

## Ledwina

The stream flowing quietly along its way could take with it none of the flowers and branches mirrored in its surface; only a figure like that of a young white lime swam slowly upstream. It was the beautiful, pale image of Ledwina who was returning home from an extended stroll along its banks. When she occasionally stood still, half fatigued, half meditating, then it could steal no ray, not even bright or milder iridescence from her young figure, for she was as colourless as a snowdrop and even her lovely eyes were like a pair of bleached forget-me-nots in which only loyalty remained, but no lustre. "Tired, tired", she said quietly and slowly let herself down into the tall, fresh green grass on the bank, that surrounded her like the green border of a bed of lilies. A pleasant freshness flowed through all her limbs, such that she closed her eyes in enjoyment. A convulsive pain roused her – in a trice she stood up straight, one hand pressed firmly against her ailing breast, and shook her blond head involuntarily from her weakness, turned rapidly as if to go away, and then turned, almost as if defiantly, stepped close to the bank and looked, first brightly then dreaming, into the stream. A large stone protruding from the river sprayed coloured drops all around and the wavelets flowed and broke so delicately that the water here seemed to be covered by a net and the leaves of downward bowing branches fluttered away like butterflies in the mirror. Ledwina's eyes rested on her own image – as the locks fell from her head and drifted away, her garment tore and the white fingers dissolved and faded. Then, as cramp gradually began to make itself felt again, she felt as though she were dead and decay were eating through her limbs, relaxingly, every element tearing away its part with it. "Silly nonsense", she said, quickly thinking better of it, and turned, with a sharp look in her mild features, into the military road that ran close along the river. While she was casting her eyes across the wide, empty field for cheerful objects, a repeated whistling from the direction of the stream went unnoticed and as shortly afterwards a large black dog with outstretched *<gap in MS>* ran straight across the meadow directly at her, she fled from *<gap in MS>* seized by alarm, with a cry toward the stream and as the animal was at her heels, flat footed into it. "Here Sultan!" someone called next to her and at the same time she felt herself being grasped by two ungentle hands and lifted on to the bank. She turned, still quite dazed and ver *<gap in MS>* stood a big, thickset man whom she recognised as a butcher by the wether draped around his neck like a fur cape. Each regarded the other briefly, the man's face meanwhile changing to the most obvious irony mixed with vexation. "Why does she jump like that, then?" he blurted at last. "Oh, God," said Ledwina, quite ashamed, "I thought the animal was rabid." "Who, my dog?" said the fellow, offended. "He is not even angry, has never bitten nobody." Ledwina looked at the dog which now sat quite sensible, like a sphinx, next to his master and listened. "Is she then right wet?" the butcher started to say. "Not very" replied Ledwina, the man meanwhile measuring the depth of the water next to the stone with his staff, the stone on which Ledwina had happened in her watery journey. "But very miserable, that I can well see," he then said. "I shall just see to it that I get her to that house." Indeed, Ledwina had much need of his support and only with difficulty did she reach the farmhouse that stood but a hundred paces distant from the river, her guide constantly regaling her with the characteristics of rabid dogs. The old peasant woman quickly pushed aside her distaff as Ledwina walked through the door with the words, "Light the fire, Lisbet, I have caught cold and had a shock." The butcher at once began the story of the adventure. "Make up the fire," Ledwina repeated. "I got my feet wet in the Sandloch." The rescuer wanted to make the matter with the damsel sound more dangerous. "It is young Fräulein x-x," said the old woman. Reassured, she laid wood on

the fire, placed a chair next to it, plumped up a cushion thereon and went into the cellar to fetch a glass of fresh milk. The butcher, abandoned at the height of his narration, called after her in annoyance, "A gin, landlady." "We serve no spirits," said the woman in the cellar doorway, "you can get a glass of milk for once, for nothing." "Young Fräulein," the butcher started speaking again, "but I say she could have drowned." Ledwina had to smile. "If I had lain face down", she muttered to herself and looked in her little basket for her purse. "She is also not especially well on her feet," he replied and a bitter look flashed across Ledwina's as she offered a tip. "God preserve us," raising his voice, "saving a human's life, that cannot be paid for," acting as though he would decline the somewhat small sum offered. "You guided me here, too," Ledwina spoke, almost vexed. "Yes, if she thinks so," said the rescuer and smartly took the offering as Ledwina bent over her little basket, he believing that she meant to put back into the purse what was being offered. Meanwhile the farmer's wife had brought the milk. The butcher growled, "If it only it were a good glass of beer", but took it all the same, speaking much to the landlady about paying and being able to pay well and finally went on his way. "It is often like that all day long," the farmer's wife said to Ledwina who was finding it quite cosy by the fire, "if we wanted to put up with a lot of people in the house, the demand would be big enough for the best of inns. People think money rules the world. Our Clement often has to get out of bed at night and guide travellers past the Grafenloch. That is not good for him, but one does not want to let people fall into the water." "No, indeed," said Ledwina already half in slumber. "The young Fräulein is sleepy," the old woman said, smiling. "I shall fetch another cushion." "Save us," cried Ledwina, jumping up quickly from her chair, but old Lisbet was already there again with two cushions one of which she laid on the ledge next to the stove, the other on the arm of the chair. Ledwina who, out of a sort of obstinacy of the sick, seldom did anything for her own good, laughed heartily out of pleasure because it was so comfortable for her. "Tell me something about old times, when you lived up at the manor house," she said in a friendly manner and the woman began to recount; about the departed grandpa, and how the tower had still stood, which had burned down many years ago, and Ledwina's head bent lower and lower and whatever she was hearing of the teller's words became ever more clear in her mind's eye. She saw grandfather, as a little grey man, very friendly, of course he was dead, but still shooting at crows in the old tower with his fowling piece; it did not bang, but they fell all the same and the tones from the old woman became softer and softer, who was observing her young Fräulein from time to time from behind her distaff until she finally fell completely asleep. Then she stood up gently, minced on tiptoe to Ledwina and slowly bent over her, checking her slumbers. It was touching to see that serious old face of the farmer's wife, standing over the young pale face of her ladyship; one in the silent wistfulness of dreams, the other in the depths of the inevitable imminent passing of both – the ripe ear of corn in its satiety of life over the tender, sunburned bloom. Then she rose and fetched flax from a wall cupboard and began to brush it very quietly. But her features were more serious than before and yet very soft. Thus a while had passed before the door was opened fairly ungently and, with the words, "Mother, I've brought you a new chair," her son, with some bumbling decorum, brought in a spinning chair for her, that had been made in secret. "The other is too high for you," he continued. His mother waved indignantly with her hand, pointing to Ledwina, but the latter was already awake and looking about her quite brightly and lively. "Yes, that is as I wanted you to be," the old woman said. "I have slept very peacefully at your fire," the girl said in a very friendly tone. "But it is good that I was awakened, otherwise I would have had to sleepwalk, I believe," she continued, smiling because both were looking at her enquiringly, "If I rest during daytime, then I have

scarcely any sleep at night, then I get up and walk about in my room, it is not for the best, but what shall one do with the long night. It will soon be five, now it's time for me to go," and as she went through the door, "Your son made the chair, did he not. He is really skilful." "Also right unskilful now and then," the old woman said, not yet able to shake off the annoyance, but Ledwina was already off like a gazelle, upriver, for she thought about her poor ailing breast only when severe pains reminded her of it, so hating this sad guarding, this pitiable, careful life in which the body rules the mind until it, too, becomes as ailing and wretched, that she would gladly have let this whole vital energy, dying down in sparks, flame out in one single really bright day. Here, too, her pious disposition kept the upper hand over a mind burning so terribly. But no martyr yet had sacrificed his life to God more purely and painfully than Ledwina the more beautiful death in her own mind's flame.

In the bright living room, something must have been different from usual, since Ledwina came into the room without being scolded at all, the usual bitter fruit of the quarrelling, so sweet to her but disruptive. Sister Theresa had enough to do, searching for a dropped needle, but even her mother said nothing and went on knitting and blinked her eyelids. That was always a special sign; that she was angry or moved or even embarrassed, for this clever woman to whom a generally noteworthy and often complicated life had secured complete control in action and word, over every inappropriate outburst of inner feelings, herself knew not how thinly the veil of her countenance hung over her soul. And it required but slight acquaintance for eyes, both perceptive and unpractised, in order often to understand her better than she herself in her multiple distraction by house and children. Ledwina would gladly have joined quite quietly in the company, but her work lay in the drawer of the table at which her mother was sitting – that was awkward. Meanwhile she sat down very gently on the sofa which stood on the shadow side of the room and uttered no word. Little Marie ran in and made straight for Ledwina, laughing loudly and somewhat foolishly. "Ledwinnie, do you already know the most famous new thing?" Ledwina coloured, as if startled, in unnaturally tense expectancy and their mother said quickly, "Marie, fetch me my handkerchief; I left it lying in the garden near the fir trees." Marie turned on her heel, but still said, "When I come back you will have long known about it, for Theresa will burst if she does not tell it." She laughed loudly and ran out somewhat gawkily. "You must watch out with the child," said their mother, seriously. "Children's ears are well known for being the sharpest and we adults are often truly reckless in this respect. In Marie's case it is, fortunately, only impertinence, not an awakening feeling of forwardness, that, at best, burns the soul empty. Carl," she turned to Ledwina, "received letters today, from which, among other things, it appears that one of his university acquaintances will perhaps visit him, passing through. You have heard him named, Roemfeld, the so-called handsome Graf. Carl has at times spoken much about him that sounds quite romantic and you have been incautious enough to flirt with him. I let such a thing happen, although it is regarded as being of little importance everywhere as long as the bad stays away, one must resign oneself to the nuisance, for goodness' sake. I must confess that I thought then no more about Marie than you did, but given that things like that leave no further impression upon her, as yet, highly childlike temperament, how shall one explain to her that she may not repeat that sort of conversation, without advancing just these impressions almost forcibly; for you know, she would be childish and lively enough to regale the Graf with his own biography." "One has to tell her," Carl replied, forever pacing up and down the room, "that she may not pass on anything whatever. Gossiping is, properly speaking, loathsome enough." "Do you know how to explain that to such a lively child," his mother

replied sharply. His mother broke off for a moment and then said in an indulgent voice, as if reluctant, "She is perhaps also more lively than all you." Carl went red and said, half to himself, "Also fairly naughty at times." "All children of that age are a bit naughty," his mother replied sternly, "and apart from that she obeys *me* on the word. If it is not like that with others, the fault may lie on both sides." Both fell huffily silent and an oppressive pause arose. "From whom have you had letters," Ledwina started to say, quietly and fearfully. "It was only one," said Carl, "von Steinheim – he has received a good position in Dresden and will call in here on the way there since he is travelling via Goettingen, in order to say goodbye to student-life and Roemfeld, who comes from Dresden, is also starting from there so they will travel together. Steinheim seems to have taken to the uninvited guest," this last he said half turning to his mother who, despite the greatest possible and most pleasant hospitality, always reserved the right of invitation entirely to herself. "We already know him," the latter said and then quickly, before Carl could fetch out his answer that this anxiety meant, not Steinheim, but Roemfeld, "Ledwina, where have you been this afternoon." "Down to the river," Ledwina replied. "You stayed a long time," was her mother's response. "I spent a long time with old Lisbet; I like being there".

"They are good people, too," said her mother, "Somewhat proud, but that does not matter in their class, it keeps them honest in every respect." "It really pained me," said Carl, "to find the inventory of our old domestics almost completely broken up." "Me, too," said his mother briskly. "Would that I could lift them out of the grave, even if I had to fill their coffins with money in their stead. We often called them our 'family silver'<sup>1</sup> in harmless chaff, but truly, such people are not only familiar with our faith in God, as we with theirs and, next to the guardian angel, there are no keepers more devoted and, next to parental love, no purer affection than the silent and inner ardour of such old faithful retainers toward the line against which they once were inoculated, wherein all other wishes and inclinations, even those for their relatives, have had to melt away." Frau von Brenkfeld was very moved toward the end of her own words. Her voice was firm, but the most beautiful feelings, faintly playing across her serious features, gave these an indescribable grace. Ledwina had, during all this, been observing her mother unceasingly and had turned pale, a sign that a thought was stirring her deeply. "Yes," now speaking very slowly, as though her senses had not gradually been coming alive until the speech, "That is true; we are indeed siblings, but I am unfortunately aware that we are not capable of taking those sudden, unshakable decisions that know no choice but to sacrifice oneself for others, of which the life of faithful servants gives us innumerable examples." Carl looked obliquely over toward her and dear Theresa reached out with her hand, reassuringly, and both pairs of eyes looked tearfully into one another. Ledwina said firmly, "Yes, Theresa, it is indeed so, but we are not worse for that – just that the old people are better." "That is why in this regard, the loyalty of servants," Carl started to say, "and of a quite special sort, is rather like the love toward the royal house, out of which everyone gladly sacrifices himself, even if its branches occasionally look withered and sickly compared to the beautiful old trunk. Whereas old people are always remarkable to me, and above all I enjoy speaking with them, it is just curious to see a mostly unimportant generation long after its already forgotten death, still living on in its often so important personality in these few grey, declining monuments – let alone how happy one is to encounter the living monument of some great mind of time past. I prefer freehand paintings of miniatures to the most beautiful galleries of famous biographies." "It seems to me, too," said Theresa, "as though the favourite faults of old people were, almost like those of children, in fact often burdensome yet fundamentally milder or more superficial than those of youth. Lack of consideration for the

comfort of others is the first and most prominent that leads old people, through general solicitude and the bitter comparison of their own weakness with the vigour of youth around them, to assume that the root of all that is disastrous is a minor sin but a great distress for others.”

“The latter is true,” Carl responded, “without giving reasons for the former; on the other hand, I have often rediscovered many a fault of youth in older persons, aggravated and above all in veritably informal petrification, which, for me, remains one of the most horrible spectacles with this nearness of the grave”. Frau von Brenkfeld, still one from the good times in which one honoured not only one’s parents, but also age – a time now almost vanished without trace like antediluvian times – shifted with her chair. Carl continued speaking naively in a declamatory manner, while his pipe took over the diction. “Among those of rank, ambition, that for the sake of the many one so easily forgives as something not good, as the most outrageous, the most infamous inordinate ambitiousness; among the middle class, thriftiness, half ridiculed, half praised as the most horrible parsimony about which one knows not, whether one should laugh with Democritus or weep with Heraclitus; among the lower orders, the often pleasant imprudence, as the most dreadful callousness and disregard of the otherwise nearest and dearest, and often everything together in all estates and how they, above all, seldom laugh like children, and ordinarily speak only childishly. They are at times childish and mean out of sheer maliciousness”. He started once more to walk up and down more furiously.

“Old people are good,” said Marie who was again sitting next to her mother, knitting quite properly and Frau von Brenkfeld almost had to laugh despite her irritated feelings, since according to the children’s premature way of calculating, this defence applied to her. “You may be glad,” she said, “not to have been young thirty years ago. In those days people never grew up in relation to their parents. There was no contradiction on the one side and only very seldom a reason given from the other”. “It is bad enough,” said Carl in a soft voice, “that it is now different, on average. Obedience towards parents is a law of nature and almost as precious as conscience. I am convinced that the root of nearly all the rampant moral evil now lies in neglect of the latter. Man is capable of and disposed to much. As soon as he kicks against it, however decently, there is something singular and moving about a natural law.” “Added to that,” said Theresa, “man must obey someone, spiritual or temporal, other than God; that keeps him tender hearted and Christian.” “I believe,” Ledwina added, “that if what Carl just said about old people has any reason, it is certainly to be sought in the complete lack of an object of obedience. They exercise that toward the Regent, but without feeling it, since they are usually relieved of all duties”. “True, for the greater part,” interposed Carl, “ and then quickly, “ *nota bene*, old Franz is dead. Of what did he die”? “Of a fever on the chest,” Theresa replied and Ledwina, across whose face a whiteness once more flew, added in a small voice, “He took cold because he set about sweeping a path through the snow last winte..” She rose and crossed to a chest of drawers in the shadows where she stood as though searching for something, for she felt that the tears, so freely welling up in her eyes, would become too heavy for them. “You wanted to become a hundred years old “, Marie laughed. “Just think, Carl; Ledwina believed she would become a hundred years old if she went walking every day. Old Nobst in *The Children’s Friend*<sup>2</sup> also did that”. As though she had not noticed Ledwina’s words, their mother said, “He had been through the snow to Emdor..”

“He had become old enough,” said Carl. “I think he was already over eighty. I shall not become that old”. Ledwina bent over an open drawer, deeply hurt. It was as though they wanted to snatch away from her the heart-rending but dear gift and she held it pressed close to her. In truth,

the mortal sickness of this faithful man, the spouse of old Lisbeth, allowed of many reasons, as is almost always the case with the demise of very old people and Frau von Brenkfeld was, with that well-loved but false forbearance which wounds the heart instead of healing it and offends it instead of moving it, therefore seeking to steal from that most probable reason its actual sanctity and leave it only the glory of the last sign of affection. Meanwhile Marie had run to Ledwina and was tormenting her with the question, repeated over and over amid laughter, "Ledwina, you are really afraid of death. How old would you like to become Ledwina?" Ledwina who, in her emotion, believed herself to be even more the object of attention, readily wanted to reply, yet fearing the quavering tone of her voice she bent from one side to another. During that time the child, slipped through under her arms and now pressed against the drawer in front of her, was looking into her eyes, eternally repeating its questions, loudly giggling. Finally she said, fairly composedly and louder than usual under the strain, "I am somewhat afraid of death as, I believe, are almost all people, for the opposite is against or beyond nature; in the first case I should not like to wish it for myself and in the second it is only attainable in a very long or very pious life". The little one again crept through and jumped laughing, into her chair. Ledwina had also taken heart during the discourse and returned fairly at ease to her sofa. Carl for whom, as soon as he had his information that he wanted, the rest of the conversation was mostly dead, signifying this by continuing to ponder to himself, now stood still and said, "The old fellow was a proper philosopher. He could have caused trouble for our savants. I have studied now for three years and our professors run around after useless questions all day long, like Diogenes with the lantern, yet I have seldom encountered any as subtle as those that the old genius knew how to produce out of the hat. He also taught himself to play the clarinet". "He blew that when he was still young," Marie interposed. Carl turned his pipe impatiently in his hands and then quickly went on, "What was comical, however, he also knew answers for everything and they were always good enough for him, although the sagacity of the answer never stood in proportion to that of the question, arrogance turns up everywhere". "Old Franz was very kind to your late father," said Frau von Brenkfeld gently but seriously. Carl replied quite guilelessly, "Yes, apart from schooling, he was brought up almost together with him. That also gave him the impetus". Then he continued, awakened of his own volition and with an unusually tender expression on his features, "When he recounted how, together, they secretly started smoking, with hollowed chestnuts and faithfully supported one another, sharing guilt and punishment, then I have always felt quite whimsical; in all conscience, for me, many a precious hour died with that man". "For me, too," said his mother fiercely wiping back the tears. "Old Lisbeth has, since then, become quite pitiful". "It is, above all, something curious and usually unpleasant about widows," interjected Carl, once more diverted, "Especially as long as the children are minors". "What is that, minors?" Marie broke in. "Usually they lack the strength and in any case, the eyes of the world to whom they are always a mote, take from them the power and the glory. One perceives them as exercising a severity towards creditors, which borders on crime; everything out of duty; it cannot be otherwise, but it ordinarily leaves behind some hardening – ruling does no good to any woman anywhere". "Widows are good", said Marie, offended and Carl, not grasping the connection, flared up: "Children, too, when they hold their tongues", and then started, doubly shocked, with a glance at his mother. Frau von Brenkfeld was fighting violently against a feeling more wistful than angry, that she took for unjust as Carl had been right in the main and had certainly been speaking unthinkingly, but that she had just had to hear

the poignancy of that relationship to which, as a result of her deceased spouse's muddled financial circumstances, she had had to sacrifice all her health and often her most sacrosanct sensibilities under the hardest external and internal struggles over eight years of her life, spoken about both sharply and as if condemning by him for whom above all she had gladly sacrificed everything, that drew a cloud of sorrow and loneliness into her soul, a cloud that, despite all the rays of obedience and love of her children, she was unable to disperse; even for her, the widow's veil made of crepe had become a leaden mantle which had even almost crushed honour, since her husband, after his death, had by disproportionate amounts of debt ruined those people whom, when he was alive, he had so gladly wanted to help. He had taken the blessing with him and left the guardians and his wife in her straitened circumstances the curse. In addition to that her otherwise strong heart had been clinging for some time now in great weakness to Marie the only one of her children to whom she meant everything, while the hearts of the rest of them began to hanker strongly after strange idols. In relation to her daughters this feeling was less stabbing since an all-round and versatile knowledge of the world on the part of the mother and unconditional obedience on the part of the children made up for what measure of melancholy and delicateness Ledwina might have, and Theresa of clear and level-headed conception for her age, but Carl's return, whom the university, in her view, sent back in accordance with his personal receptivity fully educated but also, or perhaps because of that, somewhat over mature and over candid, had to her, out of an anniversary of widowhood, become the oppressive funeral of the latter, although only in inner conviction, as Carl strove out of duty and resolve to be that which the most timid respect had previously made him, but just this ever transparent ambition, this recurrent failure through misunderstanding because the sharp, fearful attention of a child was lacking, this since then obvious closeness and mutual support among the siblings told her clearly how loosely the crown rested on her head held only through a sensible yet dutiful ministry. Weeping, worrying and blessing, she had sent little Carl into the wide world as a lush hothouse plant and she could not disguise that, were she then to discharge him without one of all these, he would Fräulein only the last and this, too, only on reflection and religiousness, not in that shy, pious feeling that thinks itself among rapacious animals in the world without the blessing of a mother. He obviously suffered Marie only out of regard for her and his irascible temperament had to break out just on an occasion where she seemed almost like her only child and yet, without extreme tactlessness, she could say nothing here. Even now, Carl understood her feelings only roughly at the beginning and followed them not at all. He paced up and down, smoked, and was somewhat nonplussed but completely calm. Ledwina would indeed have grasped all this the most sensitively but a chord, painfully struck earlier, still sounded so loudly that it drowned out every other sound; she could generally feed on a thought for a long time and often took breakfast when the others had already consumed an important midday meal, an insignificant tea, besides a quantity of amusing pastries and were now sitting down to the evening meal. Only Theresa who stood, ever like the angel with the flaming sword in front of and the olive branch above her family, had to bear the whole burden of this moment and was anxiously seeking imperceptibly appeasing phrases. "Why do you always choose that tiresome path along the river, Ledwina?" Frau von Brenkfeld began to say composedly, since the silence was not coming to an end. "I like that path very much, for one thing," Ledwina replied. "I think that the water plays a large part". "You also have the river beneath your window," her mother said, "but it is such a comfortable stroll when deep in thought, which is why one also

easily walks on farther than one should." "I must admit," said Carl, "that these parts here, particularly now, seem quite wretched. One goes walking as if on a table, the surroundings ahead of us like those behind us, or rather, none at all; the sky above us and the sand beneath us." "The region could be picturesquely much worse than it is," said Ledwina, "and it would still remain dear to me. I shall say nothing of the memories that dwell in every tree, for nothing can be compared to them; however, as it lies, and everywhere, it would be appealing and valuable in the utmost to me." "Chacun a son goût," Carl retorted. "Taking the exceptions that you just made, I do not know what excites you; the prickly heather or the boring willow trees or the golden hills with which a magical wind presents us within an hour." "The willows, for example," Ledwina retorted, her face taking on dull yet mobile life, "have, for me, something moving, a strange confusion in Nature – the branches colourful, the leaves grey. They seem to me like beautiful but weakly children whose hair has been bleached by a fright in the night. And, altogether, the deep peace over many an area of this landscape; no work, no herdsman, only a lot of larger birds and the solitary grazing cattle, so that one does not know whether one is in a wilderness or in a country without deceit where the farms know no guardians other than God and communal conscience." "It is not difficult," Carl retorted smiling, "to find from something which has so many dear sides, a beautiful one, too, but I assure you, one may not travel twenty leagues away, otherwise the beautiful, romantic rags fall off and what remains naked is half desert." "The desert", replied Ledwina, also smiling and as if dreaming, "the desert may perhaps have large fearful attractions".

"Child, you are babbling", said Carl and laughed out loud. Ledwina continued slowly, "Suddenly to be thus transplanted into it, without knowing similar and yet completely unequal surroundings and above all, without having suffered from them before and as far as you can see nothing but the yellow glittering sand surface no limit other than the sky that has to climb down in order to curb infinity and now stands flaming above it; instead of clouds, sky-high, ever changing pillars of luminescence instead of flowers, snakes with burning colours; instead of green trees, the terrible natural forces of lion and tiger which shoot through the rustling sand waves as the dolphin through the foaming tides – altogether, it must compare with the ocean". Carl had stood still out of wonderment. Then he said with a foolish face, "And if the changing pillars of fire pay us a visit, or the flowers of the desert entwine us, or the dreadful forces of Nature want to try themselves out on us". Ledwina felt untowardly chilled. Without answering, she bent down to pick up a ball of thread from the floor. "Oh my God," exclaimed Frau von Brenkfeld who, by this sudden movement now espied her not quite dry shoes, "you are quite wet." "I am a bit wet," replied Ledwina, quite down from untoward feelings. "And that the whole time," her mother replied, reprovingly. "Lie down this moment. You know well enough, in the name of God, how little you can stand". "Yes," said Ledwina shortly and stood up, in order to evade, in her sensitiveness, all further conversation. "See to it that you lie down and drink tea," her mother called after her. She turned in the doorway and said with forced amiability, "Yes, certainly". Theresa followed her.

"You have not yet drunk it," Theresa said, gently scolding, when she went into the bedroom a quarter of an hour later with a glass of water and saw the full cup that had prudently been poured out before she left. "If Mother came in," she went on, "You know how she keeps her word". "Oh goodness, I have not yet drunk it; if Mother came in now," Ledwina repeated, starting up from deep thought and in a trice handed the emptied cup to Theresa. "I am so hot," she said then, roughly threw back the white curtains and laid her burning hands in her sister's lap. "You drink too quickly," the latter said. "I wish I could drink that glass of water,"

retorted Ledwina. "You drink your tea; it is much better for you," Theresa answered sympathetically, "You can at least sacrifice that for your health".

"It is only a little wish – oh, it comes only from the top of my heart," Ledwina smiled and then, "Sit next to me properly and tell me something. Lying abed is so boring; it will be long before it's dark and then the long night". Theresa sat down on the edge of the bed and sighed involuntarily very deeply. Ledwina smiled anew and very amiably, almost joyfully. "The day, today," said Theresa then profoundly, "Has been outwardly so unimportant and yet inwardly so rich. Much has been thought out and also, indeed, spoken out, that had not been able to come to light over the years; like the focus of a long period".

"Yes, indeed, all kinds of things," replied Ledwina expectantly, in whose mind only one thing lay silently stirring at that moment. "I wish," Theresa spoke on, "our Carl looked a little less imposing so that he would be somewhat less honoured. Everybody turns to him and Mother goes red every time when he says with his patronising manner, "Tell that to my Mother". Ledwina had, as was said before, completely overheard that part of the conversation to which this referred and even now her mind was holding fast to a different direction, grasping no of that, in its deep dolour. "Yes," she said, still silently dreaming, "So much was spoken of that one forgot the first by the time one heard the last. I wonder whether Steinheim has also changed". Theresa's face became bright red. "I should not like it at all", she continued." It seems to me that he could only lose by it". Theresa laboriously poured out a fresh cup. "Methinks I see him," Ledwina began again, "when he is asked something and that dear, faithful face gives an answer in such a friendly manner. It makes one quite calm if one dwells on it for long". "That is alright," said Theresa fearfully. Ledwina looked up, "Do you not think so?", serious, she asked. "Oh no," said Theresa, more confused, and broke off again just as quickly, but Ledwina had sat up and grasped both her hands firmly. "Please, please, stay silent, but do not lie". Giving out a soft sound of deepest wistfulness, Theresa laid her head on Ledwina's breast and wept and trembled such that the curtains shook. Ledwina clasped her tightly to herself and her face had lit up like a moon shining on guard over her sister. Both let go after a long, thoughtful pause and sought to regain their composure; one at the silken bedcover, the other at the ribbon about the teapot, that she undid instead of drawing it tighter, for it is precisely the best and most charming human beings to whom it is given to feel ashamed when an unguarded moment has betrayed how weak they are, while the poor in spirit of every type, to whom Heaven is not promised, cannot forget for all eternity, when they have found one moving thought, in the way that every dog has its day. "I often see myself as quite ridiculous and vain," Theresa finally started to say. "Do I seem like that to you, too"? Ledwina had to laugh and looked at her questioningly.

Theresa continued, "Dark to everybody else and light to me alone; it is sad, Ledwina, to notice such a thing quite alone. I always had to boil inside when I saw this or that one of our acquaintances making a show with dreamed up trials; it is so ugly and so common. Modesty no longer protects one at all today and it would be so sad for me. Oh, Ledwina, am I just imagining it? I can build on nothing other than my most inner belief". "You just build your house," said Ledwina, moved. "You have a good reason, hidden yet firm, which will not subside beneath you". "He has never said anything of that kind to me," replied Theresa, her eyes meanwhile as wanting to burn into the floor. Ledwina said, musing and lovingly, "For another, nothing; for him, everything. Were it another, then you would also not have the belief. Oh, Theresa you will be very happy, I say that freely and am not ashamed. We all seek some time, even if

incognito, but I have given up, for I know that I shall not find". Theresa replied, humbly, "I may also not demand as much as you".

"That means nothing," Ledwina retorted, gently accusing. "You cannot believe that yourself. You are more agreeable to God and man, I know that well enough". Theresa was properly startled and wanted to interpose, but Ledwina waved sternly with her white hand and continued speaking, "Indeed, my loose, foolish temperament has so many sharp points and dark corners that it would have to be a wonderfully fashioned soul to fit quite inside". Theresa, shaken, took both her hands and said, all the while moving her head about as though searching, in order to hide feelings of the greatest emotion, "Oh, Ledwina, I do not like to say now, how much many people love you, but even you will find what remains dear to you alone. God will not miss hearing such a pure and quiet entreaty." Ledwina, for whom this conversation was becoming too trying, said, as if casually, "Yes, indeed. One says that there is a lid to every pot, but goodness knows where my chosen love is living. Perhaps he is, at this very moment, on a tiger hunt; it is just that time of year and then, you think, Steinheim's love remains unnoticed – do not believe that. Have I ever said one word to you before, and yet it has all been a certainty to me for a year and I can no longer separate you two in my mind. But how can you think that our Mother shall speak out about such a delicate matter, given a mere manifestation, however accurate – or Carl, in whom honour and decorum are almost too much. I have often, and secretly laughing, seen the struggle of both, when they want to appear neither intentionally interfering nor neglectful. Believe me, if Steinheim could forget or ignore you, both would keep silent and compose themselves, but their trust in human beings would be over for ever, as much as yours would".

"But today, too, where the decision is imminent," replied Theresa, uneasily, "not the tiniest sign in mien or word". "Oh, Theresa," said Ledwina, smiling, "I can well see that love makes people foolish. Is all this avoiding of his name and this cautious, revealing treatment of the whole visit then nothing? The visit was by far the most important part of the letter".

"I am telling you, Theresa, I knew nothing of what was being discussed as I walked into the drawing room, but I was startled and tarried in the greatest suspense. A whole sea of feelings was billowing across Mother's face, especially". Theresa had, bit by bit, raised her head and now looked, embarrassedly hoping, at Ledwina, as a child looks at its father when it notices that he wants to make it a present of something. "All right, I want to believe it and can also not really do otherwise," she said, shamefacedly. "But, please, please, do not speak any more about it". After a few moments, she continued sadly, "One must not immerse oneself thus in a hope. Happiness is far too many sided". Then she fell silent and took hold of the cup and teapot as though she wanted to pour out, then said, "I shall come back straight away," and went out of the room, for she was trembling so much that she could not have lifted the pot.

After a long while she walked back in on tiptoe and looked, bending well forward, straining her eyes, in her sister's direction because she thought that she wanted to slumber and dared not go close to her, because of the fresh evening air, wafting from her clothing, for she had been outside deep among the shrubbery and had wept and groaned her fill and now she was quiet again and cautious as before, for this sweet, dearest of souls was living a double life; one for herself, one for others. The former of these always came to the fore to do battle for the latter except that, in place of the sword, it bore the olive branch. Thus she stood for a while; no curtain rustled, but deep, heavy breathing was audible and with the certainty that Ledwina was slumbering, it also gave her a wistful concern.

She sat herself quite still at a window. The sun was going down and its last rays stood on a willow on the opposite bank; the evening wind stirred its branches so that they stepped out of the brightness and appeared in their natural colour. Then they bent back into the golden glow. For Ledwina's sick, over excited temperament, this flickering play of Nature could easily have turned into sinister image of being shackled in the singeing flame from which one vainly strove to escape, as one foot was rooted in the agonising soil, but Theresa felt indescribably euphoric, observing the pure, waving gold of the sky and the delightfully toned landscape. Her thoughts had become a silent and fervent prayer and her eyes were directed sharply to the sunset as though the partition between sky and earth were thinner here. It also seemed to her as though the rays were drawing her sighs up with them and she laid her face close to the windowpane, but as the sun was now quite gone and the evening sky began to disown its colour, her wings sank too and she became ever more sad and knew not why. The lowing cattle were moving slowly into the farmyard, the sunset climbing higher at the same time, and a fresh wind also drove the roseate herd over toward the manor house. "It will be all right now," she said, fairly loudly, meaning the weather and was startled that she had forgotten the slumberer, but an indescribable confidence enfolded her suddenly and these words, uttered involuntarily, were to her as an inspiration from God. Now she was completely calm and remained so until the hour that decided her fate. It is ever so, that the purest of souls have their moments where belief in a hidden spiritual reflection of all things into each other touches powerfully on the oracle of Nature; and whoever denies that, his hour is not yet come, but it will not fail to appear, be it the last. Theresa stood up as though out of a deep dream and stole to Ledwina's bedside. Motionless, eye even rigid, lay the sleeper and her face was as pale as marble, but within her breast toiled oppressive, restive life in deep breaths. Theresa looked concernedly at the region of the heart and then laid her hand gently on it, which rose with the strong beats. Had she not known that sudden waking was always accompanied by distressing alarm in her sister, she would not have left her to this stupefying repose, but now she glanced once more, full of concern, at the sleeper, blessed her for the first time in her life, drew the bed curtains right back, closed those at the window and then went out gently, wistfully looking back, with the intention of returning later to check again.

It was late into the night when Ledwina awoke from her long slumber; outwardly she had rested well and Theresa had, a few hours ago, been unnoticed at her bedside where she, reassured, had left her sister who now seemed eased. However, in Ledwina's innermost being a ghastly dream-world had opened up and she seemed to be walking in a great company which included her family and a lot of acquaintances, to attend a theatrical performance. It was very dark and the whole company carried torches which threw a yellow fiery glow on everything – especially the faces appeared distorted. Ledwina's guide, an old, insignificant acquaintance, was very cautious and warned her of every stone. "Now we are in the churchyard," he said. "Take care, there are several freshly dug graves". Just then, all the torches flamed up and a large churchyard with an innumerable quantity of white gravestones and black grave mounds became visible to Ledwina, which alternated regularly one with another such that the whole seemed to her like a chequerboard. She laughed aloud as it occurred to her that what was dearest in the world to her lay buried here. She knew no names and had no more exact shape for it, other than the human form in general, but it was certainly her dearest and she tore herself away with a dreadfully confused whimpering and began to see among the graves, digging up the earth here and there with a little spade. Now she was suddenly the observer and saw her own

figure, deathly pale with hair blowing wildly in the wind, burrowing at the graves, with an expression in her distorted features, that filled her with horror. Now she was once more the seeker herself; she lay across the gravestones to read the inscriptions and could not make out any, but she did see that none was the right one. She started to avoid the earth mounds, for the thought of sinking in began to form, nevertheless she was, under the compulsion of the dream, as though pushed towards one and scarcely had she trod upon it than it collapsed. She plainly felt the momentum in falling and heard the boards cracking as they broke; then she was lying beside a skeleton. Oh, it was here dearest – she knew that immediately. She embraced it more firmly than we can grasp thoughts, then she sat up and sought features in the grinning skull, for which she herself had no measure. But there was nothing added to which she could also not see properly, for snowflakes were falling although the air was sultry. It was, by the way, daytime. She took hold of one of the still fresh hands of the dead, that had come loose from the skeleton – that scared her not at all – she pressed the hand ardently to her lips, then laid it into the previous place and pressed her face into the musty dust. After a while, she looked up. It was night and her erstwhile companion was standing very tall at the grave with a lantern and bade her to accompany him. She answered that she would always remain here until she were dead; he might go and leave the lantern there, which he immediately did. For a while, she saw again nothing but the skeleton that she caressed with heartbreaking tenderness. Suddenly a child stood next to the grave, with a basket full of flowers and fruit, and she called to mind that it was one of those children who offer refreshments in the theatre. She bought the child's flowers in order to decorate the dead person, carefully and calmly sorting out and giving back the fruit. As she tipped out the basket, there were so many flowers that they filled the whole grave, which greatly pleased her and as her blood pulsed more quietly and an idea formed that she could put the decayed body back together again out of flowers so that it would be alive and go with her. As she was picking out and sorting the flowers she awoke, and as always with dreams, only the very last impression passes over into waking life, fairly free, but she felt unbearably hot. She sat up and looked somewhat confusedly around the room. The moonlight was shining upon the curtains of one of the windows and since the river passed by beneath it, they seemed to be flowing like the waters. The shadow fell on her bed and gave the white cover the same property, such that she felt as though she were under water. She contemplated this for a while and the longer she did so, the more horrid it felt. The idea of an Ondine turned into that of a corpse sunk in the river, slowly being eaten away by the water while inconsolable parents vainly lower their nets into the inaccessible kingdom of the element. It became so horrible for her that, because of the heat in her body, she decided after a few qualms to get up and draw open the curtains. The night was particularly beautiful, the moon hanging clear in deep blue, clouds lying darkly on the horizon in a heavy, towering mass and thunder rumbled distantly yet powerfully hither like the roar of a lion. Ledwina looked greedily through the windowpanes; the grey silvery light rested like a magic secret on the landscape and thin, subdued flickerings floated across the grasses and wild flowers as though elves were laying out their flimsy veils to bleach. At the river the air was quite still, for the willows stood as if petrified and no breath of wind bent their ruffled hairs, but in the distance the poplars were shaking, holding their white surfaces to the moon so that they glistened like silvery avenues in dreams and fairytales. Ledwina looked and looked and her foot took root ever more firmly in the enticing place. Soon she was standing at the open window half involuntarily, half self-reproaching, wrapped in a thick shawl; she shuddered gently in the cool air and at the ghostly scene. She viewed the clear light above her and the soft light below her in the stream, then the

gloomy lurking background and the whole seemed to her like the proud and indulgent maritime salute of two lighted royal gondolas while the population stands close together, surging in the distance, its muffled murmuring echoing across the water. There appeared, far away on the river, yet a third light – a gambolling dull little flame like a hazy meteor and she knew not whether it was really a jack-o-lantern or carried by human hand, more for company than as a guide in the deceptive brightness of the night. She directed her gaze firmly at it as it slowly danced about and its uninterrupted approach vouched for the latter opinion. She was so lost in strange kingdoms that she pictured the traveller as a grey sorcerer who was looking for secret herbs in the damp hollows of the moor. In reality there were many spirit-raisers, so-called horse whisperers in that region, as is generally the case in flat countries where people breathe in melancholy and a certain morbid depth of thought, the belief in ghosts, with the fog-ridden air. These magicians mostly settled, respected older people, are with few exceptions, as guileless as their children, while they perform the uncanny work almost never as a trade, but mostly as a secret mastered by chance, yet precious, in neighbourly service. In all this, they themselves keep strictly to small matters which make things of that sort awesome, even for complete disbelievers, like the rigid secrecy, the plucking of herbs or twigs at full moon or on a particular night of the year, etc. Thus it would not have been an impossible thing, on a nocturnal stroll, to find such weird fellow travellers. However, the little flame bounced nearer and soon Ledwina could make out that it was the burning wick of a lantern that a man was carrying while a figure on horseback followed him. She reflected that it was a nocturnal traveller whom an expert in the route was guiding past the deceptive bays of the stream. The fairy kingdom was destroyed, but a human feeling of deepest wistfulness about the unknown person gripped her, with whom she [x-x] and yet who passed by, heeding her as little as the stones in the path and knew nothing of her, if he were to read of her death in the newspapers. Now he was opposite the manor house where the footpath was paved with blocks. A slow hoof beat echoed up to her and she strained her sight to gain some sort of shape of the fleeting apparition. Suddenly a cloud drew across the moon, heralding the conspiracy on the horizon. It became quite ominous and at the same time a heavy, clattering fall reached her ears; vehement splashing and the loud cry of fear of a male voice followed it. Ledwina jumped, icy cold, back from the window in terrible shock and wanted to hurry to help, but her knees carried her only to the middle of the room where she collapsed, but did not lose consciousness. She screamed continuously, as if in the greatest of horror, her voice almost at breaking point and after one minute her mother, her sister and most of the female personnel had gathered around her. They lifted her up and carried her to her bed, believing that she was talking out of her mind as she consistently and fearfully shouted, "Open the window; in the river – he is lying in the river" and strove to pull free. Marie who was crying aloud from shock, was however the first who differentiated the call from the river from the loud confusion. They tore open the window and soon the manor house's domestic staff, quite stunned, moved with poles and hooks to the riverbank. His lively horse had carried the traveller out of the waves into which he had followed the wayward light of his guide, since he was trotting close behind him. He stood dripping next to his snorting animal and out of fear, was about to go into the stream again to rescue the human life that was being washed away, because he knew of no other help in that strange landscape. Theresa stood at the window, wringing her hands and listened for sounds of the searchers above the storm which had now broken out with terrible intensity. Thunder was rolling without letup and water dancing in horrible delight at the prize fallen to it and threw foam into the eyes of those who were trying to snatch it from it.

The stranger stood at the riverbank, shivering with cold, not wanting to go into the manor house but into the waves with a boat. "Rather save your own life," said the old estate manager, "Methinks that one is enough". "Oh, God!" the stranger cried painfully, "I talked him into it. He did not want to leave his old mother who is afraid of thunderstorms. For God's sake, a boat, a boat!" "You cannot get a boat, we have none," said the manager. The stranger held a lantern high up to his face and as, in the deceptive beam he seemed to be laughing, he grasped him angrily by the front of his coat and shouted, "A boat, or I shall yet throw thee into the water". The estate manager looked him squarely in the face and said, "We have none." The stranger spoke doubtingly and confusedly, "How did you get here, then?" "Over the bridge, there," the manager replied. "A bridge," said the stranger, as if paralysed, letting go of him and in the greatest fear, joined the other searchers. "I have something here," one called and threw something white on to the bank that one recognised as the lost man's cap. They searched here more busily but the hooks pulled in vain through the foaming water. "We shall not find him," shouted another, exhausted in the fruitless and almost aimless work. "The weather is too rough". "The water is not giving him up," shouted yet another. "It has not yet had human flesh this year". "Not", replied another and the stranger was with shock, how, after this remark, all zeal was visibly extinguished. He offered money upon money and they continued to search to please him, but so disheartened that they were soon only slapping the water with the hooks and rods for appearances' sake. Theresa had meanwhile not left the window. "I hear nothing," she said in a lamenting tone toward Ledwina whom she saw, to her shock, half dressed and about to get out of the bed. She closed the window quickly and pushed her shaking sister back into the bed, where the latter soon gave up on the condition that she would be informed of all news as quickly as possible. Theresa promised everything and believed that she would manage with her conscience. She had composed herself with great strength and was now speaking to Ledwina about many consoling spiritual and earthly things as the latter was at last now quiet and fell asleep from the greatest exhaustion. Then she went to arrange a warm room for the stranger who, after several hours, at last came in frozen through and through and inwardly quivering. Then she lay down herself. Would the morning perhaps bring her some recovery, since the day had again demanded all her strength, after she had bedded down a maid next to Ledwina's boudoir.

It had struck seven as Minnie crept into the room on tiptoes and the young lady came toward her already fully dressed. "What is it, Minnie?" she asked, trembling, and closed the last pin. "The strange gentleman is wide awake," the girl answered. "But the messenger?" asked Ledwina. "God knows," the girl replied and both fell silent. "One doesn't need to think much good," Minnie then said and started to weep bitterly. Ledwina looked down fixedly ahead and asked, "Do they know who it was?" "Yes, indeed", the sobbing girl replied. "It is old Elizabeth's Clement. Oh, my God, what is left for the poor old woman" and wept aloud. Ledwina sat on the bed and laid her face firmly in the pillow; then she stood up, chalky white and said, "Yes, God will know", took her handkerchief from the table and went out slowly. In the living room everybody was gathered around the table. As Ledwina entered, the almost too strikingly handsome stranger stood up and bowed. Carl said refinedly and politely, "That is my eldest sister," and to Ledwina, "Graf Holberg". They sat again at the serving table and conversation continued somewhat depressed, about all manner of events at Goettingen, as the single point of contact known to both. "Fräulein Marie, take care," said the stranger, turning from the conversation to Marie who was repeatedly putting an open clasp knife into her mouth to test the blade. Marie went red and laid down the knife. "Quite right; she is called Marie," said Frau von Brenkfeld, smiling

politely. "I believe that I know them all," the Graf replied cheerfully and glanced around the group with his bright eyes. "Steinheim is a faithful painter, believe me, so that I recognized them all again immediately." "You have seen a lot of Steinheim," said Carl. "Oh, very much," Holberg replied quickly. "In the last year, daily or rather, nearly all day. I even attended an otherwise quite unnecessary lecture as a favour to him". Carl laughed, dryly, "As long as they were there," the Graf continued, "one could certainly not easily approach him, for his heart belongs to several absent persons, but open only to one who is present. I never had an excuse for visiting him and he appeared not at all at our student groups now," he went on with a flashing, rapid glance, "now I believe that I am deceiving neither myself nor others when I say, we like each other very much. I took to him straight away, since I first met him in the library. He was sitting at the window reading Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, a play which at the time, perversely, did not appeal to me as did the remaining works of this giant, for," he continued, laughing childishly, "I must, unfortunately, always wear the livery of the time for a short while, thus I shone at the time in the wildly romantic – grey as a thundercloud, embroidered with snakes and demons. I must have looked glorious". He glanced around, pleased and to the embarrassed face of Frau von Brenkfeld who could think of no answer to this, nodded in a friendly manner, "Yes, indeed, gracious Madam, in N. there was a State livery and there people took leave of their senses, made for the woods in droves and searched, not for mushrooms, but revelations from the world of spirits. I was part of it and therefore even *The Merchant of Venice* did not suit me, there is not the least bit of shuddering therein. Thus it was that I approached the reader and wanted to shine with my judgment, but a Spanish proverb says *some set out to shear and return shorn themselves*. Now, tell me, my best gracious lady, how can one, having an otherwise unbribable intelligence, be so completely mad from time to time"? Carl sought to help out by laughing and said, Steinheim writes very well of you". "Do you then also know my name?" said Frau von Brenkfeld, out of embarrassment not thinking about the impertinence of her question. The stranger turned red and said, "You mean gracious lady", then he looked down and said in a modest voice, "Do you not celebrate your Name Day on the nineteenth of November"? "Quite right," replied Frau von Brenkfeld. "I am called Elisabeth". "The three young ladies," the Graf went on, "will be called Fräulein Theresa and Marie and I fear that the name of the third is difficult to remember and I am afraid of getting it wrong. It must sound something like Lidwina or Ledwina." Entirely the latter," said their mother and glanced at Ledwina. The Graf nodded, smiling and friendly in her direction, who, however, did not notice it, as she was just thinking of Theresa's joy, for whom she would so gladly have wished this gentle oil on, as she thought, still troubled waters. "Can you not tell me," said Carl, "when Steinheim will come here"? "I am sure as soon as possible," the Graf replied with a long look that said much. Carl pursed his lips and said, "I have a little trip in view, thus we should miss each other, but I shall postpone it or give it up according to how it works out". "A trip? To where?" Ledwina asked wonderingly and Carl replied shortly and ill-humouredly, "To the Harz, perhaps". And then, to the Graf, "We hoped to see you here at the same time". The Graf said in a friendly tone, as he shook his black locks from his forehead, "Look how well Steinheim is disposed towards me, but I must myself know what I may dare – suppose that you had turned me away". Frau von Brenkfeld was about to interpose politely, but the Graf continued, "A dear pleasure has been spoiled for me. I wanted to surprise my sister on her birthday, thus the unhappy thought to use the fine night as an aid. Then he suddenly became grim, stood up and went out. "What do you think of him?" said

Frau von Brenkfeld, looking up at Ledwina as though out of a deep anguish. The latter shook her head, smiling curiously and said, "I do not know yet, but quite proper. "He has something childish about him," Carl interposed, "But that goes with his sickness". "Is he sick?" said Ledwina, tensely, "He looks quite fresh, almost too fresh".

"Oh, God, how he would like to look fresh", replied Carl. "It really shocked me when I saw him. On my last stay at Goettingen he was always as pale as a ghost; he was called Pallidus for that reason for a long time, until it was finally no longer a joking matter, but now". Carl fell silent, serious and then went on, "I think of an occasion when we had a good students' gathering in "Ulrichs" (a beer garden) and as several of us plucked bunches of wild flowers as we went along, someone finally posed the question of what the so-called funeral flower is, since many say that the dark red poppy, others the little light red dianthus, yet others only yellow, high flowers are so named, he said so wistfully then, 'Light red seems to me to deserve the name above all; light red is indeed the proper death colour. Dear God, how beautifully the Old Marigold<sup>3</sup> can bloom, so shortly before withering.' Then he stayed back and was quiet the whole evening, for his father had, with his beautiful, intelligent mother, against the will of all the relatives, dragged consumption into the family. I find that truly bad." "You choose hard expressions, Carl," said Theresa who had for the last few minutes again been present. "There is in truth, enough badness in the world; one does not need to aggravate it with a word.

Carl said, offended and therefore coldly, "Perhaps, in view of his personality, I can also call it mad; I would then have to assume that he took her for healthy in an *idée fixe*. The most violent passion would not lead me astray into knowingly poisoning my whole clan." Theresa, who for understandable reasons wished Holberg well, said this quickly and quite unthinkingly, "If, however, he cannot love and therefore also not marry". Carl stood still, looked at her mockingly, then tapped her forehead gently with his finger and said with emphasis, "Oh thou blind world, how thou dost stumble in the darkness". Theresa bent her head backward unwillingly, but she said nothing, for it angered her unbelievably having just now said something absurd – even more, Ledwina who regarded her sister fundamentally as not only richer in heart and temperament, but also cleverer in her clear circumspection on the whole, than her brother, knowledgeable, strong, but often obtuse in his limited, exaggerated ego. "That is as it may be," Carl continued seriously, "it is enough that the whole family is burned out like a meteor, from sheer genius and weakness, except him and one sister on whose cheeks the Old Marigold already shows. The poor boy could make fine remarks enough; Death has already often hit him very hard and now it is even waiting within him".

There was a knock at the door and a labourer entered, wearing socks. "Your Graces," he began, "the strange gentleman is asking about people in the village, who would search for Clement for money and a kind word, if that must be, then so be it, but find him they will not. The river is too long; he may already be ten hours further away." "I shall speak to the strange gentleman," said Frau von Brenkfeld. "Just go". And when the labourer was outside, she looked silently at her children and then said, "This terrible disquiet; I think we shall not stand one another for long." Then she went out to offer suggestions to the Graf. Carl watched her go and then, laughing embarrassedly, "I am only glad that this sojourn is not on my account. I was afraid of all that. Hollberg has been spoiled throughout his whole life. All four of us took to him. We had undertaken to make a proper, stylish ladies' man of him. He accepted everything quite well, but in the middle of the best of gatherings, something mostly insignificant could seize him so deeply and strangely that he spoiled all the fun with his quaint mood. Occasionally that is interesting but always

monstrously uncomfortable, added to which he never grasped a real concept of student life, at gatherings remaining elegant as if among Philistines, artless and confiding as if among brothers and could have had the worst of quarrels, but everyone knew and indulged him”.

“Then he was much liked?” Theresa asked. “Oh, indeed,” Carl replied meanwhile searching round the room for his mislaid tobacco pouch. “Added to that, being artless and noble is also the surest way to general regard – there is thus something princely”. Theresa turned to Ledwina, “It is indeed something unique about hereditary refinement. “It may dare much,” replied Ledwina, “as long as it is only outward forms of which the inner sense of honour never speaks and also offends them only harmlessly”. “Yes, indeed,” said Theresa. “But then it is also more to me than beauty, not only in a man” she continued, meditating in a friendly manner. “It would also meet my choice, for me”. “Oh certainly,” replied Ledwina and Carl, who went back to them again said, “I should, by the way, not wish to see myself so considered. It always reminds one of respect for women”. Theresa looked up reluctantly then she began to laugh, at first quietly then more heartily. “It is so loathsome” she said, “that one has to laugh so absurdly”. Their mother came in with the Graf. “You do understand that,” she said. “Quite surely,” replied the Graf and looked glowingly about him. “The gracious lady has but to command. It is only for the sake of the mother”. “His mother,” said Frau von Brenkfeld, “will bear the sight of the corpse better perhaps after few days than now; at least I hope so”. “I believe not,” replied the Graf, moved. “She cannot console herself; she had nothing but the son”. Frau von Brenkfeld spoke earnestly. “You are wrong. None of us can determine how much a truly Christian and strong character from among the lower estates, especially a woman, is able to bear, so little idea do we have of the uninterrupted chain of anxieties and self-denials, of which their life almost always consists. Believe you me, what you see like that, is nothing.” The Graf raised his burning face and said, “What, gracious Madam? Oh, forgive me”. He was silent for a few seconds, as if dazed, then he continued, “Just think how the water will maul him. The old woman is sure to keep going to the river until it spews him out and then she will not know him”. He stood up hastily, said, “Forgive me” again and went out. A little surprised, Frau von Brenkfeld watched him leave and then said, “Is that sickness or caprice”? “Both”, replied Carl phlegmatically and thus the conversation went on among people whom one has to call good in parenthesis, often unjustly, always wrongly over a character that one had not been able to touch softly enough and that with the most transparent clarity, for all that, had to smoulder on eternally misunderstood feelings. Frau von Brenkfeld said, “I realise, daily, more and more how thankful I must be to God that I was born among seven sisters and, indeed, really right in the midst; neither the eldest nor the youngest,” just as Marie, hurrying in fearfully, called out, “Mother, the Graf is sitting on the balcony and is as white as chalk”.

“My God,” said Frau von Brenkfeld, “Could he be becoming unwell”? “Yes, yes,” Marie replied. “He had laid his head on the stone table and did not see me at all.” They hurried outside; the Graf still tried to deny his obvious weakness with a few laboriously confused words, but his senses seemed to be leaving him all the more and he soon let himself be more carried than guided to his room, patiently and exerting the last of his consciousness, hear a few comforting words. After half an hour a high fever showed quite definitely and the forenoon passed, waiting anxiously for the local doctor for whom they had sent immediately.

“What do you think of the sick man”? Frau von Brenkfeld asked the doctor as he came back into the room. Doctor Toppmann slowly reached his hat next to the flowerpots from the dressing table and guardedly brushed off a little pollen with his sleeve. Then he said, “Not much. I am too little familiar with his constitution and one cannot talk to him, as he is

quite confused." "My God, since when" cried Frau von Brenkfeld. "I know nothing about that". "It does not even have to have been so earlier". "That is extremely sad," replied Frau Von Brenkfeld vehemently. "He is not going to die, for God's sake"? Doctor Toppmann pulled his strange faces and said, "We can all die; incidentally one must not think such a thing until the contrary is impossible". "In no way," interposed Theresa." I earnestly ask you not to disappoint us in this". Toppmann tightly closed his left eye and asked, "Why that, then"? "One is after all more painstaking," replied Theresa. "One knows what one has to do in any case." "What has one to do, then?" Toppmann asked. "Oh, God," Theresa retorted. "We have a thousand and one other reasons; keep to the subject". Toppmann remained silent for a little while then he said, seriously and addressing all those present, "I know you will not neglect anything that is within your powers and knowledge, therefore keep the room cool but above all without draught and ensure that the medicament is taken properly. Also, for the time being, the patient may not be left alone. Tomorrow morning I shall come again, if nothing special happens beforehand". He gave a bow and was about to leave. Then he turned around and said, "Notabene, go no closer to him than is unavoidable; the condition could easily be catching". He bowed again and went out. Carl said, "I believe I can occasionally still remember every word that I have heard Toppmann utter my whole life. The unforgettable pantomime does that, to which the words are as if moulded on, or perhaps the other way round." "He also speaks very little generally," his mother replied. "Today he was, in his way, very open". "Theresa also really taxed him," Carl retorted and looked at Theresa who was just leaving the room, with signs of extreme disquiet. Carl went on, "I once wanted to make a collection of the different variations of his basic face before I went to Göttingen and so made a tick on a paper intended for that as often as I believed to have discovered something new. It confused me so much that I was able to reach only forty and must admit that this sharp noticing of all sorts of distortion in fantasy and reality, to which I surrendered bit by bit with true passion, finally gave me a weakness and such gloomy absent mindedness that I regard this as one of the most dangerous occupations. I cannot understand how caricature painters manage to avoid the madhouse".

"It is common knowledge", replied Frau von Brenkfeld, "that artists like that, satiricists in literature and life and the most famous buffoons in theatre included, usually are at least very hypochondriac".

Ledwina had, during these exchanges, crept quietly out and into the open air, in order to disguise, perhaps to assuage a pressure, both physical and spiritual, which was overwhelming her. She was drawn inexorably to the river's bank, as though there were still something to rescue and a thousand and one wondrous possibilities which could be regarded as such only for her, danced in horrible pictures around her burning head. Now she saw the lost man – as a thorn bush still held the pale, trembling face above water by one part of his hair while the other fluttered on the dipping branches of the bush, torn from the head; his bleeding limbs were being hurled in gruesome rhythm against the stony bank by the waves; he was still alive, but his strength was drained and he had to tarry in awful fear of death until the buffeting of the waves tore away the last of the hair – now another, equally hideous and fearful face. She cringed quietly along the wall, beneath the window where her mother sat, but she was looking neither up nor about her, talking rapidly and urgently with Carl about many things that were thoroughly unimportant to her, in order to conceal the ill-humour which had irresistibly overcome her since the Graf's arrival and which was heightened, by the doctor's report, to a degree that she herself had to feel as unjust. Poor Clement was certainly the reason for what lay in this mood of veritable worry. Apart from that, an excessive fear of and almost

childish protection against all infection were part and parcel of the house's fixed regime. Accordingly, an imperceptible antipathy and a firmly entrenched injustice took hold in Frau von Brenkfeld toward the Graf who, in addition to all the worry and emergency, threatened to pollute her pure house and over whom his clearly innocent part in the death of the good lad had already cast some shadow that, at the time, she did not feel any reason, or feel strongly enough, to blot out. She was, however, fair-minded enough to observe something unjust within herself and in accordance with her deeply hidden kindness, would not now have wanted to judge him or even only speak about him at any price. It was the same with Carl, only for other reasons and it must have been highly entertaining for an observer to have heard a dialogue, so entirely boring to both sides and yet going on with such liveliness and often such interesting remarks.

A coach rattled across the drawbridge and a team of six bays trotted on to the forecourt. "The Bendraets," said Carl. "I shall run away," replied his mother, red as red with annoyance and went to receive these always-unwelcome guests. The two little painted Fräuleins had already wandered into the house arm in arm with the tall Law Candidate, as the young, ever friendly Herr von Tuerk was known throughout the district, in order, as they expressed it, to liven up Ledwinnie and Theresie a bit, while their mother, slowly alighting from the coach, reciprocated Frau von Brenkfeld's greeting. The women took their seats on the sofa and the gaze of the lady of the house rested ever more softly upon the faded, melancholy features of her neighbour, who, replying to her enquiry, told her with embarrassed ease, that her husband and her sons had gone out to a small hunting party together with the young Warneck, but would come to these parts about midday and thereupon call in. Frau von Brenkfeld answered kindly out of sympathy for the depressed woman and a gentle, quiet conversation began between the two women who would so gladly have confided in one another and had never been able to do so, as so many pressing family relationships forced a good, harmless soul to seek her salvation in intrigue. Talk turned to Baron Warneck, the owner of the neighbouring estates, who had returned a few months ago from travels of several years. "It is a man of much understanding", said Frau von Brenkfeld. "Indeed; with quite exemplary talents", the Bendraet woman replied, "and very worthy".

"Do you mean by that, courageous or legally"?

"Properly, the latter", Frau Bendraet smiled, "but I believe it in both senses". "We know him little", replied Frau von Brenkfeld, "but I like to think only good things about him. My Carl rode over there recently, on account of minor hunting offences and praises his kindness and neighbourly attitude. Our two estates and rights on both sides cross over each other in an unpleasant way. God give him a good, peaceable wife," she added. "What do you mean?" said Frau Bendraet, fixing her eyes upon her. "They speak of Claudine Triest". "Oh?" replied Frau von Brenkfeld, smiling. "I think they are speaking of Julie Bendraet." "He has given us no reason whatever to believe that," replied Frau Bendraet, reddening. "On the contrary, he seems rather to betray a little preference for Elise, but in any case"; she paused and took hold of the friend's hand. "It is really ridiculous to dispute such things, ere one is asked one's opinion. But in any case, Elise would also hardly choose Warneck. The Baron has gaddled about and enjoyed it too much ever to become steady. He must have a lively and merry wife who shares with him the effort and enthusiasm of his love affairs. That would not do for my little stay-at-home girl; God grant her" she added weakly, "a quiet domestic existence where she does not perceive that she is less pretty and lively than Julie". Frau von Brenkfeld squeezed the speaker's hand gently and the latter continued, "But, to repay you in your own coin, I have made

worthy Tuerk really happy with the little trip here. His heart is daily full of the most beautiful poems in honour of Ledwina". "Oh. He writes poems, does he?" laughed Frau Brenkfeld. "Oh, indeed", replied Frau von Bendraet, "very nicely and I really believe he is intending to go wooing, but he is not suited to Ledwina, she is too gentle for him". "She is also not healthy," said Frau von Brenkfeld in a defensive tone. "Oh, yes", replied Frau Bendraet, promptly and anxiously. "I think she is very improved and looks much more well". Both were still for a little while, then Frau von Brenkfeld said, "You did not see her recently". "I did hear about it, though", Frau Bendraet replied, "from the swarthy bandmaster at Erlenburg; He said recently, she was looking more beautiful and healthier than ever". "Oh, the main poacher", said Frau von Brenkfeld and became even more gloomy; then she went on quickly and composedly, "As long as Tuerk hasn't a better life, he is suited to no-one of his equal". "He has an estate, though," said Frau Bendraet. "Ah, dear child, rather call it a peasant's holding; the little gentlemanly liberties will not improve it much". "He will be well employed", said the neighbour. "Let us hope so, but he still has time until then. The post of law-clerk is hardly significant". Frau Bendraet turned very red and spoke. "He is lively and well behaved; he can please people. Shall a mother hinder her children's happiness and advancement and leave the family a house full of unmarried daughters – admittedly", she interrupted herself, "your daughters are provided for; not every family has that advantage alone". "Even in the opposite case", replied Frau von Brenkfeld, "the decision to support a daughter is better than the probability of vainly patching up the miserable circumstances of several generations of her offspring in time to come". The tall law clerk and Julie interrupted this conversation. The tall man was saying that Fräulein Theresa was so busy cooking and frying for the unfortunate one, that there was no getting her to talk and Fräulein Elise had wanted to lighten the duties for her friend and had therefore remained behind. Frau von Brenkfeld now told the story of the previous night. Frau Bendraet wondered that she had not mentioned it before. "I do not gladly entertain my guests with unpleasant things", the lady of the house replied. "Herr von Tuerk," Julie called out from Theresa's embroidery frame at which she had sat down. "You must declare a feud on Frau von Brenkfeld. She calls a young, handsome man an unpleasant thing". Frau von Brenkfeld looked serious and Tuerk did not know how to take it. "Now, do not spoil things, dear child," her mother called out. "Heaven forbid!" replied Julie, "I shall not dare to do so". Now she stood up and began to tease poor Tuerk most unmercifully with jokes, often tasteless, often appropriate, occasionally including both women in an irresponsibly disrespectful manner, thereby making the tall man very anxious, who was very much on good terms with the whole world. Theresa, meanwhile, was standing outside the sick man's door as though on hot coals. She had just sent in a glass of lemonade to him and was quietly trying her best to get Elise away, who was stepping from one crack in the door to another in order to gain a view of the stranger. "Elise," said Theresa, "the servant will come out and bang the door against your head". "Oh, please," whispered Elise, "seek an excuse to get me in". "My goodness, how can there be an excuse for such a thing" Theresa replied and put her hopes upon Carl who was in there and who would tell her everything. Now Elise wanted to watch out for when Carl should emerge. Theresa became impatient and had Carl called out by a servant. He appeared ill humoured and in a hurry, greeted Elise fleetingly, gave a brief report and went back into the sickroom. Elise seemed offended or embarrassed, came away from the door with Theresa and they went to join the company. Elise immediately sat down at Theresa's embroidery frame and worked away busily. Tuerk paid her due compliments on her diligence and had to swallow Julie's scoffing for each and so the morning passed. Suddenly, Ledwina was missed and

they consoled themselves, as they knew that she had gone walking. "Our gentlemen are failing to appear". Just as Frau von Bendraet said, "Our gentlemen are failing to appear" Marie called out, "Look, Mother. A rider". "That is my husband," said Frau Bendraet. "And another", shouted Marie, "and *one more*!" she cried emphatically. "Yet another will be coming, dear child", said Frau Bendraet and turned toward the lady of the house apologetically. The arrivals dismounted from the horses. Herr von Bendraet kissed the hand of the lady of the house, amid many polite words. Baron Warneck, still in the courtyard, attended to something with his boots, squire Clement Bendraet not neglecting to twist the spurs under his soles for him. "Don't play the fool," said his brother, but Warneck laughed, settled everything and they all went inside. Hunting tales and politics were mooted and lunch was there – craved and yet unexpected.

Theresa had already opened the door to the dining room in which the company was already examining the dry point etchings on the walls, when she looked round because she heard Ledwina's footsteps on the stairs. She wanted to turn back hastily, for her sister just then sat herself down on one of the steps, glowing hot and exhausted, but she quickly waved imploringly with her hand and Theresa went on through the open door. Not long after, Ledwina appeared too and they all sat down at table. Elise wanted to insist on sitting next to Ledwinnie, but Theresa drew her to her place. "You are going to help me with the serving", she said and this was also all right with Elise. Table conversations began and halted again. Herr von Bendraet spoke of a journey that he had in mind. "If I ever win the big lottery," Julie cried, "then I shall always travel. I can think of no greater luck". "I believe," replied Elise, "that too much travelling does womenfolk no good and makes them restless and dissatisfied in the home. I shall rather stay at home and hear tell of other people's travels. Oh, Baron Warneck did entertain us well yesterday – you must also be able to tell us much, Herr von Brenkfeld". "Has Warneck often related things to you"? asked Carl. "I do not like to think about how often we, or actually I, have already taxed Herr von Warneck. Really, the less I hope and wish to see myself, the less can I deny myself the substitute of a lively description". "Warneck is a tormented man," Julie laughed. "I always fear that he will stay away altogether, for what attacks does he have to suffer from Elise"! Elise looked piqued – and Carl said, "If Warneck recounted much, then my little experiences are as nothing, for he observed and inspected the same places which only flew past me as in a magic lantern". He bent toward Warneck who, in conversation with Louis Bendraet, had pricked up his ears as he heard his name being spoken. "I am saying, you have not only seen much more, but all those things of which I could give an account". "In that way," replied Warneck, "the many travel descriptions of those places in *particular* would certainly have left nothing over for us. It is the different kind of views and perceptions which make a travel narration from the hundredth mouth as remarkable as from the first. And on that point, in Switzerland where the most stirring images of Nature are as common as can be, who can believe that he has seen everything; given, I saw the Schaffhausen waterfall shimmering in the sun, but you saw it during a storm or in fog – what a dissimilar and yet, at the same time, wonderful spectacle and I have seen little of all the magnificent gorges and caves, since I am given to vertigo". "I climbed about thoroughly in the caves," said Carl. "It must be an oddly pleasant feeling," Louis Bendraet interposed, "to wander about in full vigour under the earth as if buried, in the damp, mouldy rock. I should like to go through that". "You are the little hero," his brother cried, "wanting to undertake breakneck climbs and you as giddy as a goat. Listen Louis; if you want to travel you must take Warneck with you. He would have to lead you like a cow on a rope and if

need be, hang you across his shoulders". "What do you think, Louis," Warneck laughed, "that would look quite unpoetic and in addition think of the cave women and mountain dwarves and underground dwarves – and the gnomes who conjure a hunchback on to people. I fear that would not have a good effect on your figure". They laughed, Tuerk and Louis too. "Once," said Carl, "I would almost have believed that I saw a cave ghost. Six of us climbed into a chasm on the <mountain>. Both Briels, the two Herdings, Rolling and I. The rest had walked themselves tired and lay in a shabby mountain hostelry. The entrance was low and narrow and a very tall conifer forest made it even darker. We had scarcely gone a few steps when we stood in dense darkness. Our guide wanted to ignite the torches that we had brought with us; that delayed things a little". "That was a bad idea on the good man's part," Clement Bendraet cut in. "He ought to have done that outside the cave". His mother waved at him indignantly and Carl continued, "I forgot to say that it was raining somewhat; anyway, while the man was struggling with striking a flame, I hear, above the calling of my companions who were trying the echo, something sliding across the floor and suddenly it wound itself about my knees and grunted and tugged at my clothing and tried to pull me down. I admit that I shuddered. 'My friend,' I called out, 'see to it that you get a light. Here is something, but I shall hold on to it'. Then I reached down to grasp a shaggy mop of hair or fur – I knew not what. Then it started to grunt and lash out and growled 'I'll call on the Apostle Peter'. 'What, you there?' our guide called. 'Do not be afraid gentlemen, that is only a poor soul. He will do you no harm'. Meanwhile the torch lit up and I caught sight of a ragged emaciated fellow of about forty years who knelt before me and clung to me firmly. I held back his head by the hair and the ochre yellow face stared at me, grunting. The guide said 'be quiet Seppi, those are the Apostles'. Then he pointed to the youngest Herdring with the long locks and said, 'Look, that is Mary Magdalene'. The poor fellow let go of me and crept into a corner of the cave where we saw that some straw lay. The guide apologised afterwards for not having told us about this madman. He took himself for the Angel Gabriel and this cave for Christ's tomb that he was guarding, letting in no one other than the Apostles and the sacred women; anybody could claim to be those. He had been sick and our landlord did not think that he was back in the cave". "The poor fellow had a hellishly boring job," said Clement. "As well as that," said Carl "he believed that, as an angel, he was not allowed to enjoy anything other than herbs and fruit; at the beginning, raw and whatever he found in the mountains. Afterwards they got him accustomed, by this token, to all sorts of vegetables and fruit except apples that he took to be the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and peas. Why not these, I cannot say". "Probably", Clement shouted, "for the sake of the innocent weevils that he occasionally found inside". "Did you go further into the cave"? said Julie. "Yes, Fräulein," Carl replied, "we were ashamed to turn back which each of us had rather done, for we were all shaken by the sight of the most shocking that nature has. But I know not whether to say 'praise God' or 'unfortunately' how such sad impressions which do not touch our fate, so easily fade. Thus, for a few days we thought no further about it than to call Fritz Herdring 'Mary Magdalene' and so there remained from the whole horrible affair nothing more than an insipid joke". A short silence fell. Then Warneck began, "Madness is a matter about which spiritual and secular laws should prohibit too much brooding and examination, for nothing leads more easily to freethinking". "I would think rather," interposed Tuerk, "into the lunatic asylum". Warneck replied, "One or the other and very easily both at the same time". Again a silence, then said Warneck, "In this way I have had many a horrible experience, but nothing is more vivid to me than the picture of an old woman in Westphalia, whom I found in the company of a dismally morose, no longer young, girl at the door of the inn where I was staying.

The facial features of the old woman, confused but without a trace of wildness, aroused my sympathy and I spent a little while with her. She was slowly gnawing a dry crust of bread. Then she paused as if shocked, stuck her finger into her mouth and in her hand held the ruins of a tooth that had just fallen out. Now she took a dirty paper from her pocket, unwrapped it and laid the tooth to a few other pieces of tooth. The girl said in reply to my enquiry that her cousin saved all her teeth as they fell out one by one, in order – at this point the creature grimaced in a laugh, I felt quite sick – so that when she should arrive where the wailing and gnashing of teeth were, she would not always need to wail, but be able to gnash her teeth occasionally. My host said to me later that she had always been a very upright woman, but that her husband, a small trader, had become bankrupt of his own making and since a few families who had suffered as a result had, in their initial anger, heaped curses upon her, she had gone mad and now believed herself to be dammed for the bankruptcy. Only in spring, when the cowslips bloom was she happy and wore big bunches of them day and night because she believed that, if she were to die during this time, she could open Heaven with them. When the flowers started to wither she became ever more fearful and sought the last flowers with the greatest of effort, even when the flowering was already over, after which she had to lie abed for a long time so much had she fretted". Warneck became silent and a general conversation arose about madness, human mental vigour etc. and soon became lost among other subjects.

The afternoon passed with walks, bat-and-ball, the swings and altogether the most restless gadding about. Herr von Bendraet played piquet with Warneck and Julie played tag with Tuerk who seemed by turns in love, or completely worn out and tried in vain to engage Ledwina in conversation during intervals. Elise sat at the frame and showed her a new stitch that Ledwina immediately tried. "Fräulein Ledwina," said Tuerk, "can indeed copy everything". "And Herr von Tuerk," riposted Julie, "can say something about everything, but it does not suit him well". Carl and Louis walked in and asked after Clement. "I thought that he was with you," said Elise. "Certainly not," retorted Carl "we were speaking about Italy's works of art. Thereupon he said, if we wanted to show off with the fine arts, then hang it all. Afterwards he did come back again, bringing a couple of goose feathers that had fallen out and some birch bark and bade us endow posterity with our fine thoughts – a shepherdess would shortly pass by, on top of that, with the attributes of the arts and wisdom. We should just pay close attention; he would, meanwhile, join in the idyll with the women reaping over there in the field, whereupon he ran off".

"And an old, dirty peasant woman went by lugging her milking pail," said Louis, laughing. "Devil knows what she looked like; she had decorated her skirt with twenty rags of various colours. By attributes he probably understood an old dried up goose wing that she had picked up somewhere out on the fields". "Then he was in the field," said Theresa "from the wall I could see right across the field and cannot but notice him". The game of piquet was ended; Bendraet had lost and stood up ill humouredly. Then Clement came in, his blond locks tousled about his glowing face. "Maria Magdalene," cried Julie. "Where have you been so long"? asked Elise. "In my coat," he replied.

"But what is the matter with you, do you feel like laughing or crying"?

"I feel like skinning you alive" he replied still half testily and now broke out laughing all the more unstopably. He took refuge at the window with the rest of the young people and spoke quietly and animatedly to them. The cheerful mood took the upper hand there, too and one saw that he was being teased. The manor house clock struck five. Warneck wanted to take his leave and return to Schnellenfort but Frau von Bendraet bade him to eat with them at supper beforehand. "If you cannot stay overnight," said she, "then it is only a mere half hour from Luenden to

Schnellenfort and the moon is shining brightly". "You must also tell us all about your travels," Elise interposed. "Oh, you know most of it", Warneck replied. However," he added, laughingly, "I have not yet mentioned the most remarkable phenomenon to have occurred to me on my travels. I observed it in the most southerly regions of France, where it appeared even more unusual than if it were here". "Now," said Julie. Warneck paused, smiling, for a while, then he said "A woman who had never contradicted her husband". "Do not hoax people", said Julie, laughing disappointedly and Tuerk called out, "Listen, Warneck, Fräulein Julie thinks your curious thing is trumped up". "I, too, do not believe it" said Clement, "or had the man attached a muzzle to her?" "Not much better," said Warneck, "she was deaf and dumb, and that from birth". "And yet married", said Theresa. "That, young lady," replied Warneck is really the remarkable and at the same time abominable part of the matter. She was little better than an animal, but she had a few hundred florins". "That is quite right," cried Clement, "it is impossible to imagine a more homely wife". "Clement, Clement," said Frau von Bendraet, "what a lot of nonsense you are talking again"! "He only mixed up his words, madam," Warneck replied, "look how red he has become" and saying this, laid his hand against young Bendraet's cheek. Clement struck him on his fingers, half embarrassed, half in fun. "Incidentally," Carl spoke up, "there is in this district, in all seriousness, a peasant woman who, intentionally, in order to live at peace with her husband has spoken not one syllable for fourteen years". "That is right", said Frau von Brenkfeld. "We know this woman very well. She suffered long and much from the quarrelsome nature of her husband; she suddenly stopped speaking. At first, they took her for angry, then mad, then for dumb and thus it went on for fourteen years. The man dies, she starts to speak again on the day of his funeral and assures everybody that it will console her on her dying day that she kept to her resolution; she could now think of her late husband without disquiet and regret, for there had been no disunity between them for fourteen years". "That is a lot," said Warneck. "Is the woman still alive?" asked Louis. "Yes, indeed," replied Frau von Brenkfeld. "Close by Endorf in the little red cottage on the main road". "I do know the woman," said Clement. "I do not," replied Louis, "but I should like to meet her". Clement bent down to him and said, half whispering, "Do not put yourself out, sonny; it is an old witch and do not even think of pretty daughters". "Go on," said Louis. Warneck laughed and wagged his finger at him. "Now, what else is there," said Clement out loud, "I just said the woman had no children, but a dozen or so squalling brats would have made her bring out a few words". Warneck retorted mockingly, "It almost seemed to me as though what you said sounded differently, but I do not want to make you redder; you are already blooming like a rose". "Nearly as though one had caught him kneeling at Claudine's feet", cried Julie. "Hm," Clement growled, under his breath. "For a start, the Blankenau appeals to me more than the Triest. In the end, one indeed becomes dog-tired of the perpetual quibbling." "Excellent," replied Julie, "if a little envy of the craft is included". "I am well aware," cried Clement, "that you are working towards making me tease again, but I truly would not know wherewith. I would then have to bring to light your unlucky love for the well-patched one". "You do not need to say anything about that," retorted Julie, laughing. "Had the poor wretch a better living, he would not need to have his coats patched for so long". "It is disgrace enough that art has to beg for bread," Louis loudly interposed. "And actually, that is Louis' ideal and not mine". "Ideal is saying a lot," replied Louis, "I can, praise God, think higher still, but I find it very natural that I have an interest in the Rengenbergs and only wonderful that I am the only one in the house; music is usually a language that children and savages understand". "For which of the two do you take me, then?" asked Julie. Louis bent toward her and said softly, "For a child and a wild one at that". Julie jumped up

quickly and attacked him at great speed. Louis tried to defend himself, but the blows fell like snowflakes, on his cheeks and shoulders and back, so that Louis ducked his head between his shoulders. First one then the other of the company moved up and in the end only found peace on the sofa with the women. She called out, "You ought to move to Erlenburg, you belong there, you troubadour, you bunny". The little war was at an end, Louis drew breath, Julie looked at her reddened little hands and stepped up to Baron Warneck. "Do not be cross; I pushed you really hard. Why do you make a wall of yourself? It has to come down when the enemy is hiding behind it". Warneck looked into the tender, glowing face and a faint movement twitched across his face. He lowered his sharp gaze into her eyes and said, "Can it be that Fräulein Julie knows herself so little" then he turned quickly to the others. The carriage drew up and the beautiful, richly bridled riding horses pawed impatiently at the pavement. Their riders put them through their best paces for the benefit of the watchers at the windows and the visit was at an end.

"Clement can, after all, not keep quiet about his own shame"; Carl started to say to his sisters, as they watched the procession through the windowpanes. "Do you know what the teasing about his red face means? He had got himself a thorough slap in the face from a pretty peasant girl in the field and when he considered it properly, it became so ridiculous in his mind that he could not keep quiet about it. He always does it like that. It is really no worse than other people, but he says everything bad that he knows about himself and a few other things, too, about which he does not think". "He is very boring for me", replied Theresa. Their mother sat, meanwhile, at the other window and thought about the poor, depressed neighbour, a mother and wife and yet orphaned and saw her in her mind's eye creeping, old and worn, in the arid, rustling arbour of her dearest last hopes. She thought of her own children, of their breeding, their obedience, their childish solicitude and in the comparison her heart became through and through soft out of nostalgia and regret. She took a prayer book from the drawer of the table and went out of the room into her bedchamber.

Meanwhile Carl was telling Theresa about the patient's condition which seemed to him very reassuring. The sick man was fully alert and had slept very quietly for several hours. "I implore you", said Theresa, "do take proper care of him; we cannot do it". Carl made some replies to this and Theresa became distracted, for she had just seen Ledwina strolling across the outer court into the garden. Her slow, feeble gait, the delicate, lightly bent figure, the colourless, much plaited head of hair which seemed, like the blooming snowball, to become too heavy, all had struck at her heart with melancholy fear. Carl said just then, "I shall go up to the sick man again". "Do that," she replied quickly and thereupon walked, deep in thought and disquietedly, out into the broad, beautifully laid out manor house garden. She saw Ledwina from afar, sitting under the old lime tree at the edge of the park, resting her arms akimbo on the stone table and her face pressed firmly on them. At that point she was reminded of how she had seen Graf Holberg in the morning in a similar position, pale in his unconsciousness and of all that Carl had said about his sickness and she was shocked by the similarity, for would she ever have admitted in Ledwina's case, what she immediately recognised irrefutably on the Graf. It is a wonderful symbol of loving hearts to care for a loved one without the need, thus also to cling with heart-rending blindness to hope when it is long broken for any other person. A mood of fear overcame her, in which she did not want to approach Ledwina. She was about to turn back as her sister looked up and over to her. She tried to take courage, went towards the lime and sat down next to her. Ledwina looked up and said, in a quite flat tone of voice, "My God, if Luenden were as close as Erlenburg". "It is, praise God," replied

Theresa, "more than as far again to there. We shall surely have a couple of months quiet". "For example, Clement", said Ledwina, "and I truly think, Adolphine Dobronn could take him". "Oh, undoubtedly," replied Theresa. Ledwina answered, "and perhaps Lina Blankenau, too. My God, if I had to become that man's wife, I could not possibly live long". She laid her head, as if fatigued by the thought, on Theresa's shoulder and continued "No, die I would perhaps not, but turn into a mental cripple, lose all thoughts that are dear to me – half mad, really dull witted should I become". She pondered a while then said, "Anyway, Theresa, I am so insatiable and have so little feeling for the views of others, that is one of my greatest faults. God knows what school is intended for me. I admit that I am very afraid of a sister-in-law. Perhaps she will have no place in her heart for me". Then she said, with a quick flash in her dull eyes, "No, it is not like that, but I fear that I have none for her. A wall will stand between us, that she shall replace Mother and you for me and cannot do so – for you will then be long gone and happy". Theresa laid her arm gently about the so strangely moved girl and herself became gloomy. "Dear Ledwina, do not spoil your life with the future – it arrives of its own accord, without our dragging it to us in fear and worry". "Just because of that," answered Ledwina animatedly; "we must make ourselves familiar with the thought so that it does not come too hard later. Do you know that is sinful of one's own fault to submit to a fate that is borne so generally. But," she then continued more slowly, "When I think about it, that another rules in place of Mother and sleeps in the bed at which we have so often stood and wished her goodnight". She turned restlessly to all sides. "It will not be like that," said Theresa, "Mother will probably stay here; Carl is so sensible, his choice will not turn out so bad that Mother has to move away". "But when Mother is dead" replied Ledwina. "Mother," said Theresa wistfully, "can, praise God, live longer than we". "But the time comes finally," interrupted Ledwina. Then she laid her arm gently around Theresa's neck and went on, leaning close to her shoulder and ill at ease; "Look, Theresa, in our attic there are so many old pictures standing, of family, but we really know almost nothing of any who is portrayed and they are all our forefathers and lived here, God knows in which rooms and had brothers and sisters and children, looked at and kept these pictures with joy and veneration and, perhaps, later with the dearest, most moving memories and now – what do they look like? You know the nose and eyes of the old woman with the black cap, of course, are now rubbed out. I am sure that was done intentionally, because she really looks so ugly". She went on, breathing deeply, "The past, the most precious remains, become trodden underfoot. Think, if Mother's picture" –. She started to weep passionately and clung tightly to her sister. Theresa had to contain herself strenuously, for every fibre of her heart ached, but she held her self-control and said "Ledwina, be quiet. Do not harm yourself. Why do you look for violent subjects which must shake you and make you sick? Now I am asking you, if you love me, then pull yourself together and speak and think of something else". Both were silent. Ledwina stood up and strolled up and down the garden a few times then sat down again next to Theresa who began to speak of all sorts of things. She answered in such a manner that Theresa had to see both her goodwill and its entire weakness. The sun began to set and its mild light danced through the branches of the lime tree on to the girls' garments and Ledwina's gently quivering face. "How beautiful the evening is becoming," said Theresa. "This time yesterday poor Clemens was still alive," sighed Ledwina. "Are you seeking dreariness again?" said Theresa gently. "Is then," replied Ledwina, "one day's remembrance too much for his mother's only comfort? Listen to me". Now she recounted how she wandered by the river, always upstream, fighting against horrible, senseless images; how she almost gave up and wanted to turn back, only this one bay still, and something faintly flickering shone

through the blackberry runners out of the waters over to her. Secretly shuddering, she called it the sun's reflection, but when light clouds floated across the sky, the sun's gold disappeared from the stream and the furtive light flared brighter through the dark leaves. "You understand, I am sure, Theresa" she said, "that I thought on the legends of lights that watch over the drowned. Meanwhile I did not give up and walked rapidly toward it. Then it flared up high and disappeared and as I reached the brambles it was poor Clemens's lantern swinging over the water, burnt out and caught up in the bines. I knelt down at the bank and released it from the thorns, but as I held it so cold and extinguished in my hand, it felt like a dead, rigid part of the lost one. I left it standing on the bank". She pressed, shuddering slightly, against Theresa. "But what is that, then"? she said and pointed to the ground. "What do you mean"? asked Theresa. "Methinks I can see more than the shadows of the tree". "Ours, too" said Theresa. "It will be nothing. Listen, and as I went back and reached the sandpit, I saw old Lisbeth from afar, going out of her house. Oh, Theresa, she has become so small, I had almost not recognised her, she walked a good way in front of me without seeing me, but always rigidly into the water. You know, she is always so proper. Oh, God she looked so bewildered, half her hair hung out below her cap. I could stand it no longer and passed by, then it struck noon in the village and the prayer bell began to toll. I said, in passing, 'Jesus Christ be praised'. She did not look up, but pressed her hands together and said, 'for ever and ever, for ever and ever, amen' loud and often over and over again. I still heard it when I was already some distance ahead of her". "God will console her" said Theresa and looked down at the ground, moved. It seemed to her herself as if she was seeing another figure listening through the dappled shadows of the trees; she looked round quickly but there was nothing. "It is becoming too cool for you, Ledwina" she said, standing up and Ledwina, wracked by a hidden feverish shuddering, followed her willingly. In the courtyard, Carl met them. Theresa let her sister go on ahead and told him about her remarks and he went straight into the garden; she hurried after the mourning, wandering girl.

[Not completed – published posthumously]

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Notes:

An unfinished work, written between late autumn 1820 and winter 1825/26 and intended as a novella of twenty four chapters, was first published posthumously 1884/1887. *Ledwina*, the main character's name, is probably a reference to St. Lidwina, patron saint of the sick, who was reputed to have fallen on ice, thereby breaking a rib and remaining in her sick-bed for the rest of her life, taking only Holy Communion and experiencing ecstasies and visions. The pages of an outline continuation are published in Historisch-kritische Droste-Ausgabe.

<sup>1</sup> 'family silver' (fidei-kommissum): an obsolete English legal term contained within the German text. [< Latin *fideicommittere*, to entrust s.t. to a person]

<sup>2</sup> Reference to an 18<sup>th</sup> century magazine, "Children 's Friend" (*Der Kinderfreund*)

<sup>3</sup> Old Marigold: *Calendula officianalis* (Totenblume)