write them down too, and not spare him, seeing that he is still my enemy. Why should I be generous? But I will admit that he talked nonsense only when he was drunk. But is it not a great mistake to be drunk at all?

When I first met him, in the autumn of 1859, he was a man of two-and-thirty—we were of an age. He wore a full beard at that time, and affected woolen sports shirts with an exaggerated lowness of neck; not content with that, he sometimes left the top button undone. His neck appeared to me at first to be remarkably handsome; but

little by little he made me his deadly enemy, and then I did not consider his neck handsomer than mine, though I did not show off mine so openly. I met him first on a river boat, and we were going to the same place, on a hunting trip; we agreed to go together up-country by ox-wagon when we came to the end of the railway. I purposely refrained from stating the place we were going to, not wishing to set anyone on the track. But the Glahns can safely stop advertising for their relative; for he died at the place we went to, which I will not name.

I had heard of Thomas Glahn, by the way, before I met him; his name was not unknown to me. I had heard of some affair of his with a young girl from Nordland, from a big house there, and that he had compromised her in some way, after which she broke it off. This he had sworn, in his foolish obstinacy, to revenge upon himself, and the lady calmly let him do as he pleased in that respect, considering it no business of hers. From that time onwards, Thomas Glahn's name began to be well known; he turned wild, mad; he drank, created scandal after scandal, and resigned his commission in the army. A queer way of taking vengeance for a girl's refusal!

There was also another story of his relations with that young lady, to the effect that he had not compromised her in any way, but that her people had showed him the door, and that she herself had helped in it, after a Swedish Count, whose name I will not mention, had proposed to her. But this account I am less inclined to trust; I regard the first as true, for after all I hate Thomas Glahn and believe him capable of the worst. But, however it may have been, he never spoke himself of the affair with that noble lady, and I did not ask him about it. What business was it of mine?

As we sat there on the boat, I remember we talked about the little village we were making for, to which neither of us had been before.

“There's a sort of hotel there, I believe,” said Glahn, looking at the map. “Kept by an old half-caste woman, so they say. The chief lives in the next village, and has a heap of wives, by all accounts—some of them only ten years old.”

Well, I knew nothing about the chief and his wives, or whether there was a hotel in the place, so I said nothing. But Glahn smiled, and I thought his smile was beautiful.

I forgot, by the way, that he could not by any means be called a perfect man, handsome though he was. He told me himself that he had an old gunshot wound in his left foot, and that it was full of gout whenever the weather changed.

II

A week later we were lodged in the big hut that went by the name of hotel, with the old English half-caste woman. What a hotel it was! The walls were of clay, with a little wood, and the wood was eaten through by the white ants that crawled about everywhere. I lived in a room next the main parlor, with a green glass window looking on to the street—a single pane, not very clear at that—and Glahn had chosen a little bit of a hole up in the attic, much darker, and a poor place to live in. The sun heated the thatched roof and made his room almost insufferably hot at night and day; besides which, it was not a stair at all that led up to it, but a wretched bit of a ladder with four steps. What could I do? I let him take his choice, and said:

“Here are two rooms, one upstairs and one down; take your choice.”

And Glahn looked at the two rooms and took the upper one, possibly to give me the better of the two—but was I not grateful for it? I owe him nothing.

As long as the worst of the heat lasted, we left the hunting alone and stayed quietly in the hut, for the heat was extremely uncomfortable. We lay at night with a mosquito net over the bedplace, to keep off the insects; but even then it happened sometimes that blind bats would come flying silently against our nets and tear them. This happened too often to Glahn, because he was obliged to have a trap in the roof open all the time, on account of the heat; but it did not happen to me. In the daytime we lay on mats outside the hut, and smoked and watched the life about the other huts. The natives were brown, thick-lipped folk, all with rings in their ears and dead,

brown eyes; they were almost naked, with just a strip of cotton cloth or plaited leaves round the middle, and the women had also a short petticoat of cotton stuff to cover them. All the children went about stark naked night and day, with great big prominent bellies simply glistening with oil.

“The women are too fat,” said Glahn.

And I too thought the women were too fat. Perhaps it was not Glahn at all, but myself, who thought so first; but I will not dispute his claim—I am willing to give him the credit. As a matter of fact, not all the women were ugly, though their faces were fat and swollen. I had met a girl in the village, a young half-Tamil with long hair and snow-white teeth; she was the prettiest of them all. I came upon her one evening at the edge of a rice field. She lay flat on her face in the high grass, kicking her legs in the air. She could talk to me, and we did talk, too, as long as I pleased. Glahn sat that evening in the middle of our village outside a hut with two other girls, very young—not more than ten years old, perhaps. He sat there talking nonsense to them, and drinking rice beer; that was the sort of thing he liked.

A couple of days later, we went out shooting. We passed by tea gardens, rice fields, and grass plains; we left the village behind us and went in the direction of the river, and came into forests of strange foreign trees, bamboo and mango, tamarind, teak and salt trees, oil—and gum-bearing plants—Heaven knows what they all were; we had, between us, but little knowledge of the things. But there was very little water in the river, and so it remained until the rainy season. We shot wild pigeons and partridges, and saw a couple of panthers one afternoon; parrots, too, flew over our heads. Glahn was a terribly accurate shot; he never missed. But that was merely because his gun was better than mine; many times I too shot terribly accurately. I never boasted of it, but Glahn would often say: “I'll get that fellow in the tail,” or “that one in the head.” He would say that before he fired; and when the bird fell, sure enough, it was hit in the tail or the head as he had said. When we came upon the

two panthers, Glahn was all for attacking them too with his shot-gun, but I persuaded him to give it up, as it was getting dusk, and we had no more than two or three cartridges left. He boasted of that too—of having had the courage to attack panthers with a shot-gun.

“I am sorry I did not fire at them after all,” he said to me. “What do you want to be so infernally cautious for? Do you want to go on living?” “I'm glad you consider me wiser than yourself,” I answered.

“Well, don't let us quarrel over a trifle,” he said.

Those were his words, not mine; if he had wished to quarrel, I for my part had no wish to prevent him. I was beginning to feel some dislike for him for his incautious behavior, and for his manner with women. Only the night before, I had been walking quietly along with Maggie, the Tamil girl that was my friend, and we were both as happy as could be. Glahn sits outside his hut, and nods and smiles to us as we pass. It was then that Maggie saw him for the first time, and she was very inquisitive about him. So great an impression had he made on her that, when it was time to go, we went each our own way; she did not go back home with me.

Glahn would have put this by as of no importance when I spoke to him about it. But I did not forget it. And it was not to me that he nodded and smiled as we passed by the hut! it was to Maggie.

“What's that she chews?” he asked me.

“I don't know,” I answered. “She chews—I suppose that's what her teeth are for.”

And it was no news to me either that Maggie was always chewing something; I had noticed it long before. But it was not betel she was chewing, for her teeth were quite white; she had, however, a habit of chewing all sorts of other things—putting them in her mouth and chewing as if they were something nice. Anything would do—a piece of money, a scrap of paper, feathers—she would chew it all the same. Still, it was nothing to reproach her for, seeing that she was the prettiest girl in the village,

anyway. Glahn was jealous of me, that was all.

I was friends again with Maggie, though, next evening, and we saw nothing of Glahn.

III

A week passed, and we went out shooting every day, and shot a heap of game. One morning, just as we were entering the forest, Glahn gripped me by the arm and whispered: “Stop!” At the same moment he threw up his rifle and fired. It was a young leopard he had shot, I might have fired myself, but Glahn kept the honour to himself and fired first. Now he'll boast of that later on, I said to myself. We went up to the dead beast. It was stone dead, the left flank all torn up and the bullet in its back.

Now I do not like being gripped by the arm, so I said:

“I could have managed that shot myself.”

Glahn looked at me.

I said: “You think perhaps I couldn't have done it?”

Still Glahn made no answer. Instead, he showed his childishness once more, shooting the dead leopard again, this time through the head. I looked at him in utter astonishment.

“Well, you know,” he explains, “I shouldn't like to have it said that I shot a leopard in the flank.”

“You are very amiable this evening,” I said.

It was too much for his vanity to have made such a poor shot; he must always be first. What a fool he was! But it was no business of mine, anyway. I was not going to show him up.

In the evening, when we came back to the village with the dead leopard, a lot of the

natives came out to look at it. Glahn simply said we had shot it that morning, and made no sort of fuss about it himself at the time. Maggie came up too.

“Who shot it?” she asked.

And Glahn answered:

“You can see for yourself—twice hit. We shot it this morning when we went out.” And he turned the beast over and showed her the two bullet wounds, both that in the flank and that in the head. “That's where mine went,” he said, pointing to the side—in his idiotic fashion he wanted me to have the credit of having shot it in the head. I did not trouble to correct him; I said nothing. After that, Glahn began treating the natives with rice beer—gave them any amount of it, as many as cared to drink.

“Both shot it,” said Maggie to herself; but she was looking at Glahn all the time.

I drew her aside with me and said:

“What are you looking at him all the time for? I am here too, I suppose?”

“Yes,” she said. “And listen: I am coming this evening.”

It was the day after this that Glahn got the letter. There came a letter for him, sent up by express messenger from the river station, and it had made a detour of a hundred and eighty miles. The letter was in a woman's hand, and I thought to my self that perhaps it was from that former friend of his, the noble lady. Glahn laughed nervously when he had read it, and gave the messenger extra money for bringing it. But it was not long before he turned silent and gloomy, and did nothing but sit staring straight before him. That evening he got drunk—sat drinking with an old dwarf of a native and his son, and clung hold of me too, and did all he could to make me drink as well.

Then he laughed out loud and said:

“Here we are, the two of us, miles away in the middle of all India shooting game—what? Desperately funny, isn't it? And hurrah for all the lands and kingdoms

of the earth, and hurrah for all the pretty women, married or unmarried, far and near. Hoho! Nice thing for a man when a married woman proposes to him, isn't it—a married woman?"

"A countess," I said ironically. I said it very scornfully, and that cut him. He grinned like a dog because it hurt him. Then suddenly he wrinkled his forehead and began blinking his eyes, and thinking hard if he hadn't said too much—so mighty serious was he about his bit of a secret. But just then a lot of children came running over to our hut and crying out: "Tigers, ohoi, the tigers!" A child had been snapped up by a tiger quite close to the village, in a thicket between it and the river.

That was enough for Glahn, drunk as he was, and cut up about something into the bargain. He picked up his rifle and raced off at once to the thicket—didn't even put on his hat. But why did he take his rifle instead of a shot-gun, if he was really as plucky as all that? He had to wade across the river, and that was rather a risky thing in itself—but then, the river was nearly dry now, till the rains. A little later I heard two shots, and then, close on them, a third. Three shots at a single beast, I thought; why, a lion would have fallen for two, and this was only a tiger! But even those three shots were no use: the child was torn to bits and half eaten by the time Glahn come up. If he hadn't been drunk he wouldn't have made the attempt to save it.

He spent the night drinking and rioting in the hut next door. For two days he was never sober for a minute, and he had found a lot of companions, too, to drink with him. He begged me in vain to take part in the orgy. He was no longer careful of what he said, and taunted me with being jealous of him.

"Your jealousy makes you blind," he said.

My jealousy? I, jealous of him?

"Good Lord!" I said, "I jealous of you? What's there for me to be jealous about?"

"No, no, of course you're not jealous of me," he answered. "I saw Maggie this evening, by the way. She was chewing something, as usual."

I made no answer; I simply walked off.

IV

We began going out shooting again. Glahn felt he had wronged me, and begged my pardon.

“And I'm dead sick of the whole thing,” he said. “I only wish you'd make a slip one day and put a bullet in my throat.” It was that letter from the Countess again, perhaps, that was smouldering in his mind. I answered:

“As a man soweth, so shall he also reap.”

Day by day he grew more silent and gloomy. He had given up drinking now, and didn't say a word, either; his cheeks grew hollow.

One day I heard talking and laughter outside my window; Glahn had turned cheerful again, and he stood there talking out loud to Maggie. He was getting in all his fascinating tricks. Maggie must have come straight from her hut, and Glahn had been watching and waiting for her. They even had the nerve to stand there making up together right outside my glass window.

I felt a trembling in all my limbs. I cocked my gun; then I let the hammer down again. I went outside and took Maggie by the arm; we walked out of the village in silence; Glahn went back into the hut again at once.

“What were you talking with him again for?” I asked Maggie.

She made no answer.

I was thoroughly desperate. My heart beat so I could hardly breathe. I had never seen Maggie look so lovely as she did then—never seen a real white girl so beautiful. And I forgot she was a Tamil—forgot everything for her sake.

“Answer me,” I said. “What were you talking to him for?”

“I like him best,” she said.

“You like him better than me?”

“Yes.”

Oh, indeed! She liked him better than me, though I was at least as good a man! Hadn't I always been kind to her, and given her money and presents? And what had he done?

“He makes fun of you; he says you're always chewing things,” I said.

She did not understand that, and I explained it better; how she had a habit of putting everything in her mouth and chewing it, and how Glahn laughed at her for it. That made more impression on her than all the rest I said.

“Look here, Maggie,” I went on, “you shall be mine for always. Wouldn't you like that? I've been thinking it over. You shall go with me when I leave here; I will marry you, do you hear? and we'll go to our own country and live there. You'd like that, wouldn't you?”

And that impressed her too. Maggie grew lively and talked a lot as we walked. She only mentioned Glahn once; she asked:

“And will Glahn go with us when we go away?”

“No,” I said. “He won't. Are you sorry about that?”

“No, no,” she said quickly. “I am glad.”

She said no more about him, and I felt easier. And Maggie went home with me, too, when I asked her.

When she went, a couple of hours later, I climbed up the ladder to Glahn's room and knocked at the thin reed door. He was in. I said:

“I came to tell you that perhaps we'd better not go out shooting to-morrow.”

“Why not?” said Glahn.

“Because I'm not so sure but I might make a little mistake and put a bullet in your throat.”

Glahn did not answer, and I went down again. After that warning he would hardly dare to go out to-morrow—but what did he want to get Maggie out under my window for, and fool with her there at the top of his voice? Why didn't he go back home again, if the letter really asked him, instead of going about as he often did, clenching his teeth and shouting at the empty air: “Never, never! I'll be drawn and quartered first?”

But the morning after I had warned him, as I said, there was Glahn the same as ever, standing by my bed, calling out:

“Up with you, comrade! It's a lovely day; we must go out and shoot something. That was all nonsense you said yesterday.”

It was no more than four o'clock, but I got up at once and got ready to go with him, in spite of my warning. I loaded my gun before starting out, and I let him see that I did. And it was not at all a lovely day, as he had said; it was raining, which showed that he was only trying to irritate me the more. But I took no notice, and went with him, saying nothing.

All that day we wandered round through the forest, each lost in his own thoughts. We shot nothing—lost one chance after another, through thinking of other things than sport. About noon, Glahn began walking a bit ahead of me, as if to give me a better chance of doing what I liked with him. He walked right across the muzzle of my gun; but I bore with that too. We came back that evening. Nothing had happened. I thought to myself: “Perhaps he'll be more careful now, and leave Maggie alone.”

“This has been the longest day of my life,” said Glahn when we got back to the hut.

Nothing more was said on either side.

The next few days he was in the blackest humor, seemingly all about the same letter. “I can't stand it; no, it's more than I can bear,” he would say sometimes in the night; we could hear it all through the hut. His ill temper carried him so far that he would

not even answer the most friendly questions when our landlady spoke to him; and he used to groan in his sleep. He must have a deal on his conscience, I thought—but why in the name of goodness didn't he go home? Just pride, no doubt; he would not go back when he had been turned off once.

I met Maggie every evening, and Glahn talked with her no more. I noticed that she had given up chewing things altogether; she never chewed now. I was pleased at that, and thought: She's given up chewing things; that is one failing the less, and I love her twice as much as I did before!

One day she asked about Glahn—asked very cautiously. Was he not well? Had he gone away?

“If he's not dead, or gone away,” I said, “he's lying at home, no doubt. It's all one to me. He's beyond all bearing now.”

But just then, coming up to the hut, we saw Glahn lying on a mat on the ground, hands at the back of his neck, staring up at the sky.

“There he is,” I said.

Maggie went straight up to him, before I could stop her, and said in a pleased sort of voice:

“I don't chew things now—nothing at all. No feathers or money or bits of paper—you can see for yourself.”

Glahn scarcely looked at her. He lay still. Maggie and I went on. When I reproached her with having broken her promise and spoken to Glahn again, she answered that she had only meant to show him he was wrong.

“That's right—show him he's wrong,” I said. “But do you mean it was for his sake you stopped chewing things?”

She didn't answer. What, wouldn't she answer?

“Do you hear? Tell me, was it for his sake?”

And I could not think otherwise. Why should she do anything for Glahn's sake?

That evening Maggie promised to come to me, and she did.

V

She came at ten o'clock. I heard her voice outside; she was talking loud to a child whom she led by the hand. Why did she not come in, and what had she brought the child for? I watched her, and it struck me that she was giving a signal by talking out loud to the child; I noticed, too, that she kept her eyes fixed on the attic—on Glahn's window up there. Had he nodded to her, I wondered, or beckoned to her from inside when he heard her talking outside? Anyhow, I had sense enough myself to know there was no need to look up aloft when talking to a child on the ground.

I was going out to take her by the arm. But just then she let go the child's hand, left the child standing there, and came in herself, through the door to the hut. She stepped into the passage. Well, there she was at last; I would take care to give her a good talking to when she came!

Well, I stood there and heard Maggie step into the passage. There was no mistake: she was close outside my door. But instead of coming in to me, I heard her step up the ladder—up to the attic—to Glahn's hole up there. I heard it only too well. I threw my door open wide, but Maggie had gone up already. That was ten o'clock.

I went in, sat down in my room, and took my gun and loaded it. At twelve o'clock I went up the ladder and listened at Glahn's door. I could hear Maggie in there; I went down again. At one I went up again; all was quiet this time. I waited outside the door. Three o'clock, four o'clock, five. Good, I thought to myself. But a little after, I heard a noise and movement below in the hut, in my landlady's room; and I had to go down again quickly, so as not to let her find me there. I might have listened much more, but I had to go.

In the passage I said to myself: “See, here she went: she must have touched my door

with her arm as she passed, but she did not open the door: she went up the ladder, and here is the ladder itself—those four steps, she has trodden them."

My bed still lay untouched, and I did not lie down now, but sat by the window, fingering my rifle now and again. My heart was not beating—it was trembling.

Half an hour later I heard Maggie's footstep on the ladder again. I lay close up to the window and saw her walk out of the hut. She was wearing her little short cotton petticoat, that did not even reach to her knees, and over her shoulders a woolen scarf borrowed from Glahn. She walked slowly, as she always did, and did not so much as glance towards my window. Then she disappeared behind the huts.

A little after came Glahn, with his rifle under his arm, all ready to go out. He looked gloomy, and did not even say good-morning. I noticed, though, that he had got himself up and taken special care about his dress.

I got ready at once and went with him. Neither of us said a word. The first two birds we shot were mangled horribly, through shooting them with the rifle; but we cooked them under a tree as best we could, and ate in silence. So the day wore on till noon.

Glahn called out to me:

"Sure your gun is loaded? We might come across something unexpectedly. Load it, anyhow."

"It is loaded," I answered.

Then he disappeared a moment into the bush. I felt it would be a pleasure to shoot him then—pick him off and shoot him down like a dog. There was no hurry; he could still enjoy the thought of it for a bit. He knew well enough what I had in mind: that was why he had asked if my gun were loaded. Even to-day he could not refrain from giving way to his beastly pride. He had dressed himself up and put on a new shirt; his manner was, lordly beyond all bounds.

About one o'clock he stopped, pale and angry, in front of me, and said:

“I can't stand this! Look and see if you're loaded, man—if you've anything in your gun.”

“Kindly look after your own gun,” I answered. But I knew well enough why he kept asking about mine.

And he turned away again. My answer had so effectively put him in his place that he actually seemed cowed: he even hung his head as he walked off.

After a while I shot a pigeon, and loaded again. While I was doing so, I caught sight of Glahn standing half hidden behind a tree, watching me to see if I really loaded. A little later he started singing a hymn—and a wedding hymn into the bargain. Singing wedding hymns, and putting on his best clothes, I thought to myself—that's his way of being extra fascinating to-day. Even before he had finished the hymn he began walking softly in front of me, hanging his head, and still singing as he walked. He was keeping right in front of the muzzle of my gun again, as if thinking to himself: Now it is coming, and that is why I am singing this wedding hymn! But it did not come yet, and when he had finished his singing he had to look back at me.

“We shan't get much to-day anyhow, by the look of it,” he said, with a smile, as if excusing himself, and asking pardon of me for singing while we were out after game. But even at that moment his smile was beautiful. It was as if he were weeping inwardly, and his lips trembled, too, for all that he boasted of being able to smile at such a solemn moment.

I was no woman, and he saw well enough that he made no impression on me. He grew impatient, his face paled, he circled round me with hasty steps, showing up now to the left, now to the right of me, and stopping every now and then to wait for me to come up.

About five, I heard a shot all of a sudden, and a bullet sang past my left ear. I looked up. There was Glahn standing motionless a few paces off, staring at me; his smoking rifle lay along his arm. Had he tried to shoot me? I said:

“You missed that time. You've been shooting badly of late.”

But he had not been shooting badly. He never missed. He had only been trying to irritate me.

“Then take your revenge, damn you!” he shouted back.

“All in good time,” I said, clenching my teeth.

We stood there looking at each other. And suddenly Glahn shrugged his shoulders and called out “Coward” to me. And why should he call me a coward? I threw my rifle to my shoulder—aimed full in his face—fired.

As a man soweth...

Now, there is no need, I insist, for the Glahns to make further inquiry about this man. It annoys me to be constantly seeing their advertisements offering such and such reward for information about a dead man. Thomas Glahn was killed by accident—shot by accident when out on a hunting trip in India. The court entered his name, with the particulars of his end, in a register with pierced and threaded leaves. And in that register it says that he is dead—dead, I tell you—and what is more, that he was killed by accident.

THE END

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PAN ***

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