

THE NOTEBOOKS OF MALTE LAURIDS BRIGGE

(Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge)

by Rainer Maria Rilke

Translated from the German by William Needham

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BOOK ONE

September 11th, rue Toullier.

Here, then, is where people come to live; I'd have thought it more a place to die in. I've been out. I've seen: hospitals. I saw a man reel and fall. People gathered round him, which spared me the rest. I saw a pregnant woman. She pushed herself heavily along beside a high warm wall, sometimes touching it as if to make sure it was still there. Yes, it was still there. And behind the wall? I looked on my map: 'Maison d'Accouchement'*. Fine. They'll deliver her child; they're able to do that. Further on, in rue Saint-Jacques, a large-sized building with a cupola. The map gave: 'Val de Grâce, hôpital militaire'. I didn't actually need to know that, but it does no harm. The lane began to smell on all sides. It smelled, so far as I could make out, partly of iodoform, partly of the grease from the pommes frites, and partly of fear. All cities smell in summer. Then I saw a house strangely blinded by cataracts. It was nowhere on my map, but over the door and still quite legible were the words: 'Asyle de nuit'**. Next to the entrance were the prices. I read them. It wasn't expensive there.

*maternity hospital
**night shelter, dosshouse

And what else? A baby in a stationary pram: it was chubby, its face a greenish hue, and on its forehead there was a definite rash which was clearly healing and not painful. The child was asleep, its mouth open, breathing iodoform, pommes frites, fear. That's just how it was. The main thing was being alive. That was the main thing.

The fact is, I can't give up sleeping with the window open. Electric tramcars with all their bells ringing rage through my room. Automobiles drive across me. A door slams. Somewhere glass from a broken window clatters to the ground. I can hear the big pieces laughing and the little splinters sniggering. Then suddenly a dull muffled sound from inside a house on the other side. Someone's coming up the stairs. Coming, coming, on and on, is there for a long time, goes past. Back in the street. A girl shrieks: 'Ah, tais-toi, je ne veux plus!'. The tram, mad with excitement, races up, and across, and away. Someone is calling. People are running, overtaking one another. A dog barks. What a relief: a dog. Toward morning there's even a cock crowing, and what a boundless blessing it is. Then, abruptly, I fall asleep.

*Ah, shut up. I've had enough!

Those are the noises. But here there's something that's more terrible: the silence. I believe that sometimes when a great fire occurs you can get a moment of extreme tension: the water jets slacken off, the firemen no longer climb, nobody stirs. Soundlessly a black cornice edges forward up above; and a high wall, behind which flames are mounting, tilts, also without a sound. Everyone stands, shoulders hunched, tense, with the part of their faces above the eyes pressed into into furrows, waiting for the awful crash. That's how it is with the silence here.

I'm learning to see. I don't know what it's about, but everything is registering in me at a deeper level and doesn't stop where it used to. There's a place within me that I wasn't aware of. What's going on there I don't know.

I wrote a letter today and while I was writing it struck me that I've been here barely three weeks. Three weeks elsewhere--say, in the country--that could be like a day, here it's years. I'm definitely not going to write any more letters. What's the point of telling anyone that I'm changing? I haven't remained who I was, I'm different from who I was before; so, clearly I have no friends or acquaintances. And writing to strangers, to people who don't know me, is simply not possible.

Did I say it before? I'm learning to see--yes, I'm making a start. I'm still not good at it. But I want to make the most of my time.

For example, I've never actually wondered how many faces there are. There are a great many people, but there are even more faces because each person has several. There are those who wear one face for years on end; naturally, it starts to wear, it gets dirty, it breaks at the folds, it becomes stretched like gloves that are kept for travelling. These are thrifty, simple people; they don't change their faces, and never for once would they have them cleaned. It's good enough, they maintain, and who can convince them otherwise? Admittedly, since they have several faces, the question now arises: what do they do with the others? They save them. They'll do for the children. There have even been instances when dogs have gone out with them on. And why not? A face is a face.

Other people change their faces one after the other with uncanny speed and wear them out. At first it seems to them that they've enough to last them forever, but before they're even forty they're down to the last of them. Of course, there's a tragic side to it. They're not used to looking after faces; their last one wore through in a week and has holes in it and in many places it's as thin as paper; bit by bit the bottom layer, the non-face, shows through and they go about wearing that.

But that woman, that woman: bent forward with her head in her hands, she'd completely fallen into herself. It was at the corner of rue Nôtre-Dame-des-Champs. I began to tread softly the moment I caught sight of her. Poor people shouldn't be disturbed when they're deep in thought. What they're searching for might still occur to them.

The street was too empty; its emptiness was bored with itself and it pulled away the sounds of my footsteps and clattered around all over the place with them like a wooden clog. Out of fright the woman reared up too quickly, too violently, so that her face was left in her two hands. I could see it lying there, the hollowness of it's shape. It cost me an indescribable effort to keep looking at those hands and not at what they'd torn away from. I dreaded seeing the inside of a face, but I was much more afraid of the exposed rawness of the head without a face.

I'm afraid. One has to do something about fear once one has it. It would be hideous to fall ill here, and were it to occur to anyone to get me to the Hôtel Dieu*, then I would undoubtedly die there. The Hôtel is pleasant and terrifically popular. One can scarcely get a glimpse of the façade of Paris Cathedral without risking being run over by one of the great number of vehicles that must needs go at top speed into and across the open square. There are these little omnibuses that are forever ringing their bells, and the Duke of Sagan himself would have to let his carriage be halted if one of these little people who was dying had taken it into their head that they wanted to go straight to God's very own Hôtel. The dying are stubborn, and the whole of Paris comes to a halt when Madame Legrand, the brocanteuse** from the rue des Martyrs, is driven to a certain square in the Cité. A notable feature of these fiendish little carriages is that they have frosted glass windows which are immensely stimulating and one imagines the most marvellous agonies taking place behind them--the imagination of a concierge could manage that--, and with a more fanciful imagination and striking out in other directions clearly there's no limit to one's conjectures. But I've also seen open droschkes*** arriving, for hire, with their hoods folded back, charging the normal rate: two francs per hour of death.

*'hostel of God'

**second hand dealer

***simple horsedrawn carriage

This excellent hotel is very old. In the days of King Clovis people were already dying here in what few beds there were. Now there are 559 beds to die in. It's natural mass-production. With such a high number as that a single death doesn't get the same attention; however, that isn't what matters. Quantity is what matters. Who today still cares whether or not a death has been well put together? Nobody. Even the rich who, after all, can afford to attend to the details of dying are starting to grow slipshod and apathetic; the desire to have a death all of one's own is becoming more and more infrequent. Only a while and it'll become as rare as a life of one's own. God! it's all there. God! It's all there waiting for us. We come along, we find a life, ready-made, off the peg, and all we have to do is put it on. You want to go, or you are forced to: 'No trouble at all, sir. Voilà votre mort, monsieur'*. You die as and when you die; you die the death that belongs to the sickness you have (for all sicknesses are known; what is also known is that the different fatal endings belong to the sickness and not to the people who are sick; the sick person doesn't have anything to do, in a manner of speaking).

*There you are, sir, there's your death.

In sanatoriums, where people die so gladly and with so much gratitude toward doctors and nurses, the death which is died is one that is utilised by the institution; everyone approves. But when one dies at home, the natural thing is to choose the sort of death they have in the better circles of society, where the, as it were, first-class funeral has already been introduced along with a whole train of admirable customs. The poor stand in front of such a house and watch until they've seen all they want to see. Their own death is, of course, banal and without any sort of fuss at all. They're pleased if they can find one that more or less fits--too big, well one can still grow a bit; it's only if it doesn't meet across the chest or if it chokes that something has to be done to it.

Whenever I think back to my home, where there's no one left now, I can see that in times gone by things must have been different. In those days people knew (or suspected) that they had death inside them like the stone inside a fruit. Children had a small one in them and grown-ups a big one. Women had it in their womb and men in their chest. They had it and it gave them a particular dignity and quiet pride.

My own grandfather, old Chamberlain Brigge, obviously carried a death inside him. And what a death it was: two months long and so loud it could be heard at the furthest corner of the estate. The long old manor house was too small for this death; it seemed as if wings needed building on to the hose because the Chamberlain's body was getting bigger and bigger and he was forever demanding to be carried from one room to another and got into a fearful temper if the day were still not ended and there were no more rooms left for him to lie in. Up the stairs the procession went, the menservants, maids, and the dogs that he always had round him; the steward led the way and then brought them into the room where his blessed mother had died, a room that was exactly as she had left it twenty-three years before and which no one since had been allowed to enter. Now the whole mob broke in. The curtains were pulled back and the robust light of a summer afternoon put all the shy, frightened objects to the test and clumsily turned itself round in the wide-eyed mirrors. And the people did the very same. There were lady's maids so consumed with curiosity they couldn't tell exactly what their hands were searching after; there were young servants gaping at everything, and elderly servant-folk walking around trying to recall what tales they had been told about this locked room in which now, at last, by good fortune, they found themselves.

It was the dogs that appeared to be the most affected; a room where everything gave off a smell afforded them an immensely exciting interlude. The tall, lean Afghan hounds occupied themselves running back and forth behind the armchairs, making long dance-steps in their swaying motion as they crossed the chamber, raising themselves on their hind legs like heraldic dogs, resting their slender front paws on the white gold window sill and with sharp, eager, furrowed faces looked to the left and to the right down into the courtyard. Little glove-yellow dachshunds had seated themselves on the wide, silk-covered easy-chair by the window looking as if everything were exactly as it should be, and a sullen-faced, wire-haired pointer rubbed its back against the edge of a gilt-legged table causing the Sèvres cups on the painted top to tremble.

Yes, for the absent-minded overslept items in the room, it was a dreadful time. At one point rose leaves, spilling from books that had been hastily and clumsily opened, whirled to the floor and were crushed underfoot; small, fragile articles were seized, instantly broken and then quickly put back; quite a number of things that had been bent were either stuck under curtains or even thrown behind the gold mesh of the firescreen; and from time to time something fell, fell with a muffled sound on to the carpet, fell with a bright sound onto the hard parquet floor, but breaking to pieces here and there with a sharp burst or an almost soundless one, for these things, cosseted as they were, could not possibly withstand any kind of fall.

And had anyone thought to ask what might be the cause of it all, what might have called down this glut of destruction upon this closely guarded room, there would have been only one answer to give: death.

The death at Ulsgaard of Chamberlain Christoph Detlev Brigge. For he it was who lay, bulging massively out of his dark blue uniform, in the middle of the floor and did not stir. In his big strange face that no one could recognise any more, the eyes were closed; he didn't see what was happening. At first they'd tried to lay him on the bed, but he had resisted, for he had hated beds ever since those first nights of the last stage of illness. Also the bed here had proved too small, and there was nothing left to do but to lay him on the carpet; for he refused to be downstairs.

Christoph Detlev's death had already been living at Ulsgaard for many many days now, talking with everyone and demanded--demanded to be carried, demanded the blue room, demanded the little salon, demanded the large drawing room, demanded the dogs, demanded that people laugh, talk, play games and remain silent and all at the same time, demanded to see friends, women, people who had died, demanded to die itself: demanded, demanded, screaming.

For, when night had fallen and those among the overtired servants who were not keeping watch were trying to go to sleep, Christoph Detlev's death would scream and scream again and groan and roar for such a length of time without stopping that the dogs, which at first had joined in the howling, fell silent and didn't dare lie down but remained standing on their long, slender, trembling legs, overcome with fear. And when people in villages heard him roaring through the vast Danish silvery summer night they got up as they did in thunderstorms, dressing and remaining seated, not saying a word, round the lamp until it was over. And the women who were close to giving birth were moved to beds in the furthest rooms and in the tightest make-do spaces; but they heard it, they heard it as if it were in their own bodies, and they pleaded to be allowed to get up as well, and they came, all large and white, and sat with the others with their blurred faces. And the cows which were calving at the time were helpless and unresponding and one calf together with all the mother cow's entrails was dragged out dead because it totally refused to come. And everyone did their daily work badly and forgot to bring in the hay because all through each day they had had fears of the night; and because they were so weary from lying awake and from getting up out of fear they weren't able to think properly. And when on Sunday they entered the white peaceful church they prayed that there might be no more lords of the manor at Ulsgaard for this one was dreadful. And what they were all thinking and praying for was said aloud by the minister from up in the pulpit, for he too no longer enjoyed restful nights and he could not understand God. And the bell said it because it now had a fearsome rival that boomed the whole night long and against which even with every bit of it's metal making the peal it could do nothing. Yes, they all said it, and one of the young men dreamed he had gone into the castle and had struck the gracious lord dead with his pitchfork; everyone was so resentful of the lord, so exasperated, so overwrought that as they listened to his tale they looked at him, quite without knowing, to see if he were possibly grown-up enough to carry out such a deed. That is how people felt and talked all over the area where just a few weeks previously the Chamberlain had been loved and pitied. But although they talked in this way, nothing changed. Christov Detlev's death was in residence at Ulsgaard and would not be hurried. It had come for ten weeks and for ten weeks it stayed. And during this time it was more the master than Christov Detlev Brigge had ever been; it was like a king being known later, and going down in history, as: 'the Terrible'.

It wasn't the death of somebody suffering from some kind of dropsy; it was the evil regal death that the Chamberlain his whole life long had carried inside him where it had fed. Every excess of pride, of will and of dominance that he had not been able to use up himself on his calm days had gone into his death, the death that now sat at Ulsgaard squandering them.

What a look Chamberlain Brigge would have given to anyone who demanded he die a different death from this one. His was a hard death.

And when I think of the others I have seen or heard of: it's always the same. They've all had a death of their own. Those men who carried it in their armour, shut inside it like a prisoner; those women who grew very old and small and then on an immense bed like the ones on a theatre stage, in front of the whole family, the servants and the dogs discreetly and with dignity passed away. The children, even the really small ones, didn't have just any child's death; they braced themselves and died as who they were already and who they would have become.

And what a wistful beauty that gave to the women when they were pregnant and stood there with their slender hands restingly naturally on the large shape where two fruits were: a child and a death. And that tight, almost nourishing smile that took over their faces, didn't it sometimes come from sensing that both were growing?

I've done something to keep fear away. I've sat up all night writing and now I'm as tired as if I'd been on a long walk across the fields at Ulsgaard. It's really hard for me to think that all of that is no more; that strangers are living in the old long manor house. It's possible that the maids are now asleep in the white room up in the gable, sleeping their heavy, damp sleep from evening till morning.

And one has nobody and nothing and one travels the world with a trunk and a crate of books and, in point of fact, without any curiosity. What sort of life is that really: without house, without anything passed down to me, without dogs? At the very least one should have memories. But who has? Would that one's childhood were here now, it's as if it's been buried. Perhaps one needs to be old to be able to have contact with all that. I imagine it's good being old.

It was a beautiful autumn morning today. I strolled through the Tuileries. Hung with mist like a light grey curtain everything eastwards into the sun was bedazzling. The statues, grey against grey, basked in the sunlight of the yet to be unveiled garden. Solitary flowers in the long flower beds got up and said 'Red' in a frightened voice. Then a very tall slim man came round the corner from the Champs-Élysées; he carried a crutch, but it was no longer shoved under his shoulder: he held it out in front of him, lightly, and now and then he stood it on the ground firmly and loudly as if it were a herald's staff. He couldn't suppress a joyful smile and smiled at everything as he went by, including the sun, the trees. The way he walked was like that of a shy child, but unusually light, full of memories of walks in earlier times.

What a little moon like this can do to everything. There are days when everything around one is softly illumined, not yet identifiable in the bright air but nonetheless distinct. Even what lies nearest is imbued with the tones of distance, is abstracted and only denoted, not revealed; and what relates to distance: the river, the bridges, the long streets and the squares squandering themselves among them are what this expanse has collected behind it to be painted as if on silk. It's not possible to tell what a light-green vehicle on the Pont-Neuf can be, or a type of red that isn't too bold, or even a mere poster on the fire wall of a pearl grey group of houses. All is simplified, carelessly conveyed by a few light-coloured planes in like the face in a Manet portrait. And nothing is negligible or superfluous. The booksellers along the quai open up their cases, and the new or worn yellow of the books, the violet brown of the volumes, the larger green of a folder: all are attuned to one another, are valid, are part of the whole and form a completeness which lacks nothing.

Down below me is the following assortment: a small handcart pushed by a woman; on top and running the whole length a barrel organ; crosswise on the other side a basketwoven cot in which quite a small bonneted and gleeful infant with sturdy legs is standing and doesn't like being made to sit. Now and again the woman turns the handle on the organ. The little infant immediately stands up again in its basket stamping, and a little girl in a green Sunday dress dances and taps her tambourine up at the windows.

I think I ought to begin working on something now that I'm learning to see. I'm twenty-eight and virtually nothing has happened. Let's go back: I've written a study on Carpaccio, which is poor; a play entitled 'Marriage', which seeks to prove something false by means of ambiguities; and poems. Ah, but poems written early in life don't amount to much. One should wait and gather meaning and sweetness a whole life long--and as long a life as possible--then, at the very end, one might possibly write ten lines that are any good. For poems aren't, as people think, feelings (one has those early enough);

they're experiences. To write a single line of verse one must see many cities, people, things, one must know animals, one must feel birds flying and know the movements flowers make as they open up in the morning. One must be able to think back to roads in unfamiliar regions, unexpected encounters, and partings which one saw coming long before; one must be able to think back to those days in one's childhood that are still unexplained, to one's parents whom one could not help offending when they brought a delightful gift and one didn't appreciate it (it was a delight for someone else), to those childhood illnesses which arose so peculiarly and with so many profound and difficult changes, to those days in peaceful and secluded rooms, and to those mornings by the sea, to the sea anywhere, to seas, to nights of travel that swept along high above, flying with the stars; and it's still not enough, even when one's allowed to think of everything one can. One must have memories of many nights of love--no two nights the same--of the cries of women in labour and of pale, white, sleeping women who have given birth and are now closing again. But one must also have been with the dying, one must have sat in a room with the dead with the window open and random noises coming in. And having memories is still not enough. If there are a great many, one must be able to forget them, and one must have the patience to wait until they return. For the memories are not what's essential. It's only when they become blood within us, become our nameless looks and signs that are no longer distinguishable from ourselves--not until then does it happen that, in a very rare moment, the first word of a verse rises in their midst and goes forth from among them.

All my poems came about in a different way; so they are not poems. And when I wrote my play how mistaken I was. Was I an imitator and fool to need a third person in order to tell of the fate of two people who were making each other's life difficult? How easily I fell into the trap. And I should have known very well that this third person who figures throughout all lives and literatures, this ghost of a third person who has never existed, has no meaning, and must be disavowed. He is one of the pretexts of a Nature which forever endeavours to divert people's attention from her deepest secrets. He is the screen behind which a play is acted out. He is the noise at the threshold of the voiceless silence of a real conflict. One would think it had all been too difficult till now for playwrights to speak of the two about whom the action turns; the 'third', precisely because he is so unreal, is the easy part of the task that they all can do. Right at the start of their dramas one notices the impatience; they can hardly wait to bring him on. The moment he's there everything is fine. But how boring it is when he's late; there's absolutely nothing can happen without him, everything comes slowly to a standstill, and waits. Yes, and what if this jamming up and delay goes on? What, Mr. Playwright, and you, the audience, who know the ways of the world, what if he had been lost without trace, this popular rake, or this presumptuous young man who fits every marriage like a skeleton key? What if, say, the devil had gone off with him? Let's say that's what's happened. Suddenly one becomes aware of the unreal emptiness of the theatres, they're walled up like dangerous holes, only moths from the padded edging of the loggia whirl down through the unstable hollow space. The playwrights have to forgo the pleasure of living in an exclusive neighbourhood. All public watchdogs search dutifully far and wide for that irreplaceable third person who himself was the plot.

At the same time they're living among other people, not the 'third' persons but the two, about whom such an incredible number of things might be said and of whom not a word is ever spoken, though they suffer and do things and don't know how to help each other.

It's ludicrous. Here I sit in my little room, I, Brigge, 28 years of age and known to no one. I sit here and am nothing. Nevertheless, this nothing, five flights up on a grey Paris afternoon, begins to think and it has these thoughts:

Is it possible, it thinks, that one still hasn't seen or recognised or said anything that's real and important? Is it possible that there have been thousands of years in which to look, to reflect, and to

record, and that these thousands of years have been allowed to go by like a school break when one eats a sandwich and an apple?

Yes, it's possible.

Is it possible that despite inventions and advances, despite culture, religion and worldly wisdom one has remained on the surface of life? Is it possible that even this surface, which at any rate might, after all, have been something, has been covered over with unbelievably boring material so that it has the look of drawing-room furniture in the summer holidays?

Yes, it's possible.

Is it possible that the whole of world history has been misunderstood? Is it possible that the past is false because it's always its masses that have been spoken about as if one were talking of a convergence of many persons instead of talking about the one person they were gathered round because he was a stranger and was dying?

Yes, it's possible.

Is it possible that one believed one had to catch up on what had occurred before one was born? Is it possible that each and every person had to remember that he had been produced by all that had gone before and therefore knew it and would not let himself be persuaded by others who knew otherwise?

Yes, it's possible.

Is it possible that all these people have a totally accurate knowledge of what has never been? Is it possible that realities are as nothing to them; that their life is draining away, connected with nothing, like a clock in an empty room?

Yes, it's possible.

Is it possible that one can know nothing of the young girls who are nevertheless living? Is it possible that one says 'women', 'children', 'boys' and not suspect for one moment (irrespective of their education) that for a long time these words had no plural but only countless singulars?

Yes, it's possible.

Is it possible that there are people who say 'God' and think it's something they have in common with everyone?--And take a couple of schoolboys: one of them buys a knife and the other buys an identical one on the same day. And after a week they compare the two knives and it turns out that they look only vaguely similar--so different have they become in different hands. (There you are, says the mother of one of them, if you will go and wear everything out straightaway.)--Ah then: is it possible to believe that one could have a God and not use him?

Yes, it's possible.

But if all this is possible and if even there's only a glimmer of possibility, then, for pity's sake, surely something needs to be done. The first person to come forward who has had these disquieting thoughts must begin to do what has always been missed; he could be just anyone and it doesn't matter in the least if he's not the most suitable person: there's simply no one else to do it. This young, insignificant foreigner, will have to sit himself down, five flights up and write day and night: yes, he will have to write; that's what it amounts to.

I must have been twelve at the time, thirteen at the most. My father had taken me with him to Urnekloster. I don't know what prompted him

to go visit his father-in-law. The two men had not seen each other for years ever since my mother died, and my father had never himself set foot inside the old manor house to which Count Brahe had retired late in life. I never saw this remarkable house again because when my grandfather died it passed into strangers' hands. Thus, seeing it now, in a version of my childhood memories, it's not a building, rather it's all split up: a room here, a room there, and here a section of passageway that doesn't link these two rooms but has simply been preserved, a fragment. Similarly it's all scattered about within me, -- the rooms, the staircases which opened onto the ground floor with such great elaborateness and other narrow circular stairways in whose darkness one travelled like blood through veins; the tower rooms, the high balconies, the unexpected galleries one was urged along from the little entrance door:--all that is still within me and will never cease being within me. It's as if the image of this house had plunged into me from an infinite height and smashed to pieces on the foundation of my being.

What is preserved in its entirety in my heart, it seems to me, is solely the dining-hall where we met for dinner every evening at seven. I never saw that room by day; I can't even remember if it had any windows or what they looked out on; each time the family entered the candles would be burning in the heavy chandeliers and within a few minutes one forgot the time of day and everything one had seen outside. That high, and I presume vaulted, room was more impressive than all the rest; its darkened height, with its never fully illumined corners sucked all the images out of one without replacing them with anything in particular. One sat there as if dissolved, wholly without willpower, without consciousness, without interests, without resistance. One was like an empty space. I remember that at first this annihilating condition almost created a feeling of nausea in me which I overcame by stretching out my leg until my foot touched my father's knee opposite. It wasn't until later that I noticed that he seemed to understand, or, at least, seemed to tolerate this odd behaviour, even though in terms of the almost cool relationship existing between us such a gesture was inexplicable. It was, however, that light touch which gave me the strength to get through those long meals. And after several weeks of desperate endurance, I, with a child's almost boundless adaptability, had become so used to the eeriness of those meetings that it no longer cost me any effort to sit at table for two hours; now the time went by relatively quickly because I occupied myself observing those present.

My grandfather called it 'the family' and I also heard the others use this term, which was quite arbitrary. For although these four people were distantly related to one another, they didn't belong together in any way. My uncle who sat next to me was an old man whose hard tanned face showed several black flecks, the results, I learned, of an exploding charge of gunpowder; surly and malcontent as he was, he had retired from the army at the rank of major and now carried out alchemical experiments in some room in the house unknown to me and, so I heard the servants say, was in contact with a gaol, which once or twice a year sent corpses to him. Day and night behind a locked door he would dissect them and prepare them in a mysterious way to resist decomposition. Opposite him sat Miss Mathilde Brahe. She was a person of uncertain age, a distant cousin of my mother's. Nothing was known about her except that she kept up a very lively correspondence with an Austrian spiritualist who called himself Baron Nolde and to whom she was completely devoted, to the extent that she wouldn't undertake even the slightest thing without soliciting his prior approval or something after the style of a blessing. She was at that time exceedingly stout, of a soft, lazy corpulence which, as it were, had been poured casually into the loose, light-coloured dresses she wore; her movements were weary and vague and her eyes were constantly watering. All the same there was something about her that reminded me of my gentle and slender mother. I found that the longer I looked at her the more I could detect in her face all my mother's fine, soft traits, which since her death I had never been able to remember clearly; only now, seeing Mathilde Brahe daily, could I again know what she who was now gone from me had looked like; in fact I possibly knew it for the first time. Only now did the hundreds and hundreds of

details compose in my mind a memorial picture that accompanies me everywhere. Later I realised that in Fraulein Brahe's face all the details which characterised my mother's features were actually there,--only now it was as if a stranger's face had pushed its way between them forcing them apart so that they were distorted and no longer linked to one another.

Next to this lady sat the little son of a cousin, a boy of about the same age as me but smaller and weaker. His thin, pale neck rose from a pleated ruff that disappeared beneath a long chin. His lips were thin and tight shut; his nostrils quivered slightly; and of his beautiful dark brown eyes only one could move. It sometimes looked across towards me calmly and sadly, whereas the other one remained constantly trained on the same corner of the room as if it had already been sold off and would no longer come under consideration.

At the head of the table stood my grandfather's enormous armchair which a servant with nothing else to do would push under him; in it the old man occupied only a very small space. There were those who addressed this imperious hard-of-hearing old gentleman as 'Excellency', while others gave him the title 'General'. And he most certainly bore the stamp of these titles but it had been so long since they had been conferred that the designations scarcely made sense any more. At any rate it seemed to me that no definite name could be attached to his personality which in some moments was so sharp and yet at other times so diffuse. I could never bring myself to call him 'Grandfather', although occasionally he was friendly to me and now and then would call me to him, trying to add a jocular touch to my name. I should add that the whole family behaved towards the Count with an evident mixture of awe and timidity; only little Erik enjoyed a certain familiarity with the aged master of the house; his movable eye threw quick assenting looks at his grandfather who just as quickly returned them; and sometimes in the long afternoons one could see them appearing at the far end of the long gallery, and then walking hand in hand past the dark old portraits, not speaking a word but clearly understanding each other in some other way.

I used to spend almost the whole day outside in the grounds and in the beech woods or on the heath; luckily there were dogs at Urnekloster and they would accompany me; here and there would be a tenant's house or dairy farm where I could get milk and bread and fruit, and I enjoyed my freedom in a fairly carefree way, at least in the following weeks, without letting myself be worried by thoughts of the evening gatherings. I spoke with hardly anyone for it was a joy to me to be alone; now and then I would have a short conversation but only with the dogs: I got on marvellously with them. Taciturnity, by the way, was a sort of family trait; I was used to it in my father, and it didn't surprise me that over dinner practically nothing was said.

In the first few days following our arrival, however, Mathilde Brahe proved herself to be exceedingly talkative. She questioned my father about old acquaintances in foreign cities, she recalled odd impressions, and she moved herself to tears thinking of female friends who had died and of a certain young man who, she hinted, had been in love with her, though she had chosen not to respond to his ardent but hopeless affections.

My father listened politely, inclining his head now and then in agreement and answering only when it was most necessary. The Count, at the head of the table, smiled continually, his lips drawn down; his face seemed larger than usual, as if he were wearing a mask. As it happens, he would sometimes say a few words himself, addressing no one in particular, in a voice that, though soft, could be heard throughout the whole room. It had something of the monotonous regularity and indifference of the workings of a clock about it; the surrounding silence appeared to have an empty resonance all of its own, the same for each syllable.

Count Brahe meant it as a special courtesy to my father when he spoke of his late wife, my mother. He called her Countess Sibylle and all

his sentences ended as if he were asking after her. I felt--I don't know why--as if he were referring to very a young girl dressed all in white who at any moment might enter the room where we were. I also heard him speak in the same tone about 'our little Anna Sophie'. And one day when I asked about this young woman whom my grandfather seemed so fond of I learnt that he meant the daughter of the Lord High Chancellor Conrad Revenlow, the morganatic wife of Frederick IV whose remains had rested at Roskilde for almost a century and a half. He had no notion of the passage of time; death was a minor incident which he ignored completely and those who were lodged in his memory continued to exist and their dying altered nothing whatsoever. Several years later, after the old man had died, he was described as having maintained the stubborn notion that the future and the present were one. He was said to have spoken on one occasion with a young wife about her sons and in particular about the travels of one of them; the old man talked endlessly and all the while the young lady, who was just into the third month of her first pregnancy and sitting near him, was almost fainting from horror and fear.

However, on one occasion it all began with my laughing. I just laughed out loud and couldn't stop. It was one evening when Mathilde Brahe didn't show up at dinner. When the old and almost totally blind servant reached her place he, unaware, proffered the dish as usual. For a short while he stayed like that, then when he judged it right he moved along in his satisfied and dignified manner as if everything were in order. I had watched this scene and in the short time it took it didn't strike as being in the least comic. But a short while later just as I was putting food in my mouth laughter rushed up into my head with such speed that I swallowed the wrong way and caused great alarm. And although I found this situation annoying, and although I did everything possible to remain serious, my laughter carried on erupting and kept me completely in its power.

My father, as if to blot out my behaviour asked in his full but low voice: 'Is Mathilde unwell?' My grandfather gave one of his smiles and then answered with a statement which I, being preoccupied with myself, paid no attention to and which sounded like: 'No, she simply doesn't want to meet Christine.' I didn't take these words to be the reason why my neighbour, the tan-faced major, got up and with a mumbled apology and bowing directly towards the Count, left the room. I did happen to notice that he turned round once more in the doorway behind his host's back and by winks and nods signalled to little Erik and to my utter astonishment to me also as if he were urging us to follow him. I was so amazed that my laughter lost its grip on me. For the rest, I paid no further attention to the major; I found him unpleasant and I observed also that little Erik was taking no notice of him.

As always the meal dragged on and on and just as we reached dessert my eye was caught by something moving in the semi-darkness at the far end of the hall. I thought the door there led to a mezzanine and was always locked but little by little it had opened and with a feeling of curiosity and dismay that was new to me I now fixed my eyes in that direction and saw a slim lady in a light coloured dress step into the shadow of the doorway and come slowly up towards us. I don't know if I stirred or made a sound before the noise of a chair being overturned forced me to tear my eyes away from the strange figure, and I saw my father who had jumped to his feet and was now going towards the lady, his face deathly pale and his hands clenched at his sides. Meanwhile, quite undisturbed by the scene, she continued towards us step by step and was already not far from where the Count was seated when the latter suddenly stood up, grabbed my father by the arm, pulled him back to the table and held on to him, while the strange lady slowly and absently went across the space that had been cleared, step by step through an indescribable silence in which only a glass trembled and clinked and though a door in the opposite wall of the hall disappeared. At that moment I noticed that it was little Erik who with a deep bow closed the door behind the stranger.

I was the only one still sitting; I had sunk so heavily in my chair it felt as if I would never be able to get up again by myself. For a

while I looked but my eyes wouldn't see. Then I remembered my father and I became aware that the old man still held him by the arm. My father's face was angry now, flushed with blood, but my grandfather, whose fingers gripped my father's arm tightly like a white claw, was smiling his mask-like smile. Then syllable by syllable I heard him say something although I couldn't understand what his words meant. Nevertheless they must have gone deep into my senses because about two years ago I found them buried in my memory and I've been aware of them ever since. He said: 'You are impetuous, Chamberlain, and discourteous. Why don't you let people go about their business?' 'Who is it?' cried my father, interrupting. 'Someone who has every right to be here. No stranger. Christine Brahe.' At that point there arose once more that odd, rarefied silence and once more the glass began to tremble. But my father then broke loose and dashed out of the hall.

The whole night long I heard him going up and down in his room, for I couldn't sleep either. But suddenly towards morning I awoke from whatever passed for sleep and to my horror saw something white that sat on my bed and froze me to the core. In my desperation I summoned the strength to hide my head under the bedclothes and there from fear and helplessness I began to weep. Suddenly it became cool and bright above my tear-filled eyes; I squeezed them shut so I wouldn't have to see anything through my tears. But the voice that now spoke to me from very near came mildly and sweetly to my face, and I recognised it: it was Mathilde's voice. I immediately calmed down and even when I was already quite peaceful I let her continue comforting me; true, I did find this kindness too feminine but I enjoyed it nevertheless and thought I had somehow deserved it. 'Aunt', I said at last, trying through my wet eyes to combine in her dissolved face the traits of my mother: 'Aunt, who was the lady?'

'Ah', answered Miss Brahe with a sigh that seemed to me strangely comical, 'an unfortunate woman, my child, an unfortunate woman.'

That same morning I noticed a number of servants busily packing. I thought it would be for us and I found it quite natural that we were leaving now. Maybe that was my father actually intended to do. I have never got to know what induced him to stay on at Umelkloster after that evening. But we didn't leave. We stayed on in that house a further eight or nine weeks, enduring its oppressive peculiarities, and we saw Christine Brahe on three more occasions.

At that time I knew nothing of her story. I didn't know that she had died a long, long time before; it was while she was giving birth to her second child, a boy, who grew up to meet a terrifying and cruel fate,--I didn't know that she was a dead woman. But my father knew. Had he, a man of passion and eager to be logical and clear-thinking, wanted to force himself to endure this adventure without asking questions? I could see, though I couldn't appreciate, how he struggled with himself; I witnessed it without understanding how he finally won through.

That was when we saw Christine Brahe for the last time. On that occasion Miss Mathilde appeared at dinner; she was not her former self. As in the first days following our arrival she talked incessantly with no discernible thread and for ever getting herself into a muddle, and at the same time some physical unease in her compelled her to be constantly adjusting her hair or her dress,--until without warning she jumped up and with a shrill wail disappeared.

At that same moment I instinctively turned my gaze towards a certain door, and sure enough: Christine Brahe entered. Beside me the Major gave a vigorous jerk that transferred into my body, but clearly he no longer had the strength to stand up. His old, tanned, speckled face turned from one person to another, his mouth hung open and his tongue moved about behind his decayed teeth; then all at once his face was gone, and his grey head lay on the table, and his arms lay over and under it as if in chunks, and from somewhere a withered, speckled hand emerged, trembling. And now Christine Brahe went past, step by step, moving slowly like an invalid through an indescribable

silence broken only by a solitary whimpering sound like that of an old dog.

But then, to the left of the large silver swan filled with daffodils the large mask of the old man with its grey smile thrust forward. He raised his wine glass towards my father. And now, just as Christine Brahe was coming across behind his chair, I saw my father reach for his glass and lift it a handsbreadth above the table as if it were something very heavy. And that very same night we went on our way.

Bibliothèque Nationale.

I am sitting here reading a poet. There are a great number of people in the room but one doesn't notice them. They're inside the books. Sometimes they move about in the pages like people turning over in their sleep between two dreams. Ah, how good it is being among people who are reading. Why aren't they always like this? You can go up to one of them and gently touch him: he doesn't feel a thing. And if, when you stand up you bump against someone next to you and you apologise, he gives a nod towards where he hears your voice coming from, his face turns towards you and he doesn't see you, and his hair is like the hair of someone asleep. How good that feels. And I am sitting here and I have a poet. What a fate. There are now perhaps three hundred people in the room, all reading; but it's impossible that every single one of them has a poet. (God knows what they have.) There aren't three hundred poets. But see what sort of fate I have: I, probably the most beggarly of these readers, a foreigner: I have a poet. Even though I am poor. Even though the suit I use everyday is starting to show signs of wear at certain places. Even though the state of my shoes might cause comment of one sort or another. True, my collar is clean, as is my underwear, and I could, just as I am, walk into any cafe you like, possibly on the finer boulevards and without hesitating stretch out my hand and help myself to any cake or pastry from the platter. It would raise no eyebrows, I wouldn't be told off and thrown out, because at least it's a gentleman's hand, a hand that's washed four to five times a day. Yes, indeed, there's no dirt under my fingernails, no ink stains on my forefinger and, of special note, my wrists are flawless. It's a well-known fact that poor people don't wash as far up as that. Certain conclusions then can be drawn from the cleanness of my wrists. And people draw them. They draw them in shops. Even so, there are still a few individuals on the Boulevard Saint-Michel for example and in the rue Racine who are not ones to be misled and couldn't care less about my wrists. They take one look at me and they know. They know that I'm actually one of them, that I'm only putting on a bit of an act. It's carnival time. And they don't want to spoil my fun; so they just grin a little and wink. No one has seen them do it. The rest of the time they treat me as a gentleman. There only needs to be someone else close by for them to even act like servants. They act as if I were wearing a fur coat with my carriage following behind. Sometimes I'll give them two sous, trembling lest they reject them, but they accept them. And all would have been fine if they hadn't persisted with a little of their grinning and winking. Who are these people? What do they want from me? Are they lying in wait? What do they recognise in me? Admittedly, my beard looks a trifle neglected, in a quite, quite less than small way it resembles their sickly, old faded beards that have always impressed me. But don't I have the right to neglect my beard? Many busy men do, and it doesn't occur to anyone to group them with the outcasts as a consequence. For it's clear to me that outcasts is what they are; no, not actually beggars, a distinction must be made. They are human garbage, empty husks that Fate has spat out out. Moist with the spittle of Fate they stick to a wall, a lamp-post, advertising pillars, or are gradually sluiced down the alleyway leaving a dark, dirty trail behind them. What in the world did that old woman want of me, the woman who had crawled out of some hole carrying a drawer from a bedside table with a few buttons and needles rolling around in it? What was her reason for always walking alongside me, watching me? As if she were trying to recognise me with her watery eyes that looked as if a sick person had spat green phlegm at her bloody eyelids. And then how did that small grey-haired woman come to be standing beside me for

a quarter of an hour in front of a shop window, showing me an old, long pencil being pushed with interminable slowness up through her clenched, putrid hands? I pretended to be looking at the window display and not to have seen anything. But she knew I'd seen her, she knew I was standing wondering what she might be doing. I knew full well that it had nothing to do with the pencil: I got the feeling it was a sign, a sign for the initiated, a sign that outcasts knew; my guess was that she was meaning me to go somewhere or do something. And the strangest thing was that all the time I couldn't get rid of the feeling that there might actually be a certain understanding between us, that this sign related to it, and that this scene was all part and parcel of what I should have been expecting.

That was two weeks ago. But now hardly a day has passed without some similar encounter. Not only at dusk, it happens at midday in the most crowded streets: suddenly a little man or an old woman will appear, they'll nod, show me something, and then disappear again as if everything necessary has been done. It's possible that one of these days they'll take it into their heads to come as far as my room, they know precisely where I live and they'll set it up so that the concierge doesn't stop them. But here, my friends, here I'm safe from you. One needs a special card to enter this room. I have an advantage over you in that I have one. As you can imagine, I walk through the streets a little shyly; but eventually I stop in front of a glass door, open it as if I were at home, show my card at the next door (just the same as when you show me your things, the only difference being that they understand me and know what I mean--), and then I'm amongst these books, taken from you as if I'd died, and am sitting reading a poet. You don't know what that is, a poet?--Verlaine?... Nothing? Nothing you can recall? No. You didn't single him out from the others you knew? You don't make distinctions, I know. But it's a different poet I'm reading, one who doesn't live in Paris, a different one altogether. One whose has a quiet house in the mountains. He sounds like a bell ringing in air that's pure. A happy poet who who tells of his window and of the glass doors of his bookcase which mirror thoughts of a desolate vastness that is dear to him. This poet is exactly what I would have wanted to become; for he knows so much about girls and I too would have known a lot about them. He knows about girls who lived a hundred years ago; it no longer matters that they're dead, because he knows everything. And that's the main thing. He pronounces their names, these soft, elegantly written names with the old-fashioned loops in the long letters and the grown-up names of their older female friends in which you can already hear the tiniest echo of Fate, the tiniest echo of disappointment and death. Perhaps in a compartment of his mahogany desk lie their faded letters and pages loosened from their diaries giving dates of birthdays, summer picnics, birthdays. Or it may be that in the pot-bellied chest of drawers at the back of his bedroom there's a drawer in which their spring dresses had been put away; white dresses worn for the first time at Easter, dresses of dotted tulle which were really for summer, but they couldn't wait. Oh, what a happy fate to sit in the quiet room of an ancestral house with nothing but calm things that stayed in the same place, and from outside in the bright green garden the first tom-tits rehearsing their song in the light air, and the village clock in the distance. To sit and gaze at a strip of warm afternoon sun and to know a great amount about girls from the past and to be a poet. And to think that I too might well have become a poet like him, that I'd have been able to live anywhere, anywhere in the world, in one of the many country houses that are closed up and nobody cares about. I'd have needed just one room (the one under the gable that got plenty of light). Up there I'd have lived with my old things about me, the family pictures, the books. And I'd have had an armchair and flowers and dogs and a stout walking stick for stony paths. And nothing else. Nothing except a book bound in yellowish, ivory-coloured leather with end papers of an old flowered pattern: in it I'd have done my writing. I'd have done a lot of writing because I'd have had many thoughts and memories of so much.

But it hasn't worked out that way. God knows why. My old furniture is rotting away in a barn where I was allowed store it, and as for myself, yes, dear God, I haven't got a roof over me and the rain is

getting into my eyes.

Sometimes, in the rue de Seine for instance, I go past little shops. Vendors of second-hand goods, or small-time antiquarian booksellers, or dealers in engravings, all of them with overcrowded windows. No one ever goes inside them, they don't look as if they do any business. But look inside and you can see them sitting there and reading, completely at ease, with no thought to the morrow, or of making a success of things; they have a dog that sits cheerfully by their feet, or a cat that makes the silence even greater as it brushes along the rows of books as if it were wiping the names off the spines.

Ah, if only that would do: sometimes I could wish I could buy myself a crowded shop-window like that and sit down behind it with a dog for twenty years.

It's good saying it out loud: 'Nothing has happened.' Once more: 'Nothing has happened.' Does it help? The fact that my stove began to smoke again and I had to go out isn't actually a disaster. And the fact that I'm weary and feel I've caught a chill doesn't signify anything. The fact that I've been wandering around the streets all day long is my own fault. I could just as well have been sitting in the Louvre. But no, I couldn't have done that. There are certain people there who go to get themselves warm. They sit on the velvetcovered benches with their feet looking like big empty boots side by side in a row on the warm-air grating. They're thoroughly decent people and when the attendants in dark uniforms and wearing decorations leave them be, they're very grateful. But when I enter they always grin. Grin and give little nods. The attendants in dark uniforms and wearing decorations leave them be, they're very grateful. But when I enter they always grin. Grin and give little nods. And then when I go up and down in front of the paintings they always keep their eye on me, always this all-eyes-swirled-into-one following me. It was good then that I didn't go into the Louvre. I just kept on walking. Heaven only knows how many towns, districts, cemeteries, and passageways I've walked through, how many bridges I've crossed. Somewhere I saw a man pushing a vegetable cart. He shouted: 'Choufleur, choufleur,' pronouncing '--fleur' with a particularly gloomy 'eu' sound. Alongside him walked an ugly, angular-faced woman who now and then gave him a nudge. And whenever she nudged him he shouted. Sometimes he shouted of his own accord as well, but there was no point doing so now because they were in front of a customer's house and he had to shout anyway. Have I already said that he was blind? No? Well, he was blind. He was blind and he shouted. I'm not being exactly truthful when I put it like that. I've left out the cart he was pushing. I'm pretending I didn't notice he was calling out 'Cauliflowers'. But is that essential? And even if it were, doesn't it really come down to what it all meant to me? I saw an old man who was blind and shouted. That's what I saw. Saw.

Will people believe there are houses like this? No, they'll say I'm making it up. This time it's the truth, nothing left out, and, of course, nothing added. Where am I supposed to get it from? People know I'm poor. People know that. Houses? But, to be exact, they were houses that were no longer there. Houses that had been demolished, top to bottom. What was there were the other houses that had been standing next to them, tall, neighbouring houses. Apparently they were in danger of falling down because supporting them was a whole framework of long tarred poles that had been rammed in at an angle from the piled rubble on the ground to the exposed wall. I don't know if I've already said that this is the wall I mean. But it was, as it were, not the first wall of the existing houses (that should have been understood) but the last wall of the earlier ones. You could see inside them. On the different floors you could see walls with the paper still sticking to them, and here and there signs of where floors

or ceilings had been fixed. Adjoining the inside walls and running the whole width of the house was a dirty-white expanse of wall across which crawled in unutterably disgusting, wormsmooth, bowel-like form the open rust-flecked groove for the toilet pipe. There were grey dusty marks at the edge of the ceiling where the gas pipe had been, and they went this way and that before they suddenly turned right round, ran to the painted wall and into a dark hole that had been ruthlessly torn open there. What was most unforgettable, though, were the walls themselves. The dogged life that had been lived in these rooms refused to be obliterated. It was still there; it clung to the nails that were left, it lingered on the remaining strip of floor-boarding, it was huddled up under the little that was left of a corner section.

You could see in the paintwork how, slowly, year by year, it had changed blue into a mildewy green, green into grey, and yellow into an old, stagnant, putrefying white. And it had actually got into fresher-looking places behind mirrors, pictures and cupboards because it had traced and retraced their outlines amid the spiders and dust even in these hidden places that were now exposed. It was in every patch where the paint had peeled off, it was in the damp pockets at the bottom edges of the wallpaper, it swayed in the hanging shreds and sweated from the nasty stains that went back ages. And from these surfaces that had been blue, green and yellow and were now framed by broken runs of demolished partition wall, arose the air from these lives, this tenacious, shiftless, fuggy air that no wind had yet dispersed. Lingered there were the midday meals and the illnesses, the breathed out air and the years old smoke and the sweat that seeps from the armpits and makes clothes heavy, and the stale breath from mouths, and the boozy odour of fermenting feet. Lingered there were the pungent smell of urine, the stinging smell of soot, the dull steam-damp smell of potatoes, and the heavy, oily reek of old fat. Also there was the sweet lingering smell of neglected breast-feeding babies, and the smell of anxious children setting off to school, and of the muggy beds of older lads. And a lot of the smells were those that had come up from below out of the chasm of the street; they'd evaporated; and others had dripped down in the rain which over cities is not pure. And many had been brought here by the feeble, tamed housewinds that always kept to the same street, and there were plenty more that had come from goodness knows where. I did say, didn't I, that all the outer walls had been demolished bar the last--? Now this is the wall I've been talking about all this time. You might think I'd be standing in front of it for ages, but I'm willing to swear that as soon as I recognised the wall I took to my heels. Because it's the fact that I recognised it that makes it horrible. I recognise everything here; it passes into me without further ado; it finds a home in me.

After all that I was somewhat wearied--you might say strained--which is why I found it too much that he had to be still waiting for me. He was waiting in the little *cr merie** where I was hoping to have a couple of boiled eggs; I was hungry, I'd gone the whole day without getting myself anything to eat. And even now I couldn't get anything; before the eggs were ready I was forced to go back out into the streets and be buffeted by a whole turbid flow of people bearing down on me. For it was the Shrovetide carnival and it was evening and people had all the time in the world and floated about, rubbing against one another. And their faces were full of the light that came from the carnival booths and laughter welled up and poured from their mouths like puss from an open sore. The more impatient I became trying to move forward the more they laughed and crowded tightly together. A woman's scarf somehow got caught on me; I pulled her along behind me and people stopped me and and laughed and I felt that I should laugh too but I couldn't. Somebody threw a handful of confetti into my eyes and it stung like a whiplash. At the street-corners people were tightly wedged in, crammed against one another and they couldn't make any progress, just a gentle forward and back movement as if they were copulating where they stood. But although they stayed where they were and I ran like a madman along the side of the carriageway where there were breaks in the crowd, the plain truth is that it was they who were

moving whereas I never left the spot. Nothing was changing; each time I looked up I was made aware that the selfsame houses were still on one side and the carnival booths were on the other. Perhaps we were keeping to the same place and it was simply a dizziness in me and in them that had made everything appear to be spinning. I had no time to think about it, I was heavy with sweat and there was a stupefying pain travelling round and round inside me as if something too big was being propelled in my blood and it stretched my veins as it came along. And at the same time I felt that the air had long since been used up and that I was simply breathing in more exhaled out air that my lungs left alone.

*basic restaurant

But all that's over now; I've survived. I'm sitting in my room near the lamp; it's a bit cold because I daredn't try the stove. What if it smoked and I had to go outside again? I'm sitting and thinking: if I weren't poor I'd rent another room, one with furniture that's not so outworn nor so full of former tenants as this is. At first it was really hard for me to lay my head back in this easy-chair; there is, you see, a certain greasy-grey hollow in its green cover that would likely fit all heads. For a long time I took the precaution of laying a handkerchief under my hair, but now I'm too weary to do it; I've discovered that it's fine as it is and that the slight hollow is exactly right for the back of my head, as if it had been made to measure. But if I weren't poor the first thing I would buy for myself would be a good stove and I would burn clean strong wood from the mountains and not these miserable têtes de moineau* whose fumes have such a frightful effect on your breathing and puts your head in a spin. And then I would need someone to tidy the place without making a din and to tend the fire in the same way I do, for often when I have to kneel in front of the oven, riddling the ash with the skin on my forehead all taut from being close to the glow of the embers, and with the heat in my open eyes, I'm using up all the strength that I need for the day so that if I then meet others they easily get the better of me. Sometimes, if there was a large crowd around, I would take a carriage and drive past, I would eat every day in a Duval... and no longer creep into the crémeries... Is he likely to have been in a Duval? No. In there they wouldn't have let him wait for me. They don't admit people who are dying. People dying? Right now I'm sitting in my room; I can try calmly to reflect on what has happened to me. It is good to leave nothing to uncertainty. So I walked in and at first I saw only that the table where I often used to sit had been taken by someone else. I nodded a greeting in the direction of the little counter, ordered and sat down at a table nearby. But it was then that I felt him, although he didn't move. Of all things, it was his motionlessness that I felt and that I understood at once. Communication between us was established and I knew that he was rigid with terror. I knew that the terror had paralysed him, terror at something that was happening inside him. Perhaps a blood vessel had burst inside him, perhaps a poison that he had been afraid of for a long time was right now entering a chamber of his heart, perhaps a large abscess in his brain had risen like a sun and had changed his whole world. With an indescribable effort I forced myself to look at him because I still hoped it was all my imagination. But what happened was that I jumped up and rushed out because I hadn't been mistaken. He sat there in a thick black winter coat and his grey tense face was sunk deep into a woollen scarf. His mouth was closed as if it been shut with great force, but it wasn't possible to say if his eyes could still see on account of the smoke-grey spectacle lenses that covered them and trembled a little. His nostrils were torn open, and the long hair covering his emptying temples looked wilted as if from too great a heat. His ears were long and yellow with big shadows behind them. Yes, he knew he was withdrawing himself from everything, not only from human beings. One moment more and everything would be gone from his mind and this table and this cup and the chair he was clinging to, everything in his daily life, everything close to him would have become unintelligible, foreign, difficult. So he sat there and waited for it to have happened. And he offered no more resistance.

I'm still resisting. I'm still resisting although I know that my heart has already been ripped out of me and is hanging there and, even if my torturers now leave me alone, I can't go on living. I tell myself: 'Nothing has happened' and yet I've only been able to understand this man because there's also something working away inside me and it's starting to draw me away and to separate me from everything. How I always used to dread hearing people say of a dying person that they were past recognising anyone. I'd imagine a lonely-looking face that lifted itself out of the pillow, searching for something familiar, something that had been seen for a moment but it wasn't there. If my fear weren't so great I'd be able to find consolation in the thought that it's not impossible to see everything differently and still live your life. But I'm frightened, I'm unutterably frightened of this change. I haven't yet got used to being in this world. Not at all. Though the world does look good to me. What would I do in another one? I would so like to remain among the meanings which have become dear to me, and if there were something that really has to change I would want, at the very least, to be allowed to live among dogs who have a world that is related to ours and has the same things.

There's still time for me to write all that down and talk about it. But there will come a time when my hand will be far from me and when I then tell it to write, it will write words that are not mine. The time of that other interpretation will dawn and not one word will be left standing on another and every meaning will dissolve like clouds and descend like rain. Despite all my fears I am yet like a man standing in the presence of something great and I recall that previously, before I began writing, it was often like this inside me. But this time it is I who will be written about. I am the impression that will be transformed. Oh it would only take a little for me to understand it all and give it my assent. Just one step more and my abject misery would become bliss. But I can't take this step. I've fallen and I can't get up any more because I'm broken in pieces. I've always gone on believing that help could come. Lying there in front of me, in my own handwriting, is what I've prayed for evening after evening. I made myself a copy from the books where I found it so that it would be close by me and would have come from my hand as if the words were my own. And now, kneeling here in front of my table, I want to write them once more because this way it takes longer than when I read them, and every word will last longer and will have time to die away.

'Mécontent de tous et mécontent de moi, je voudrais bien me racheter et m'enorgueillir un peu dans le silence et la solitude de la nuit. Âmes de ceux que j'ai aimés, âmes de ceux que j'ai chantés, fortifiez-moi, soutenez-moi, éloignez de moi le mensonge et les vapeurs corruptrices du monde; et vous, Seigneur mon Dieu! accordez-moi la grâce de produire quelques beaux vers qui me prouvent à moi-même que je ne suis pas le dernier des hommes, que je ne suis pas inférieur à ceux que je méprise.'*

*'Displeased with everyone, displeased with myself, I would like to make amends and take some pride in myself in the silence and solitude of the night. Souls of those I have loved, souls of those I have sung, strengthen me, sustain me, free me from the lies and corrupting vapours of the world; and you, my Lord God, grant me the grace to produce some fine verses that will prove to me that I am not the least of men, that I am not inferior to those I despise.'

'They were children of fools, yea, children of base men:
they were viler than the earth.
And now am I their song, yea, I am their byword.
... they raise up against me the ways of their destruction ...
... they set forward my calamity, they have no helper.
And now my soul is poured out upon me; the days of affliction have
taken hold upon me.
My bones are pierced in me in the night season: and my sinews take no
rest.
By the great force of my disease is my garment changed: it bindeth me
about as the collar of my coat.

My bowels boiled, and rested not:
My harp also is turned to mourning, and my organ into the voice of
them that weep.'

My doctor didn't understand me. Not in any way whatsoever. It was indeed difficult finding the right words. They wanted to try electric shock treatment. Fine. I was given a note: I was to be at the Salpêtrière at one o'clock. I was there. I had to go along past various huts and through several yards where here and there beneath the bare trees people with white caps were standing looking like convicts. Finally I entered a long, dark corridor-like room which had four greenish frosted-glass windows on one side each separated from the next by an expanse of black dividing wall. A wooden bench ran along the wall facing and on this bench sat those who knew me and were waiting for me. Yes, they were all there. When I'd got used to the half-light in the room I noticed that among the people who were sitting there shoulder to shoulder in an endless row there could have been a few other people, lower class people: tradespeople, housemaids, waggon drivers. Down at the narrow end of the corridor two fat women had spread themselves out on special chairs and were chatting to each other, concierges presumably. I looked at the clock; it was five minutes to one. In five, let's say ten, minutes from now it would be my turn, so it wasn't so bad. The air was stale, heavy, full of clothing and breath. At one particular spot the strong, smell of ether forced its way through a crack in a door leaving a chill as it rose. I began pacing up and down. It struck me that I had actually been directed here among these people, to this overcrowded public surgery. It was, so to speak, the first official acknowledgement that I belonged to the outcasts. Is that how the doctor had seen me? Yet when I had visited him I had on a reasonably good suit and I had sent in my card. Nevertheless he must have somehow found out. Or perhaps I'd given myself away. That being the case, then, I didn't find it so terrible. People were sitting quietly and paying no attention to me. A few of them were in pain and to make it more bearable would give a little swing sometimes to this leg sometimes to the other. A number of men had lowered their heads onto the palms of their hands, others were fast asleep, their faces weighted down with weariness. A fat man with a red swollen neck sat there bent over staring at the floor, and now and again spat with a sound like a slap at a stain as if it seemed appropriate to him. A child was sobbing in a corner; it had brought its long skinny legs up onto the bench and was now holding them in an embrace, pressing tightly as if it had to say goodbye to them. A pale little woman who wore on her hair a lopsided crêpe hat trimmed with round black flowers, had the grimace of a smile about her meagre lips, but her sore eyelids were constantly brimming over. Not far from her they'd placed a girl with a round smooth face and bulging eyes that were devoid of any expression; her mouth hung open and one could see the white slimy gums with their old stunted teeth. And there were bandages everywhere. Bandages wrapped layer upon layer around the whole head until only a single eye was there and it belonged to no one. Bandages that hid and bandages that told you what was underneath. Bandages that had been opened and in which now lay as if in a filthy bed a hand that was no longer a hand; and protruding from the row a leg that had been bound up as big as a whole man. I walked back and forth and made an effort to be calm. I was much occupied by the wall opposite. I noticed it had a number of single doors and that it didn't reach the ceiling, so that this corridor wasn't entirely cut off from the rooms that presumably lead off it. I looked at the clock. I'd been walking up and down for an hour. A while later the doctors arrived. First a couple of young ones with looks of indifference on their faces went by, eventually the doctor whom I'd been to see came along wearing light-coloured gloves, a chapeau à huit reflets* and an impeccable greatcoat. When he saw me he tipped his hat and smiled absently. I now hoped I'd be called straight away, but another hour went by. I can't remember how I spent the time. It simply went by. An old man in a soiled apron, some sort of orderly, came in and touched me on the shoulder. I went into one of the siderooms. The doctor and the young men were seated round a table. They looked at me. I was given a chair. Fine. And now I was expected to tell them what exactly was the matter

with me. As briefly as possible, s'il vous plaît. Because the gentlemen didn't have much time. I felt odd. The young men sat and looked at me with that superior, professional curiosity that they'd been taught. The doctor I knew stroked his black goatee and smiled absently. I thought I would burst into tears but I heard myself say in French: 'I have already had the honour, monsieur, of giving you all the details that I'm able to give. If you consider it necessary that these gentlemen be fully informed, then you are no doubt able, following our conversation, to do that in a few words, while for me it would be very difficult.' The doctor stood up with a polite smile, crossed with his assistants to the window and spoke a few words which he accompanied with a horizontal rocking movement of his hand. Three minutes later one of the young men, a short-sighted and nervous fellow, returned to the table and said, trying to look sternly at me: 'You sleep well, sir?' 'No, badly.' Whereupon he bounded back to the group. They debated there for a time then the doctor turned to me and advised me that I would be called. I reminded him that my appointment had been for one o'clock. He smiled and made a quick fluttering movement with his small white hands to indicate that he was tremendously busy. So I went back into my corridor where the air had become much more oppressive and began again to walk up and down though I felt dead tired. Eventually the accumulated smells of dampness made my head spin, I stood by the entrance door and opened it slightly. I saw that outside it was still afternoon and there was some sun, and that made me unspeakably happy. But I couldn't have been standing there for a minute before I heard my name called. A female who was sitting two steps away at a small table hissed something to me. Who had told me to open the door? I said I couldn't stand the air inside. Well, that was my affair, but the door had to be kept shut. Wouldn't it be possible then to open a window? No, that was forbidden. I decided to start walking up and down again, because it did eventually produce a kind of numbing effect and it harmed no one. But now that too displeased the woman at the table. Didn't I have a seat? No, I hadn't. Wandering about was not permitted. I would have to find myself a seat. There should still be one. The woman was right. Actually there was one free next to the girl with the bulging eyes. I sat there this time with the feeling that the situation I was in must definitely be leading to something dreadful. On my left was the girl with the rotting gums; whatever was on my right took me some time to make out. There was an enormous immovable mass that had a face and a big heavy lifeless hand. This side of the face was empty, completely without features and without memories and what was uncanny was that his suit was the sort they dress corpses in before putting them in a coffin. The narrow black necktie was fastened round the collar in the usual loose impersonal way, and one could tell that the jacket had been put on this limp corpse by somebody else. The hand had been placed on the trousers in the same position as this one here, and even the hair looked as if it had been combed by the women who wash the corpses and had been set stiffly like the hair on a stuffed animal. I observed all this very carefully and it occurred to me that this seat then was the very one that had been destined for me, because I believed that now at last I had arrived at that point in my life where I would remain. Fate, indeed, moves in mysterious ways.

*stylish shiny top-hat

Suddenly there arose quite near me and in rapid succession the screams of a terrified struggling child followed by a low restrained weeping. While I was making an effort to find out where the screams could have come from, once more there was a small suppressed scream, and I could hear voices asking questions, and one, in an undertone, giving orders, and then, regardlessly, some kind of machine started to hum and continued without a care. It was then that I remembered that half-wall and it was plain to me that it was all coming from the other side of the doors and that people were working there. Indeed every so often the orderly with the soiled apron appeared and beckoned. I no longer gave any thought to it's possibly being me he had in mind. Was it meant for me? No. Two men came along with a wheelchair; they lifted the mass into it and now I saw that it was a lame old man and that the other side of his face was smaller, worn down by life and had one eye open that was dim and sorrowful. They took him into the other room

leaving plenty of vacant space near me. And I sat and wondered what they probably intended to do the feeble-minded girl and whether or not she too would scream. The machine behind the wall hummed away so pleasantly in its mass-production kind of way that it wasn't disturbing at all.

But then everything went quiet and in the quietness a superior self-satisfied voice that I thought I knew said: 'Riez!' A pause. 'Riez. Mais riez, riez.'* I was already laughing. It was inexplicable why the man in there didn't want to laugh. A machine started rattling and immediately fell silent; words were exchanged, then again the same energetic voice made itself heard and commanded: 'Dites-nous le mot: avant.**' Spelling it out: 'a-v-a-n-t'. Silence. 'On n'entend rien. Encore une fois***:...'

*Laugh!... laugh. Come on laugh, laugh.
**Say the word 'before' for us.
***We can't hear. Say it again.

And then, while the warm and squishy babbling continued on the other side, there, for the first time in many many years it was there again. That: the Big Thing, which had shocked me with my first deep horror when I was a child lying in bed with a fever. Yes, that's what I had always called it whenever they were all standing round my bed, feeling my pulse, and asking me what had scared me: the Big Thing. And whenever they sent for the doctor and he came and persuaded me to tell him, I would simply beg him to do everything he could so that the Big Thing went away, nothing else mattered. But he was like the others. He couldn't take it away, though I was small then and it would have been easy to help me. And now it was here again. Later on it had simply failed to appear, it hadn't come back not even during nights when I'd had fever, but it was here now and I didn't have a fever. Now it was here. Now it was growing out of me like a tumour, like a second head, and was a part of me although it couldn't belong to me since it was so big. It was there like a big dead animal that at one time, when it was still living, had been my hand or my arm. And my blood flowed through me and through it, as through one and the same body. And my heart must have been under a great strain pumping blood into the Big One; there was hardly enough blood. And the blood, against its own will, entered the Big Thing and came back sick and corrupted. But the Big Thing swelled and grew before my face like a warm bluish boil and grew before my mouth and across my remaining eye ran the edge of its shadow.

I can't remember how I found my way through so many yards. It was evening and I'd become lost in an unfamiliar neighbourhood. I walked in one direction up boulevards that had wall after wall and when I could see no end to them I walked back down in the opposite direction as far as some square or other. There I began to walk along one street and passed other streets that I'd never seen before, and still more of them. Sometimes electric trams with their lights too bright raced up raced past amid a harsh clanging of bells. But their destination signs carried names I didn't know. I didn't know what city I was in or whether I lived hereabouts, or what I had to do so that I wouldn't have to do any more walking.

And now, once more, I've even got this illness that always affects me so strangely. I'm sure it's taken too lightly. Just as the importance of other illnesses is exaggerated. The illness doesn't have particular characteristics, it takes on the characteristics of those it attacks. With the assurance of a sleepwalker it extracts one's deepest dread, which seemed a thing of the past, and sets it in front of one again within the hour. Men who in their schooldays once attempted the helpless vice, whose betrayed intimates are the poor hard hands of boys, find themselves making another attempt; or an illness they had overcome as a child starts up in them once more; or a habit they thought had faded away, a certain turn of the head that was a peculiarity of theirs years before, now returns. And with whatever it is that comes along there also appears a whole tangle of confused memories that hang from it like wet seaweed from some sunken thing. Lives that you could never have heard of emerge from the depths and

blend in with what had really happened, and they oust the past that you thought you knew; for in what rises is a new rested strength that had always been there and is weary from too frequent remembering.

I'm lying in my bed five flights up and my day which nothing interrupts is like a clock face without hands. Just as a thing that has long been lost is found one morning back safe and sound where it belongs and looking almost newer than it did at the time it went missing just as if someone had been taking care of it--: so here and here on my blanket lie things that were lost in my childhood and are now like new. All my lost fears are here once more.

The fear that a small woollen thread sticking out of the hem of the blanket may be hard, hard and sharp as a steel needle; the fear that this little button on my nightshirt may be bigger than my head, big and heavy; the fear that this breadcrumb now falling from my bed may turn into glass and shatter when it meets the floor, and the oppressive fear that when, in reality, it does then everything will be broken into pieces, everything, forever; the fear that the margin strip of a torn-open letter may be something that's forbidden, that no one should be allowed to see, something indescribably precious, for which there is no place in the room that could be safe enough; the fear that if I were allowed to fall asleep, I might swallow the piece of coal that's lying in front of the stove; the fear that some number may begin to grow in my brain until it has no more room; the fear that what I'm lying on may be granite, grey granite; the fear that I could start screaming and people would flock to my door and eventually break it open; the fear that I could give myself away and tell about all I'm frightened of; and the fear that there's nothing I could say because its all unsayable,--and the other fears...the fears.

I prayed for my childhood and it came back, and I feel it's still just as difficult as it was at the time and that growing older has been of no use to me whatsoever.

Yesterday my fever was better and this morning the day began like spring, like spring in paintings. I'll try to go out to the Bibliothèque Nationale to my poet whom I haven't read for such a long time, and afterwards perhaps I can take a stroll through the gardens. Perhaps there'll be wind across the big ponds where the water is so real and children come to launch their boats with red sails and watch them move through it.

Today I didn't expect it: I went out so bravely as if it were the simplest and most natural thing to be doing. And yet there was something that took hold of me as if I were made of paper and crumpled me up and tossed me way; it was incredible.

Boulevard St-Michel was wide and empty and it was easy walking up its gentle slope; casement windows overhead opened with a glassy sound and their gleam flew across the street like a white bird. A carriage with bright red wheels came by and further on there was someone dressed in light-green. Horses, their harness flashing, trotted along the dark, newly-sprayed, clean carriageway. The wind had got up, fresh, mild; and everything was rising: smells, cries, bells.

I passed one of the cafés where in the evenings musicians performed, made up as gypsies all in red. Creeping out of the open window with a bad conscience came the bleary-eyed air that had been there all night. Sleek-haired waiters were scrubbing in front of the door. One of them stood bent over throwing handful after handful of yellowish sand under the tables. A passer-by gave him a nudge and pointed down the street. The waiter whose face was quite red looked keenly for a couple of moments in that direction, then a laugh spread cross his beardless cheeks as if it had been spilled on them. He signalled to the other waiters and turned his laughing face quickly right and left a few times to call everybody over without missing anything himself. Now all of them were standing there looking and seeing or trying to see, smiling or annoyed that they hadn't discovered what was so funny.

I felt a slight fear starting inside me. Something was pressing me to go to the other side of the street, but I began to walk all the more quickly and couldn't help glancing at the few people in front of me though I didn't notice anything special about them. However I did see that one of them, an errand boy with a blue apron on and an empty basket over his shoulder, was gazing after someone. When he'd had enough he turned on the spot towards the houses and signed to a laughing clerk with a wafting movement across the forehead that everyone is familiar with. Then his dark eyes flashed and he came towards me satisfied and gently swaying.

I expected, as soon as I got a clear view, to see some unusual and striking figure; but there appeared to be no one walking in front of me except a tall lean man in a dark overcoat and wearing a soft black hat on his short pale blond hair. I checked that there was nothing to laugh at either in his clothes or in his behaviour and I was just trying to look past him down the boulevard when he tripped over something. Since I was following close behind him I took special care when I came to the spot, but there was nothing, absolutely nothing. We continued walking he and I, the distance between us never varying. Now came a crossing and what happened was that the man in front of me, made one leg shorter than the other and hopped down the steps from the raised pavement the way children do when they happily hop or skip as they go along. He got up onto the pavement on the other side simply by taking one long step. But he was scarcely up there before he lifted one leg up slightly and hopped on the other, once, quite high, and straightway again and again. At this point you might well take this sudden movement to be a trip or stumble if you persuaded yourself that it had been some trifling item, a fruit stone, slippery peel, something or other; and the strange thing was that the man himself appeared to believe in the existence of an obstacle because he turned round each time and looked towards the offending spot in that half-annoyed, half reproachful way that some people do at such moments. Once again something was shouting a warning to me to cross to the other side of the street but I didn't follow it and carried on behind this man directing all my attention to his legs. I must confess I felt curiously relieved when for the distance of twenty paces the hopping didn't recur; but as I raised my eyes I noticed that the man had encountered a further annoyance. The collar of his overcoat had turned upwards and though as he tussled first with one hand and then with both to fold it back down, he had no success. That's what happened. It didn't worry me. But straightaway to my boundless amazement I realised that in the hands of this man there were two kinds of movement: the one, furtive and swift with which he imperceptibly flipped the collar up, the other a lengthy, as it were, persistent, exaggerated, spelled-out movement which was supposed to effect a way of to folding it back down. This observation confused me to such an extent that two minutes passed before I recognised that in the man's neck, behind his hunched up overcoat and the nervous hand actions was the same bi-syllabic hopping that had quitted his legs only a short while ago. From this moment I was bound to him. I could tell that this hopping was wandering around in his body, that it was seeking here and there to break out. I understood his fear of people, and I myself began checking the passers-by to see if they had noticed anything. A cold stabbing pain ran down my spine as his legs suddenly gave a little twitching jump but no one had seen it and I imagined myself wanting to do a little stumble, should anyone be taking notice. That would certainly be a means of making those who were curious believe that there really had been a small inconspicuous object on the pavement that we had both happened to step on. But while I was pondering on how I might help, he himself had found a new and excellent solution. I forgot to say that he carried a walking cane. Now, it was an ordinary one made of dark wood with a simple curved handle. And in his anxious searching he had chanced on the idea of holding this cane first with one hand (for who knows what the other hand might be needed for) against his back right over the spine, pressing it firmly into the small of his back, pushing the curved end inside his collar so that he would feel it hard like a support behind his cervical vertebra and his first dorsal vertebra. That was a posture that wasn't conspicuous; at most a touch jaunty. It could be put down to the unexpected spring

day. It occurred to no one to turn round and look; now everything was going fine. Admirably. Admittedly, at the end of the crossing two hops came and went, two small half-suppressed hops that were of no account and the one jump that was actually visible was so skillfully appropriate (a hose was lying just there across the way) that there was nothing to be afraid of. Yes, everything was still going well; now and again the other hand too seized the cane and pressed it in more firmly and immediately the danger was once more overcome. There was nothing I could do, however, to prevent my anxiety growing. I knew that all the time he was walking and making an incessant effort to appear indifferent with his mind elsewhere, the terrible stabs of pain were accumulating inside his body; in me there was also the same anxiety that he felt with it growing and growing, and I saw how he clutched the cane to him when the shaking began inside him. The expression of his hands was so unrelenting and strong that I set all my hope in his willpower that was bound to be great. But what did a will count for here? The moment had come when his strength would be at an end; that couldn't be long now. And I who followed him with my heart beating strong lumped together as I do money what small amount of strength remained with me, and as I looked up at his hands I asked him if he would care to take it if he needed it.

I think he took it; I couldn't help it not being more.

On Place St-Michel there were many vehicles; pedestrians hurried to and fro. Often we were caught between two carriages and he would then take a breath and slacken a little as if he were taking a rest and there would be a little hopping and a little nodding. Perhaps that was the ruse employed by the captive illness to subdue him. His will had burst at a couple of places and the drop had left behind in his obsessional muscles a gentle, alluring stimulation and a compelling two-beat rhythm. But the cane was back in its place and the hands looked vicious and angry; it was all going well as we started to cross the bridge. Yes, going well. But then some unease came into his walk; first he ran two steps and then he stood. Stood. His left hand gently let go of the cane and rose so slowly that I could see it trembling up in the air. He tipped his hat back a little and drew his hand across his brow. He turned his head slightly and his uncomprehending gaze rolled on across sky, houses, water, and then he gave in. The cane was gone, he stretched out his arms as if he were wanting to fly up high and there burst from him a natural energy that bent him forward and pulled him back and made him nod and bow and flung dancing energy out of him and into the crowd. For there were already a great many people around him and I could no longer see him. What sense would there have been in going anywhere? I was empty. Like a blank sheet of paper I drifted along past the buildings and up the boulevard again.

[A draft of a letter:

I'm trying to write to you although there is actually nothing to say after a necessary parting. I'm trying anyway. I think I have to do this because I have seen the saint in the Panthéon, the lonely, sainted woman and the roof and the door and, inside, the lamp with its modest circle of light, and out there the sleeping city and the river and the distance in the moonlight. The saint watches over the sleeping city. I've wept. I've wept because it was all suddenly and so unexpectedly there. I stood before it and wept. I couldn't help it. I'm in Paris. The ones who hear this are pleased; most of them envy me. They're right. It's a great city, great, full of extraordinary temptations. For myself, I must admit that in certain respects I've succumbed to these temptations. I don't think there's any other way of saying it. I've succumbed to these temptations and this has brought about certain changes, if not in my character then assuredly in my view of the world, at any rate in my life. Under these influences a completely different perception of all things has formed in me, and there are now certain differences which, more than has been the case in the past, separate me off from other people. A changed world. A new life full of new meanings. At present I'm finding it rather difficult, because everything is new. I'm a beginner in my own relationships.

At some point might it be possible to go see the sea?

Yes, and just think: I was imagining that you could come. Would you have possibly been able to tell me if there was a doctor there? I forgot to find out about that. By the bye, I don't need that any more.

Do you remember Baudelaire's incredible poem 'Une Charogne'? Perhaps I understand it now. Except for the last stanza he was in the right. What should he do when that happened to him? It was his task to see in this terrifying existent thing, repulsive only in appearance, that which affects all existences. Choosing or refusing are out of the question. Do you think that Flaubert came to write 'Saint-Julien l'Hospitalier' by chance? It seems to me that it hinges on whether or not you can bring yourself to lie beside a leper and to warm him with the warmth of lovers' nights because nothing other than good can come of it.

Don't think for a moment that I'm suffering here from disappointments--quite the reverse. Sometimes I'm surprised how readily I gave up everything that was expected for what is real, even if it's terrible.

My God, if only something of this could be shared. But would it then exist? No, it comes only at the price of being on one's own.

The existence of the horrible in every atom of air. You breathe it in without being able to see it, but it condenses inside you, becomes hard, assumes pointed geometrical forms among your organs; for all the torments and horrors that happened at places of execution, in torture chambers, madhouses, operating rooms, under the arches of bridges in late autumn: all this has a tenacious permanence which endures for its own self and depends, jealous of everything else that exists, on its own terrible reality. People would like to be able to forget much of it but sleep runs its file softly over the furrows in their brains, though dreams can drive sleep away and retrace the pattern. And they wake up gasping and let the gleam of their candle dissolve in the darkness and drink the half-bright reassurance as if it were sugared water.

But oh on what a narrow ledge this reassurance stands. It needs only the smallest change and once again the vision of what was familiar and friendly goes beyond the outline that was so comforting only a moment ago and can be seen more clearly to be an edge of terror. Be on your guard against the light that makes space more hollow; don't look round to see whether behind you, as you sit up, perhaps a shadow is standing, like your master. Better, perhaps, if you had remained in the darkness and your unconfined heart had tried to be the heavy heart of all that is obscure. Now that you have pulled yourself together you can watch yourself cease in your hands; from time to time you can roughly sketch your own face. And inside you there is hardly any space and it almost calms you to think that anything very large can possibly be dwelling in those close confines, that even something tremendous must accordingly reduce its size in order to become an inner thing. But outside--outside there are no restraints, and when it grows out there it grows inside you as well, not in the vessels that are partly controlled by you or in the phlegm of your tranquil organs; it expands in your capillaries, sucked upwards into the outermost branches of your infinitely complex being. There it rises, there it towers over you, higher than your breath where you have fled as if to your last refuge. Ah, and where to then, where to then? Your heart drives you out of yourself, your heart pursues you and you are already almost outside yourself and can no longer get back in. Like a beetle that has been trodden on you ooze out of yourself and your little bit of outer hardness and adaptation are meaningless. O night without objects. O windows dulled to the outside. O doors carefully closed. O institutions passed on from time immemorial, believed in, never quite understood. O stillness on the staircase, stillness from the adjoining rooms. Stillness high up on the ceiling. O mother: O the one true you, you, who dealt with all this stillness back in my

childhood. You who took it all on yourself, saying 'Don't be afraid. It's me'. You who deep in the night had the courage to be this stillness for the one who was afraid, who was dying of fear. You strike a match and already the sound is you. And you hold it before you and say: 'It's me. Don't be afraid.' And slowly you put it down and there is no doubt: it's you, you are the light that reveals the familiar cherished things which are there for no other reason than that they are good, plain, simple. And whenever there's a sound of something in the wall, or on the floorboards, you simply smile, with that clear smile that lights all around you into the scared face that looks at you searchingly as if you knew all about the secrets. Is there any power to match yours among the rulers of the earth? See-- kings lie and stare, and the storyteller cannot divert them. As they lie blissfully close to the bosoms of their favourites, horror creeps over them and makes them tremble and lose all desire. But you come and keep the monstrosity behind you and completely blot it out, not like a curtain that can lift up here and there. No, it's as if you had overtaken it the moment the urgent call left my lips. As if you had arrived well ahead of all that might happen and had behind you only your hurrying here, your eternal pathway, the flight of your love.

The moulder of plaster casts whose shop I pass every day has hung two masks by his door. One is the face of the young woman who had drowned; they had taken a plaster cast of it in the morgue because it was beautiful, because it was smiling, because the smiling was deceptive, as if it knew. And lower down a man's knowing face*. This hard knot of firmly tightened meanings. This relentless, self-intensifying music that tried incessantly to condense and fall to earth. The countenance of him whose hearing a god had sealed; so that there might be no sound but his own, so that he wouldn't be swayed by sounds that were dulling and invalid. He in whom sound was clear and enduring; so that only the toneless senses might bring the world to him, silently, a tense world waiting, unready, for the creation of sound.

*mask of Beethoven

World-perfector: just as that which falls as rain over the land and upon the waters, drops down carelessly, and by chance, and joyfully heeding earthly laws again rises invisibly out of all things and rises and hovers and form the heavens; so our precipitations rose out of you and vaulted the earth with music. Your music: would that it were about the world, not only about us. Would that a pianoforte had been built for you in the Theban desert, and an angel had led you to that solitary instrument through desert mountain ranges where lie kings, courtesans, anchorites. He surely would have flung himself upwards out of fear that you would begin.

And then you would have poured forth, Purer-forth, unheard, giving back to the universe only what the universe can bear. Bedouin out hunting would have galloped by in the distance, superstitiously; but merchants would have flung themselves on the ground at the edges of your music as if you were a storm. Only a few solitary lions would have circle round you at night, afraid of themselves, menaced by their own agitated blood.

For who will retrieve you now from lecherous ears, who will drive them from the concert halls, the mercenaries with their sterile hearing that whores and never once conceives? Semen sprays out and they stay beneath it like prostitutes playing with it; or it falls like Onan's semen among all of them while they lie there in their unachieved gratification.

But, Master, if, somewhere, a virginal young man were to lay his wakeful ear beside your music, he would die of bliss, or he would carry infinity inside him and his fertilised brain would burst from sheer birth.

I don't underestimate it. I know it takes courage. But let's suppose

for a moment that someone had it, this courage de luxe*, to follow them in order to know once and for all (for who could forget it again or confuse it with something else) where they creep off to afterwards and what do they do with all the rest of their day, and if they sleep at night. This especially should be ascertained: whether or not they sleep. But it will need more than courage. For they don't come and go like other people whom could be followed without any trouble at all. They're here one moment and then gone, set down and then removed like toy soldiers. The places where you find them are a little remote but by no means hidden. The bushes give way, the path curves slightly round the lawn; that's where they are with a huge amount of clear space around them as if they were standing under a cloche roof. With their small and altogether unassuming build, you might take these inconspicuous men to be pensive walkers. But you are wrong. Do you see the left hand, how it it's trying to get at something in the slanted pocket of the old overcoat; how it finds it and takes it out and holds the little item clumsily and conspicuously up in the air? It doesn't take a minute before two or three birds appear, sparrows, hopping closer out of curiosity. And if the man manages to meet their very exact interpretation of immobility then there's no reason why they shouldn't come even closer. Eventually the first one flies up and whirls around nervously for a while level with the hand which is holding out (God knows) the crumbs from a piece of old sweet bread in its modest, manifestly sacrificial fingers. And the more people gather around him, at the appropriate distance, of course, the less he has in common with them. He stands there like a candle that's burning down and shines from all that's left of the wick and is warm and never flickers. And what the many small foolish birds can't work out is how he calls to people and how he draws them to him. If there were no onlookers and he was left standing there long enough, I'm sure that all at once an angel would come and, overcoming any hesitancy, eat a stale, cloying mouthful out of the withered hand. But now as always there are people getting in the way of that. They see to it that only birds come. They think that's ample and they claim that he expects nothing else. What else should this rain-soaked doll expect, stuck in the ground and leaning slightly like the ship's figurehead in the little garden at home. Does it also come to be standing like this because it had stood somewhere tilting towards its life, tilting to get the greatest movement? Does it now look so washed out because at one time it was painted in colours? Will you ask it?

*surfeit of courage

Only, don't ask the women anything when you see one feeding the birds. You could even follow them; they do it as they go along; it would be easy. But leave them. They don't know how it all came to be. All of a sudden they have a lot of bread in their bag and from beneath their thin shawls they take out large pieces that are moist from having been chewed a little. It makes them happy to know that their saliva is getting out into the world a little, that the little birds can fly around with the aftertaste when they're just as likely to forget it.

There I sat with your books, obstinate man*, and tried to think as others do who don't let you be in one whole but have taken a portion for themselves, one that satisfies them. For I still didn't understand fame, this public destruction of something that's still forming, whose worksite is broken into and stones are chucked about by the mob.

*Henrik Ibsen

Young man, wherever you are, there is something mounting in you that will cause you to shudder. There's advantage in the fact that no one knows you. And if those who think you are nothing contradict you, and if those you kept company with abandon you, and if they want to destroy you on account of your dear thoughts: what is this obvious danger, which keeps you strong within, compared with the cunning enmity of an approaching fame that will render you harmless by scattering you all around.

Ask no one to speak of you, not even contemptuously. And, as time

goes on and you notice how your name is being spread around, don't take it more seriously than anything else you hear from their mouths. Think: it's become a bad name; get rid of it; take a different one; any, so that God can call to you in the night. And hide it from everyone.

Loneliest and most remote of men, how they have caught up with you by your fame. How long ago is it when they were fundamentally opposed to you. And now they go around with you as if as if you were like them. And they take your words around with them in the cages of their darkness and reveal them in public places and tease them a little out of their safety. All your terrifying beasts of prey.

That was the first time I read what you had said, when the words escaped and fell desperately upon me in my desert. As desperate as you yourself were at the end, you whose path is still marked out wrongly on every map.

Like a crack this hopeless hyperbola of your path crosses the heavens, curving towards us only once before departing full of horror. What was it to you if a wife stays or leaves, and if one man is in the grip of vertigo and another of madness, and if the dead are alive and the living appear dead: what was it to you? It was so natural for you; you passed through as you would an antechamber and you didn't stop. But you lingered there, bent over, inside that place where what happens to us boils, condenses, and changes colour, inwardly. Further inward than anyone had ever been before; a door had burst open in front of you; now you were among the retorts lit by the fiery glow. You never let anyone accompany you there, mistrustful one, you would sit, noting distinctions between transitions.

And there--because revealing things was in your blood and not in how you looked or in how you spoke--completely on your own you took the immediate decision to magnify this tiny thing (that you had first become aware of as you peered closely through the glass) in such a way that it might be gigantic before all the thousands who saw it. Your theatre came into being. You couldn't wait for this almost spaceless life, compressed into drops by the centuries, to be discovered by different skills and become liable eventually to be stumbled upon by a few individuals who little by little come to share the same realization and finally demand to see for themselves these very grand rumours confirmed in a metaphor of the scene that they were presented with. You couldn't wait for this; you were there and you had to do what was hardly measurable: a feeling that rose about half a degree, the angle of deflection that you read from close up of an almost unencumbered will, the slight cloudiness in a drop of yearning and this nil colour-change in an atom of confidence: that is what you had to determine and keep known; for it was in such processes that life now, our life, was lived, the life that had glided into us, that had withdrawn so deeply inside us that it was scarcely possible any longer to make conjectures about it.

As you were then, a timelessly tragic poet, committed to revelation, you had to convert this capillary action at a stroke into the most convincing gestures, into the things that were most present. So you set about the unprecedentedly violent act of your work that more and more impatiently and more and more desperately sought equivalents among visible things for what you had seen inside. There was a rabbit there, an attic, a large room where someone was pacing the floor, a chink of glass in an adjoining room, a blaze outside the windows; there was the sun. There was a church and a rocky valley that was like a church. But that wasn't enough. Eventually towers had to be brought in, and the whole mountain range, and avalanches that bury landscapes and spill onto a stage cluttered with tangible things, for the sake of things that were incomprehensible. There was no more you could do. The two ends you had bent together shot apart, your crazy powers escaped from your supple wand and your work came to nothing.

Who could otherwise understand why in the end, stubborn as you were, you didn't want to leave the window? You wanted to see the passers-by, for the thought had struck you that one day you might be able to make

something of them, if you could make your mind up to get started.

Then, for the first time I realized that there was nothing one could say about a woman; I noticed that whenever they spoke of her there was a lot they omitted: as with other people they would provide names, descriptions, surroundings, places, objects, but they would, up to a certain point, list all sorts of things that they'd always known about her, and then stop softly and, so to speak, warily, as if they had come to that tentatively sketched boundary that enclosed her. What was she like? I would then ask. 'Blonde, a bit like you,' they would say and then start listing all sorts of things that they had always known about her but they repeatedly failed to give any accurate description of her; consequently I was unable by that means to picture her in my mind any more. I was actually able to see her only when Mama told me the story which I asked for again and again.

Every time she came to the scene with the dog invariably she would then close her eyes, put her cold fingers to her temples and with a kind of fervour frame between her hands a face that was shut off yet completely aglow. 'I saw it, Malte,' she would claim: 'I saw it.' She was already in her last years when I heard her say those words. It was when she no longer wanted to see anyone, a period when she had with her at all times, even when travelling, that little fine-meshed silver strainer through which she filtered everything she drank. She no longer took solid food, except, when she was alone, for biscuits or bread which she would crumble and eat crumb by crumb the way children eat crumbs. She was already obsessed by the fear of needles. The excuse she gave to others was simply to say: 'There's nothing else agrees with me any more, but that mustn't upset you. I feel marvellous on that.' She could suddenly turn towards me (for I had grown a little bit) and with a smile that required a great effort from her would say 'What an enormous amount of needles there are, Malte, they're lying around in so many places, and when you think how easily they fall out ... She would check herself as if to make a joke of it but the thought of all the badly fastened needles dropping down anywhere and at any moment shook her with horror.

When she talked about Ingeborg, however, she was aware of nothing else and was completely at ease: she spoke more loudly and she laughed when she remembered Ingeborg's laugh and that enabled one to see how beautiful Ingeborg had been. 'She made us all happy,' she said, 'your father as well, Malte, literally happy.' But when they said she was going to die, she seemed only a little ill, and we all went around hiding the fact. One day she sat up in bed and without thinking said to herself, like someone who wants to hear how a thought sounds out loud: 'You mustn't be so self-controlled; we all know what it is, and I can reassure you things are as good as they can be, I wish for nothing more.' Just imagine; she said: 'I don't want to go on any longer.'--she who made us all happy--'Will you come to understand that someday, Malte, when you're grown up? Think about it later, perhaps it will come into your mind. It would be good if there were someone who understood such matters.'

'Such matters' occupied Mama's thoughts when she was alone, and she was always alone during those last years. 'Of course I'll never solve it, Malte,' she would sometimes say with her characteristically bold smile that wasn't for anyone to see, its purpose being wholly fulfilled when it was smiled. 'But to think that no one ever feels tempted to find it out. If I were a man, yes--particularly if I were a man--I would think about it and in doing so I would follow proper procedures and keep my thoughts orderly from the beginning. Because there has to be a beginning, and if one could only grasp it it would be something to be going on with. Ah, Malte, we pass away like this and it seems to me that people are all distracted and preoccupied and don't pay proper attention as we go along. It's as if a shooting star were to fall and no one saw it and no one made a wish. Never forget to wish for something, Malte. One should never give up wishing. I don't believe there is any kind of fulfilment, but there are wishes that last a long time, a whole lifetime, so that one can't possibly wait

long enough for fulfilment.'

Mama had had Ingeborg's little secretaire brought up and placed in her room. I often found her in front of it, for I had her permission to enter her room just as I wished. The sound of my footstep was completely absorbed by the carpet but she felt my presence and held out one of her hands to me across the other shoulder. This hand was completely weightless and kissing it was almost like kissing the ivory crucifix that was passed to me at night before I went to sleep. She sat at this low secretaire, with its drop-leaf lid open as if she were seated at a musical instrument. 'There is so much sunlight in it,' she said, and it was true, the interior was remarkably bright with its old yellow lacquer on which flowers were painted, always a red one then a blue one. And where there were three together there was a violet one between them separating the other two. These colours and the green of the narrow horizontal arabesque border were as dim as the background was radiant, without actually being clear. This produced a strangely subdued proportionality of tones as regards their unexpressed inner affinities.

Mama pulled out the little drawers which were all empty. 'Ah, roses,' she said, inclining slightly into the melancholy fragrance that had not entirely disappeared. Regarding the secretaire she always imagined that out of the blue something might still found suddenly in a secret compartment that no one had thought of and that would open only by pressing some kind of hidden spring. 'All of a sudden it will shoot forward--you'll see,' she said in a voice that was earnest and anxious and she pulled hurriedly at all the drawers. But what papers had actually remained in the compartments she had carefully put together and locked them away without reading them. 'I wouldn't understand it, Malte; it's bound to be too hard for me.' It was her conviction that everything would be too hard for her. 'In life there are no classes for beginners; you're always required to do the most difficult things straightaway.' People assured me that she had been like this only since the terrible death of her sister, Countess Öllegaard Skeel, who had been set alight before a ball standing in front of a candle-lit mirror trying to rearrange the flowers in her hair. But of late it was Ingeborg who seemed the most difficult to comprehend.

And now I will write down the story just as Mama used to tell it when I asked her to. It was the middle of summer, on the Thursday following Ingeborg's funeral. From that part of the terrace where we were having tea one could see the gable of the family vault through the giant elm trees. The table was laid out as if there had never been one person more sitting there and we had also spread ourselves out quite a bit round it. And we had each brought something with us, a book or a workbasket, so that we were even a little cramped. Abelone (Mama's youngest sister) was pouring the tea and handing it out, and we were all busily handing round the tea things, except your grandfather who was looking from his armchair towards the house. It was around the time when the mail was expected to arrive, and it was most often Ingeborg who had brought it because she had to stay longer at the house seeing to the arrangements for dinner. In the weeks she was ill we had plenty of time to get out of the habit of expecting her for we knew very well she couldn't come. But on that afternoon, Malte, when she really could no longer come, she came. Perhaps we were to blame; perhaps we called her. For I remember that all at once I was sitting there making every effort to think what it could be that was so different now. Suddenly I found it impossible to say what it was; I had completely forgotten. I looked up and saw all the others turned towards the house, not so much in a special and obvious way as in a very calm and ordinary expectation. And I was about to--(it makes me feel cold thinking about it) but, God help me, I was just about to say 'Where is...?'--when Cavalier shot from beneath the table, like he always did, and ran to meet her. I saw it, Malte; I saw it. He ran towards her even though she wasn't coming. We realised he was running to meet her. Twice he looked round at us as if he were asking a question, then he tore away towards her as always, Malte, just as he always did and reached her; for he began to jump round and round, Malte, round something that wasn't there and then up at her to lick her, and up again. We heard him whimpering with joy, and from the way

he several times shot up in the air in quick succession, you might well have thought his jumping was to hide her from us. But suddenly there was a howl and he twisted himself away from his leap and fell backwards in the air with a curious awkwardness and then lay stretched out on the ground not moving at all. The servant came from the opposite side of the house with the letters. For a moment he hesitated. Obviously it was no easy thing to walk towards all our faces. Besides, your father had already signalled to him to stay. Your father, Malte, didn't like animals; nevertheless he went, slowly, it seemed to me, over to where the dog lay and bent over it. He said something to the servant, something short, monosyllabic. I saw how the servant rushed forward to lift Cavalier up. But your father took hold of the dog himself and carried it, as if he knew exactly to take it, into the house.

Once, when she was recounting what had happened, it had grown almost dark and I was on the point of asking Mama to tell us about the 'hand': at that moment I could have done it myself. I was already taking in breath to begin; but then it occurred to me how well I had understood the servant's not being able to approach their faces. And I was afraid, despite the darkness, of how Mama's face might look if it had seen what I had seen. I swiftly took another breath so it might appear as if that was all I had wanted to do. A few years later, after the curious night in the gallery at Urnekloster, I went around for days in the hope of confiding with Erik. But after our nocturnal conversation he again completely shut himself off from me; he avoided me; I believe he despised me. And it was precisely because of this I wanted to tell him about the 'hand'. I imagined I would regain his good opinion (and for some reason I desperately wanted this) if I could get him to understand that I really had experienced it. But Erik was so clever at keeping away from me that it never came about. And then, a short time later, we left. So this, oddly enough, is the first time I've told anyone (and after all, I'm doing it only for myself) about an event that now lies far back in my childhood.

I can tell how small I was at the time by the fact that I was kneeling on the armchair so that I could comfortably reach up to the table on which I was drawing. It was evening in our apartment in town, in winter, if I'm not mistaken. In my room the table stood between the windows, and there was no lamp in the room other than the one that shone on my pages and on Mademoiselle's book; for Mademoiselle was sitting beside me, her chair set back a little, reading. She was lost to the world when she was reading and I don't know if she was in her book; she could read for hours on end; she seldom turned a page and I had the impression that the pages kept getting fuller and fuller before her eyes as she looked words onto them, certain words that she needed that weren't there. That's how it seemed to me while I went on drawing. I drew slowly without anything very definite in my mind and whenever I was at a loss how to continue, I would look at what I'd done, tilting my head a little to the right; that was the quickest way for me to see what was still missing. There were officers on horseback riding into battle, or were in the midst of it and that was much simpler because all you needed to show was the smoke that engulfed everything. Mama certainly maintained at the time that I painted only islands--islands with large trees and a castle and a flight of steps and along the shoreline flowers, meant to be reflected in the water. But I think she was making that up; or it must have been later.

What is certain is that on that evening I was sketching a knight, a solitary, recognisable knight on a curiously clad horse. He needed so many colours that I often had to change crayons, but red was the one I favoured most and I kept reaching for it. Now I needed it once more; it rolled (I can still see it), it rolled diagonally across the illumined page to the edge of the table and before I could prevent anything it had gone past me and had disappeared. I needed it really urgently and it was very annoying having to climb down after it. Clumsy as I was it took rather a lot of organising to get down; my legs seemed much too long, I couldn't get them out from under me; I had been in a kneeling position too long and it had made my limbs numb. I didn't know what was part of me and what was part of the chair. Finally I did get down, somewhat befuddled, and found myself on

an animal skin that ran under the table and extended to the far wall. But then a fresh difficulty arose. Accustomed to the brightness above and still wholly excited by the colours on the white paper my eyes could make nothing of what might be under the table and the blackness seemed so final that I feared that I would knock against it. I relied therefore on my sense of touch and, kneeling, and supported by my left hand I combed with the other hand through the cool, shaggy rug which felt so nice and friendly; but there was no trace of a pencil. I imagined I was losing a great deal of time and was just about to call Mademoiselle and ask her to hold the lamp for me when I noticed that my involuntarily strained eyes bit by bit could make things out in the darkness. I could already distinguish the wall at the back with its light-coloured moulded skirting. The table legs helped me find my direction. I recognised first of all my own outspread hand rather like some aquatic creature moving down there all on its own searching the area around. I watched it, I still recall, almost with curiosity; it seemed to me as if it knew things I'd never taught it; as it groped around down there so sure of itself making movements I'd never seen it make. I followed its advance, it interested me; I was prepared for anything. But how could I have been expected to make instant sense of another hand coming to meet it out of the wall—a larger and unusually thin hand such as I had never seen before. Searching in a similar manner it approached from the other side and both of the outspread hands moved blindly towards each other. My curiosity was still not satisfied but suddenly it ended and only horror was left. I I felt that one of the hands belonged to me and that it was letting itself in for something that could not be remedied. Summoning all the command that I had over it I stopped it and pulled it palm down slowly back to me without taking my eyes off the other one which continued with its searching. I could see that it wasn't going to stop, and I can't say how I managed to get up again. I sat very deep in the armchair, my teeth were chattering and my face was so drained of blood it felt as if the blue had left my eyes. 'Mademoiselle--', I wanted to say and couldn't but she was shocked herself, she flung her book aside and knelt beside the armchair and called my name. I think she shook me. But I was completely conscious. I swallowed once or twice; for now I wanted to tell her about it.

But how? I made an indescribable effort to pull myself together but there was no way I could express myself well enough for someone to understand. If there were words for an event such as this then I was too small to know what they were. And suddenly I was gripped by the fear that, notwithstanding my age, those words would be there all at once and what appeared to me to be more dreadful than anything else was then having to say them. To undergo once again what it had really been like down there, or else to modify my account from the beginning; to hear myself admitting it--no, I had no strength left for that.

It's imagination, of course, if I now claim that at the time I had already felt that something had come into my life, directly into what was mine, and that I would have to go round with it for ever and ever. I can see myself lying in my little cot, not yet asleep and somehow vaguely foreseeing that life would be like that: full of nothing but very odd things that are meant for one person only and not to be passed on. What is certain is that bit by bit a sad and heavy pride arose in me. I imagined how one might go around full of inner things and be silent. I experienced an impetuous sympathy towards grown-ups; I admired them and resolved to tell them that I admired them. I resolved to say so to Mademoiselle at the next opportunity.

And then along came one of those illnesses that was intent on showing me that this wasn't my first personal experience. The fever dug around in me and from the very depths brought to light experiences, images, facts that I had no knowledge of; I lay there overwhelmed by my own self and waited for the moment when I would be told to put all those things back inside me precisely, layer by layer, row by row. I began, but it grew under my hands, it baulked, it was much too much. Then I was seized with rage and I chucked everything into me in heapfuls and pressed it together, but I couldn't close myself again. And then I

screamed, half-open as I was, I screamed and screamed. And when I began to look outside myself they had already been standing round my bed for a long time, holding my hands, and there was a candle there and their large shadows moved behind them. And my father ordered me to say what the matter was. The order was delivered in a low friendly voice but it was an order all the same. And he became impatient when I didn't answer.

Mama never came at night--, or, rather, she came just the once. I had been screaming and screaming. Mademoiselle had come and Sieversen, the housekeeper, and George, the coachman; but it did no good. And so, finally, they'd sent the coach for my parents who were at a great ball at the residence of the Crown Prince, I believe. And all at once I heard the coach coming into the courtyard and I became quiet and sat up and looked towards the door. There was a faint swishing sound in the adjoining rooms and Mama entered in her grand court-gown, of which she was oblivious, and almost ran forward letting her white fur fall behind her and took me in her bare arms. Amazed and delighted as never before, I ran my hand over her hair and her small smooth face and the cold jewels at her ears and the silk at the edge of her shoulders which smelled of flowers. And we remained like that and wept tenderly and kissed each other until we felt that father was there and that we had to separate. 'He has a high fever,' I heard Mama say timidly and father reached for my hand and counted my pulse. He was wearing the uniform of the Master of the Hunt with its beautiful broad blue watered-silk ribbon of the Order of the Elephant. 'What nonsense to send for us,' he said, speaking into the room without looking at me. They had promised to go back if it was nothing serious. And serious it was not. On my bed cover I found Mama's dance card and some white camellias which I had never seen before and when I'd felt how cool they were I placed them on my eyes.

When you have illnesses like that you find that afternoons drag on and on. In the morning after a bad night you can always go back to sleep and the next time you awake you think it's early but it's afternoon, and it stays afternoon and it doesn't stop being afternoon. So you lie in the newly tidied bed and perhaps grow a little in your joints and are too tired to imagine anything at all. As you might guess, the taste of apple sauce lasted a long time if you somehow construed it so, in spite of yourself, and let its clean tartness circulate instead of thoughts. Later with your strength returned and with pillows behind you propping you up you could sit and play with your soldiers; but they topple over so easily on the slanting bed-tray and its always all of them together; and you are not yet sufficiently back inside life to begin all over again. Suddenly it was too much and you begged them to take everything away as fast as they can and it was good to see your two hands again a little bit further along the cleared bedcover.

There were times when Mama came and read me fairy stories for half an hour (for proper long readings there was Sieversen), but it wasn't on account of the stories. For we agreed that we didn't like fairy stories. We had a different idea about what was wonderful. We found that what we marvelled at most was when everything went naturally. We didn't think much of flying through the air. Fairies disappointed us; as for transformations into something else we didn't expect more than a very superficial change. Nevertheless we did read a little, so as to appear occupied; we didn't appreciate it when anyone came in and we had to explain what we were doing; with father especially we were exaggeratedly frank.

Only when we were quite sure of not being disturbed and it was growing dark outside it could happen that we would devote ourselves to memories we had in common which seemed old to both of us. We smiled over them for we had both since grown up. We were reminded that there was a time when Mama wished I was a little girl and not this boy I now decidedly was. Somehow I had guessed this and I had sometimes thought of knocking at Mama's door in the afternoon. Then, when she asked who was there I would say I would happily cry from outside 'Sophie', making my little voice sound so dainty that it tickled my throat. And when I entered (dressed in the little house-dress with the sleeves

rolled up that I wore anyway) I really was Sophie, Mama's little Sophie, busying herself about the house, her hair plaited by Mama so that there could be no mistaking her for that naughty Malte, should he ever return. That would definitely not be welcome. His absence was as agreeable to Mama as to Sophie, and their conversations (in which Sophie always spoke in the same high-pitched voice) mainly consisted in listing Malte's bad habits and complaining about him. 'Oh dear, that Malte,' Mama would sigh, and Sophie had lots of things to tell regarding the misdeeds of boys in general; it was as if she knew heaps of them.

In the midst of such reminiscences Mama would suddenly say: 'I would love to know what has become of Sophie.' The way things were, Malte, of course, couldn't tell her anything. But when Mama suggested that she was certainly dead, he would stubbornly contradict her and implore her not to believe it even though there was little that could be proved to the contrary.

When I think about it now I find it surprising that time and again I managed to come back completely from the world land of these fevers and find myself in an exceedingly communal way of life where each person wanted the assurances of fellow-feeling with people one knew and where one took great care with shared understandings. When something was expected, it either came or it didn't; there was no third possibility. There were things that were sad, sad once and for all; there were pleasant things and a whole lot of things that were incidental. And if a joy was in store for, one knew it was a joy and that one had to behave accordingly. Basically it was all very simple and once you understood that, it took care of itself. Absolutely everything fell within these agreed boundaries: the long, monotonous school hours when it was summer outside; the walks that one had to talk about later in French; the visitors one was summoned to meet who thought one comical, just when one was feeling sad, and laughed at one as they would at the sorrowful expressions of certain birds which have no other. And the birthdays, of course, to which were invited children one hardly knew, embarrassed children who in turn made one embarrassed, or the bold ones who scratched one's face and smashed things one had just been presented with and then suddenly leave, having emptied all boxes and drawers and left it all in piles. But when one played by oneself, as was always the case with me, it could happen that one unexpectedly stepped beyond this agreed and on the whole harmless world and into a set of circumstances that were completely different and in no way foreseeable.

Mademoiselle was given to having migraine attacks which came with tremendous severity; those were the days when I was hard to find. I know that whenever father happened to ask for me, the coachman would be sent into the park to look, and I wasn't there. From one of the upper guest-rooms I could see him running out and calling my name at the entrance to the long avenue. These guest rooms ran side by side under the gables at Ulsgaard and as we only very seldom had house guests these rooms almost always stood empty. Next to them was that large corner room that had such a powerful attraction for me. There was nothing inside apart from an old bust representing Admiral Juel, I think, but the walls were lined all round with dark grey wardrobes, with the result that the window had had to be installed in the vacant whitened space above them. I had found a key in one of the wardrobe doors and it fitted all the others. So, in a short time, I had investigated every one: chamberlains' coats from the eighteenth century, which were quite cold with their interwoven threads of silver and the beautifully embroidered waistcoats that complemented them; the official costume of the Order of Danneborg and Elephant Orders, so rich and elaborate and the linings so soft to the touch that at first you took them to be women's clothes. Then there were the real gowns, each on its own, filled out by its hidden hoops and hanging there like marionettes from some over-sized puppet show, so unquestionably out of date, as if their absent heads were being used for something else. But there were wardrobes that were dark when you opened them, dark with uniforms which buttoned to the top and looked more worn than all the

others, as well as looking as if they actually wished they had not been preserved.

No one will find it amazing that I pulled all of them out and leant them into the light; that I held this one and that one to me or around me; that I hurriedly put on a costume that could be my size more or less and, curious and excited, I ran into the next guest room and stood in front of the narrow pier-mirror made of assorted pieces of green glass. Ah, how I trembled, being there; and how thrilling it was to be trembling so. When something drew nearer out of the dimness more slowly than me, the mirror didn't, so to speak, believe it and didn't want, sleepy as it was, to repeat immediately what I had told it. But in the end, of course, it had to. And what was there now was something unexpected, unknown, something quite different from what I had imagined, something sudden, independent; I swiftly ran my eye over it to recognise myself a moment later, not without a certain irony which came within a hairsbreadth of ruining all my pleasure. But if I began to say things, to bow; if I walked away turning and giving myself a vague kind of wave; if I also walked back in a lively and determined fashion, then imagination was on my side for as long as I pleased.

That was the time I got to know the influence that can come directly from a particular costume. No sooner had I donned one of them when I was forced to admit that it had me in its power; that it dictated my movements, the expression of my face, everything that came into my mind. My hand that the lace cuff kept falling across was definitely not my normal hand; it moved like an actor; I would say it even watched itself moving, however exaggerated that sounds. In the meantime all this feigning never went so far as to make me feel a stranger to myself; on the contrary, the more variations I gave of myself the more convinced of myself I became. I grew bolder and bolder. I hurled myself higher and higher, for my skill in catching myself was beyond all doubt. I didn't notice the temptation that was growing rapidly in this self assurance. My undoing didn't come about until the last wardrobe. I had never been able to open it before, but one day the lock yielded, and in place of known outfits I was afforded all sorts of things for masquerades. My cheeks flushed at the whole phantastical idea. I couldn't begin to count all that was there. Apart from a bautta* that I remember there were dominos in several colours, there were ladies's skirts that gave a light tinkling sound from the coins that were sewn onto them; there were pierrot costumes which seemed silly to me, and pleated Turkish pants and Persian fezzes out of which slipped small bags of camphor, and there were coronets with stupid bland-looking stones. I rather despised all of this; it came from such a feeble unreality and hung there so flayed, and pathetically flopped together whenever they were dragged out into the light. What threw me into a frenzy were the roomy cloaks, the scarves, the veils, all those wide, unused, yielding fabrics that were so soft and caressing or were so slippery I could hardly keep hold of them, or so light they flew past me like a breeze, or were simply heavy beneath their whole weight. In them I first saw possibilities that were really free and infinitely variable: being a slave-girl about to be sold, or Joan of Arc, or an old king, or a sorcerer, all of these were now possible, especially since there were masks there as well, large threatening or astonished faces with genuine beards and thick or raised-high eyebrows. I had never seen masks before, but I could tell straightaway that masks should exist. I couldn't help laughing at the thought that we had a dog that looked as if it wore one. I pictured his warm eyes that always seemed to be looking out from behind and into its own hairy face. I was still laughing as I put the clothes on and I entirely forgot what I was supposed to be. Now this was new and exciting, leaving my decision until I was in front of the mirror. The face I tied on had a curious hollow smell; it was a tight fit but I was able to see through it comfortably, and it was only then I began choosing all kinds of fabrics and winding them round my head in the shape of a turban, so that the edge of the mask, which reached down into an enormous yellow cloak, was almost covered over both on top and at the sides. Finally, when I could add nothing more, I considered myself amply disguised. I also seized a large staff and let it walk beside me at arm's length and hauled myself thus into the guest room and up to the mirror.

It was really magnificent, exceeding all expectations. The mirror gave it back to me instantly, it was too convincing. It wouldn't have been at all necessary to move much; the apparition was perfect, even though it did nothing. But my aim was to learn what I really was, so I turned myself round a little and finally lifted up both arms in large movements like a sorcerer, which I immediately saw was the only right thing to do. However, just at this solemn moment I heard, quite near to me and muffled by my disguise, various noises sounding together; I was very frightened; I lost sight of the Being over in the mirror and I was badly upset when I became aware that I'd knocked over a small round table with heaven knows what on it, probably very fragile objects. I bent down as best I could and found my worst fears confirmed; it looked as if everything had broken in two. The two superfluous green-violet porcelain parrots were, of course, each in its own spiteful way, smashed to pieces. Sweets had rolled out of a jar and they had the silken look of pupating insects; the lid had been flung some distance away; I could only see half of it, anyway, the rest of it was nowhere to be seen. What annoyed me most, however, was a perfume bottle that had smashed into a thousand tiny fragments and from which had spurted the remains of some oldish essence or some such resulting in the formation on the parquet floor of a stain shaped like a very repulsive physiognomy. I dried it only got darker and more unpleasant. I was absolutely desperate. I got up and searched for anything I could remedy the situation with. But there was nothing to be found. Also I was so hampered in my seeing and moving that rage mounted in me against the ridiculous state I was in: it was beyond my comprehension. I tugged on everything but it only made my clothes tighter. The strings of the cloak were strangling me and the stuff on my head pressed down as if there were more and more of it. At the same time the air had become muggy as if the o up quickly using something or other that was hanging from me, but it oldish vapour from the perfume bottle had misted things.

Hot and furious I dashed in front of the mirror and with some anxiety on account of the mask I saw my hands working away. But that's just what the mirror had wanted. Its moment of vengeance had come. While I was straining, with an increasing feeling of restriction, to somehow squeeze myself out of my disguise, the mirror compelled me, I don't know what with, to look up and it dictated to me an image, no, something real, an alien, incomprehensible, monstrous reality that permeated me against my will, for now it was the stronger of us and I was the mirror. I stared at this large, terrifying, unknown something and it seemed incredible that I was alone with it. But at the very moment I thought the worst had happened: my mind emptied, I wasn't there. For a second I had an indescribable achingly futile longing for myself because there was then only him, there was nothing but him.

I ran off but now it was he who was running. He bumped into everything. He wasn't acquainted with the house, he didn't know where to go. He tumbled down a flight of stairs, he fell over someone coming along the passage who broke free screaming. A door opened, several people came out. Ah how good to see recognisable faces. It was Sieversen, dear kind Sieversen, and the chambermaid and the servant who looked after the silverware; now things would be resolved. But they didn't leap forward and save me; their cruelty knew no bounds. They stood there and laughed; my God, they could stand there and laugh. I was crying but the mask wouldn't let my tears escape, inside they ran across my face and dried immediately, and ran again and dried. And eventually I knelt down in front of them, as no one had ever done, I knelt and lifted up my hands to them and implored them: 'Get me out, if you still can and keep me with you,' but they didn't hear; I had no voice left.

To her dying day Sieversen would tell how I had sunk to the floor and how they had gone on laughing thinking it was called for. They'd got used to my ways. But then I just went on lying there and hadn't answered. And the horror when they eventually discovered that I was unconscious, lying there like one of the pieces of cloth, simply a piece of cloth.

Time passed incredibly and all at once it was time again for Dr. Jespersen, the Pastor, to be invited. It was a tedious and drawn out breakfast for all concerned. Accustomed to the deep piety of the area around, and of its deference to him, he was completely out place at our house; you could say he was lying on dry land gasping. The gill-breathing system he had developed in himself was labouring; bubbles were showing and the whole business was not without its dangers. If one wished to be exact, fabrics of conversation just weren't there; they were remaindered at unbelievable prices: liquidation of all stock. When he came to our house Dr. Jespersen had to limit himself to being a kind of private individual, but that was exactly what he had never been. He had been employed, as far back as he could remember, as a soul expert. For him the soul was a public institution of which he was a representative and he saw to it that he was never off duty, not even in regard to his wife, 'his modest, faithful Rebecca, made blessed by bearing children,' as Lavater put it on a different occasion.

[Written on the margin of the MS:

Incidentally, concerning my father: his position in regard to God was one of absolute correctness and faultless courtesy. In church it sometimes seemed to me as if he were God's Master of the Hunt, standing there patiently, and then bowing his head. On the other hand, in Mama's eyes it was almost a violation that anyone's relationship to God could be based on politeness. If her religion had had customs and rituals that were clear and detailed it would have been bliss to her to be on her knees for hours on end and to prostrate herself and make the sign of the cross with large movements on and around her breast and shoulders. She didn't actually teach me to pray, but it was a comfort for her that I liked to kneel and put my hands together, sometimes with my fingers interlaced, sometimes with my fingers upright, whichever seemed to me to be particularly expressive. Quite a bit of the time I was left in peace and early on I went through a number of phases in my development which I didn't connect with God until much later at a time when I was in despair; the connection was made with such ferocity that it took shape and shattered almost at the same instant. Clearly I needed to begin again right from the beginning. And for this beginning I sometimes thought that I had need of Mama, though it was better, of course to experience it alone. Also by then she had been dead for a long time.]

Sitting across from Dr. Jespersen Mama could be almost boisterous. She would repeatedly get into conversation with him which he took seriously and when he then heard himself talking she reckoned she'd done enough and suddenly forgot him, as if he'd already gone. 'How can he,' she said sometimes, 'drive around and go into people's homes just as they were dying.'

He even came to her when that very occasion arose, but she was unable to see. Her senses were giving way one after the other, starting with her sight. It was in autumn, we should have been moving back to town, but just then she fell ill, or rather, she immediately began to die, slowly and drearily to wither over the the whole surface of her body. The doctors came and on one particular day they were all there together and were everywhere in the house. For a few hours it was as if it belonged to the Privy Counsellor and his assistants and as if we no longer had any say. But straightway after that they all lost interest and only came one at a time as if out of simple courtesy, and to smoke a cigar and drink a glass of port wine. And in the meantime Mama died.

All we were waiting for was Mama's only brother, Count Christian Brahe, who, it will be recalled, had for a while served in the Turkish army, where he, we had always been given to understand, had gained great distinction. He arrived one morning in the company of an exotic-looking servant and I was astonished to see that he was taller than my father and apparently older as well. The two men immediately exchanged a few words, which, I assumed, related to Mama. There was a pause. Then my father said, 'She is very disfigured.' I didn't

understand this expression, but it made me shudder when I heard it. I had the impression that my father also had had to steel himself before he pronounced the words. But it in making this admission it was probably his pride above all that suffered.

Not until several years later did I hear further talk of Count Christian. It was at Urnekloster and it was from Mathilde Brahe who was fond of speaking of him. I'm sure, however, that she rather wilfully embellished the odd episode, for my uncle's life, which the public and even our family got to know of only through rumours that he never refuted, was entirely open to interpretation. Urnekloster is now in his possession. But no one knows if he occupies it. Perhaps he's still travelling as he used to; perhaps news of his death is on its way here from some far flung part of the world, written by his foreign servant in bad English or in some or other unknown tongue. Or perhaps this man will give no sign of himself if one day he's left on his own. Perhaps both of them disappeared long ago and are on the passenger list of a missing ship under names that weren't their own.

I admit that at Urnekloster in those days whenever a coach drove up I always expected to see him step out and my heart would beat in a special kind of way. Mathilde Brahe maintained that that was how he would come, that it would be so like him to suddenly be there when when you least thought it likely. He never did come but my vivid imagination was occupied with him for weeks; I had the feeling that we owed it to each other to have a link between us and I would have loved to know something of his true nature.

Meanwhile my interest soon shifted and as a result of certain events it became wholly centred on Christine Brahe, though I didn't trouble myself, oddly enough, to acquaint myself with her circumstances. On the other hand I was worried by the thought as to whether or not there was likely to be a picture of her in the gallery that I could look at. And the desire to find out grew so obsessively and tormentingly that for several nights I got no sleep, until, entirely unexpectedly, there came the night when, God knows why, I got out of bed and went upstairs with my candle, which appeared to be frightened.

For my part, I had no thought of fear. Anyway, I wasn't thinking, I simply went. The high doors yielded so playfully before me and above me; the rooms I went through kept themselves very quiet. And finally from a waft from far below I noted that I'd entered the gallery. On the right side I could feel the windows and the night; on the left had to be the pictures. I lifted my candle as high as I could. Yes: there were the pictures.

At first I set about looking only for women's portraits but then I quickly spotted one and then another that resembled certain ones hanging at Ulsgaard, and when I shone the light from below they moved and wanted to come to it; it seemed heartless not to at least to wait. Again and again there was Christian IV with his beautiful hair braided en cadette* against the slow curve of his cheek. There were women, presumably his wives, of whom I only knew Kirstine Munk; and suddenly Mistress Frau Ellen Marsvin was looking at me, wary in her widow's attire and with the same string of pearls on the brim of her tall hat. There were King Christian's children: ever new ones from new wives, the 'incomparable' Eleonore on a white palfrey, in her most glittering period before her affliction. The Gyldenløves: Hans Ulrik who the women in Spain thought painted his face, so filled with blood was he, and Ulrik Christian, once seen never forgotten. And almost all the Ulfelds. And this one here with one eye painted over black could well be Henrik Holck, who at the age of thirty-three was Imperial Count and Field Marshal, and it happened like this: on his way to the demoiselle Hilleborg Krafse, it came to him in a dream that instead of a bride he was given a naked sword and he took this to heart and turned back and began his short, dauntless career that was brought to an end by the plague. I knew them all. We also had at Ulsgaard the ambassadors to the Congress of Nimwegen, who bore a slight resemblance to one another because they had been painted all at the same time, each with the thin, trimmed eyebrow of a moustache above the sensual, almost eye-like mouth. That I recognised Duke Ulrich goes without saying, and Otte

Brahe and Claus Daa and Sten Rosensparre, the last of his line; for I had seen paintings of them all in the great hall at Ulsgaard or had found them portrayed in old folders of copper-plate engravings.

*strands of hair drawn back each side and
tied at the back of the neck.

But there many there I had never seen; and in all only few women, but there were children. My arm had long since grown tired and was trembling, but time and again I lifted the candle to look at the children. I understood them, these little girls who carried a bird on their hand and had forgotten it. Sometimes there was a small dog at their feet, or a ball lying there and on the table next to them there were fruits and flowers; and hanging on a column behind them, small and just for the occasion, the coat of arms of the Grubbes or the Billes or the Rosenkrantz. So many things had been stationed round them it was as if there was a great deal to compensate for. But they simply stood there in their fine clothes and waited. I couldn't help thinking about the women and about Christine Brahe, and I wondered if I would recognise her.

I was about to run quickly right to the far end and look at them as I walked back, but suddenly I bumped against something. I turned round with such a start that Erik jumped back and whispered: 'Watch out with that candle of yours.'

'You here?' I said breathlessly, and I couldn't make out whether this was a good thing for me or a very bad one. He just laughed and I had no notion of what to do next. My candle flickered and I couldn't rightly make out the expression on his face. Most probably his being there didn't bode at all well. But then, drawing closer he said: 'Her picture isn't here; we're still looking for it upstairs.' Keeping his voice low he used his one movable eye to somehow indicate upwards. I took it he meant the attic. But all of a sudden a curious idea came into my mind.

'We?' I asked. 'Is she upstairs then?'

'Yes', he nodded and stood really close.

'And she's looking with you?'

'Yes, we're both looking.'

'Then the picture has been put away somewhere?'

'Yes, just imagine,' he said indignantly. But I couldn't really understand what she wanted it for.

'She wants to see it for herself,' he whispered, coming even closer.

'Oh, I see,' I said, as if I understood. Then he blew out the candle.

I saw how he stretched forward into the brightness, his eyebrows raised high. Then there was darkness. I instinctively stepped back.

'What are you doing?' I cried out in a parched voice, trying to keep myself controlled. He leapt towards me and clung to my arm, giggling.

'What is it?' I shouted at him trying to shake him off; but he held on tightly. I couldn't prevent him putting his arm round my neck.

'Shall I tell you?' he hissed and a little saliva sprayed into my ear.

'Yes, yes, quickly.'

I didn't know what I was saying. He was holding me in a complete embrace and stretching up.

'I've brought her a mirror,' he said, and giggled again.

'A mirror?'

'Yes, because her picture's not there.'

'No, no,' I uttered.

He suddenly pulled me a little bit closer to the window and pinched my upper arm so sharply that I let out a yell.

'She's not in it,' he breathed into my ear.

Automatically I pushed him away; something on him cracked, it seemed to me as if I'd broken him.

'Come on, come on,' and now it was my turn to laugh, 'Not in it, not in what?'

'You're stupid,' he replied angrily, no longer whispering. He pitched his voice lower as if he were now starting on a new and unused part of it. 'One is either in it,' he pronounced with a precocious sternness, 'in which case one can't be here, or if one is here, one can't be in it.'

'Naturally,' I answered promptly, without thinking. I was afraid he might go off and leave me on my own. I even grabbed at him.

'Shall we be friends?' I proposed. He wanted to be asked.

'It's all the same to me,' he said jauntily.

I was trying to begin a friendship with him but I didn't dare put my arm round him.

'Dear Erik,' was all I could utter and I just touched him lightly somewhere. I was suddenly very tired. I looked around. I no longer understood how I'd got here and why I wasn't afraid. I didn't rightly know where the windows and pictures were. And when we were leaving he had to show me the way.

'They won't hurt you,' he assured me magnanimously, and giggled again.

Dear, dear Erik; perhaps you have been, after all, my only friend. For I've never had one. It's a pity you didn't care about friendship. There are many things I would have loved telling you about. Perhaps we would have got along. One can never know. I remember that your portrait was being painted at that time. Grandfather had got someone to come and paint you. An hour every morning. I can't recall what the painter looked like, his name escapes me, though Mathilde Brahe was forever repeating it.

Did he see you as I see you? You wore a suit of heliotrope-coloured velvet. Mathilde Brahe was in raptures about that suit. But that doesn't matter now. I would simply like to know if he really saw you. Let's accept that he was a proper painter. Let's accept that it didn't occur to him that you might die before he'd finished, that he didn't regard the matter in any sentimental way at all; that he simply worked; that the dissimilarity of your two brown eyes delighted him; that he was not for one moment embarrassed by the stationary one; that he had the tact not to lay on the table by your hand anything which to a small degree was supporting it. Let's accept anything else that is still necessary, and let's validate it: the portrait that's in the gallery at Urnekloster, your portrait, the last one there.

(And when people are leaving, and they've seen them all, there is still a little boy there. One moment: who is that? A Brahe. Do you see the silver pole on the black field and the peacock feathers? It even gives the name: Erik Brahe. Wasn't there an Erik Brahe who was executed? Of course, it's pretty well known. But this can't have anything to do with that. This boy died when he was still a boy, whenever that was. Can't you see that?)

Whenever anyone paid a visit and Erik was sent for, Fräulein Mathilde Brahe always asserted that it was altogether amazing how closely he resembled the old Countess Brahe, my grandmother. She was said to have been a great lady. I didn't know her. On the other hand I very well remember my father's mother, the real mistress of Ulsgaard. For it seemed that she always remained such, in that she especially resented Mama's coming into the house as the wife of the Master of the Hunt. From that moment on, however, she continually acted in a retiring manner and referred servants to Mama for trivial things while she quietly made the decisions and gave the instructions relating to important matters without being accountable to a single soul. Mama, I believe, would not have had it any other way. She was so little suited to overseeing a large house; she completely lacked the ability to differentiate between what was irrelevant and what was important. The moment she was told anything it filled her whole mind and she forgot everything else even though it was still there. She never complained about her mother-in-law. And to whom could she have complained? Father was an extremely respectful son and grandfather always had little to say.

Frau Margarete Brahe had, as far back as I can remember, always been a tall, unapproachable old lady. I can't imagine her in any other way than as being much older than the Chamberlain. She lived her life in our midst without giving a thought to anyone. She didn't depend on any of us and always had with her a kind of lady's companion, an ageing Countess Oxe, whom, through some favour or other, she had placed under

a measureless obligation. It must have been a notable exception because performing good deeds was not her style. Children she did not like, and animals weren't allowed near her. I don't know if there was anything she did like. It was said that as a very young girl she had been betrothed to the handsome Felix Lichnowski whose life was brought to such a horrible end at Frankfurt. In point of fact, after her death they found she'd kept a portrait of the Prince, which, if I'm not mistaken, they returned to his family. I see now that over the years, perhaps, and as a result of the kind of retired country life that had evolved at Ulsgaard, she had foregone another brilliant life that had been in store for her. It's difficult to say whether she mourned it or not. Perhaps she scorned the opportunity that didn't come along, the opportunity to live a life that called for skill and talent. She had taken all of this so deeply into herself and had attached protective coverings to it, a mass of hard, slightly metallic, gleaming coverings, whose topmost surface could on any occasion be relied upon to present a cool, new look. Admittedly now and then she revealed through a naïve impatience that not enough attention was being paid to her; during my time there, when we were at table, she could suddenly make a complicated show of swallowing the wrong way in order to secure everyone's sympathy and, at least for a moment or two, allow her to appear as sensational and thrilling as she would like to have been in the great world. I suspect, however, that my father was the only one who took these all too often upsets seriously. Leaning politely forward across the table he would watch her, and immediately one could feel him mentally offering her his own well behaved windpipe and placing it entirely at her disposal. The Chamberlain, of course, had likewise also stopped eating. He took a little sip of his wine and kept his own counsel.

At table he had only once held fast to his own opinion as opposed to his wife's. That was long ago, yet the story was still retold maliciously and in secret; almost everywhere there was someone who hadn't heard it. Time was, they say when the Chamberlain's wife would work herself into a state about wine stains getting into the tablecloth through someone's clumsiness; any such stain, no matter how caused, did not escape her notice and drew from her the severest rebuke, not to say exposure. This had happened even when several famous guests were present. A few innocent stains which she referred to in exaggerated terms were the object of her derisive accusations, and though grandfather did his level best by means of little signs and open banter, she stubbornly persisted with her reproaches--mind you, she was to be cut off in mid-sentence. What in fact happened was something that had never been done before and was completely inconceivable. The Chamberlain had called for the red wine, which had just been passed round, and he was now paying very close attention to filling his own glass. The only thing was that, strange to tell, he didn't stop pouring even though the glass had long been full, but, under a growing silence, slowly and carefully he went on pouring until Mama, who was never one to hold back, burst out laughing, and with her laughter set the whole matter to rights. Now everybody joined in, relieved, and the Chamberlain looked up and handed the bottle to the servant.

Later another idiosyncrasy got the better of my grandmother. She couldn't bear for anyone in the house to get sick. Once, when the cook injured herself my grandmother happened to see her with her hand bandaged, and she maintained that the whole house smelt of iodoform, and it was hard convincing her that the woman couldn't be dismissed on that account. She didn't want to be reminded of being ill. If anyone were careless enough in her presence to show the slightest signs of being unwell, she regarded it as nothing short of a personal insult and would hold it against them for a long time.

The autumn mama died, the Chamberlain's wife shut herself and Sophie off completely, keeping to her rooms and breaking off all contact with us. Not even her son was admitted. It's certainly true that this death occurred at a most inappropriate time. Rooms were cold, stoves smoked, and mice had got back into the house; no place was safe from them. But it was more than that. Mistress Margarete Brigge was outraged by the fact that Mama was dying; by the fact that there was an item on the

agenda that she refused to talk about; that the young wife presumed to take precedence over her as she herself imagined dying at some time that had not yet been determined. For it often passed through her mind that she would have to die. But she didn't want to be rushed. She would die, of course, when it suited her, and after that they would all be free to follow on behind her, if they were in such a tearing hurry.

She never quite forgave us for Mama's death. As it was, she aged very quickly over the following winter. When she walked she was as tall as ever, but seated she would slump, and she was getting more and more hard of hearing. You could sit and stare hard at her for hours together and she would be unaware of you. She was somewhere within herself; only seldom and for only a few moments did she come back into her senses, which were empty, without occupant. Then she would say something to the Countess who would straighten her mantilla for her and with her large freshly washed hands would touch parts of her dress as if water had been spilt on them or as if the dress were not very clean.

She died one night as Spring got near, in town. Sophie Oxe's door was open but she hadn't heard a thing; when they found her in the morning she was as cold as glass.

Immediately afterwards the Chamberlain's dreadful illness began. It was as if he had bided until she had gone so he could die without need to consider her.

It was in the year following Mama's death when Abelone first caught my attention. Abelone was there all the time. That was a great disadvantage for her. I had observed once before on some occasion or other that Abelone was disagreeable and I hadn't given the matter any serious thought. Until then it would have appeared to me almost ludicrous to ask what reason Abelone had for being there. Abelone was there and people made use of her in whatever way they could. But I suddenly asked myself: Why is Abelone here? Each one of us had our own particular reason even if it was by no means always as evident as, say, the usefulness of Miss Oxe. But why was Abelone there? For a while people were saying that she should find something that amused her. But that got forgotten. Nobody came forward with anything for Abelone's amusement. It was absolutely clear that that she was not amusing herself.

All the same, Abelone had one asset: she sang. That's to say there were times when she sang. There was a strong, unwavering music in her. If it's true that angels are male, then you could probably say that there was something male in her voice, a radiant, divine, maleness. I, who even as a child had been so distrustful as regards music (not because it lifted me out of myself more powerfully than everything else but because it never landed me where it had found me but further down, somewhere that was wholly incomplete), I tolerated this music on which you could ascend higher and higher until you thought for a while that it must be like heaven. I had no inkling then that Abelone was to open yet heavens for me.

At first our relationship consisted in her telling me about Mama's girlhood. She attached great importance to convincing me how courageous and youthful Mama had been. There was no one, she assured me, who could match her in dancing or riding. 'She was the boldest of all, and tireless, and then she suddenly went and got married,' said Abelone, still amazed after so many years. 'It happened so unexpectedly, no one rightly understood why.'

I was interested to know why Abelone had not married. To me she seemed relatively old and the notion that she might still marry never entered my head.

'There wasn't anyone,' she replied simply, becoming truly beautiful as she spoke. Is Abelone beautiful? I asked myself, surprised. Then I

left home to go to the Academy for Young Noblemen; it was the start of a distasteful and harmful period. But there at Sorö whenever I separated myself from the others and they let me stand in peace at the window I would look out in amongst the trees; and in such moments and at night the certainty grew in me that Abelone was beautiful. And I started writing her all those letters, lengthy ones and short, many of them secret letters in which I thought I was writing about Ulsgaard and about my present unhappiness. But, as I see it now, they may well have been love letters. For when the vacation came, reluctantly, at last, it was as if by agreement that we didn't meet in front of the others.

Absolutely nothing had been agreed upon between us, but when the carriage turned into the park I couldn't help getting down, perhaps simply because I was unwilling to drive up to the house like some stranger. It was already high summer. I ran along one of the paths towards a laburnum tree. And there was Abelone. Beautiful, beautiful Abelone.

I don't ever want to forget how it was when you looked at me. How you wore your look, offering it as if it were freed from your upturned face.

Ah, wasn't there a change in the climate all around us? At Ulsgaard didn't the season grow milder from all our warmth? Are there not now particular roses in the park that go on blooming right into December?

I don't want to talk about you, Abelone. Not because we deceived each other--since, even then, beloved, you loved someone you have never forgotten, and I loved all women--but because only harm is done by putting it into words.

There are tapestries here, Abelone, wall-tapestries. I am imagining that you're here; six tapestries in all; come, let's walk slowly along in front of them. But before that, step back and look at them all together. How peaceful they are, aren't they? There's little variation in them. See, there's always this oval, blue island floating in the muted red background where there are flowers growing and little animals busying about. Only there, in the last tapestry, does the island rise a little as if it's become lighter. It always has a figure on it, a woman in various costumes but always the same form. Sometimes there's a smaller figure next to her, a maidservant, and there are always animals bearing the coat-of-arms, big animals from the island, all of a piece with the rest of the tapestry. To the left a lion and to the right, bright, the unicorn; they are holding the same banners which can be seen high above them: three silver moons rising in a blue band on a red field--did you see it? Shall we begin with the first?

She is feeding the falcon. How splendid her costume is. The bird is on her gloved hand and shifts about. She is looking at the bird and putting her other hand into the bowl brought by the maidservant to find something for it. Below to the right, a little silken-haired dog sits on the train of her dress and is looking up hoping it will be remembered. And, have you noticed, a low trellis of roses shuts off the island at the rear. The animals bearing the coat-of-arms are reared on their hind-legs in heraldic arrogance. The coat-of-arms appears again as a cloak enfolding them. A beautiful clasp holds it together. The cloak flutters.

As we move on to the next tapestry isn't our approach instinctively more gentle the moment we realize how engrossed she is as she binds a garland, a small crown of flowers. Thoughtfully she selects from the flat-bottomed cup which the maidservant holds out to her the colour of the carnation she will tie in next. Behind her on a bench stands a basket of unused roses, unused, that a monkey has found. Now it's to be carnations. The lion has grown indifferent but the unicorn on the right understands.

Shouldn't there be music in this stillness? Or was it not already

there, restrained? Her heavy adornments make no sound as she progresses (how slowly, do you see?) to the portable organ and, standing, plays, separated by the organ flutes from her maidservant who moves the bellows. She has never been so beautiful. It's wondrous to see how hair has been brought forward in two plaits and combined above the headpiece so that both ends rise out of the knot like a short plume of a helmet. The lion, disgruntled, unwillingly endures the sounds, biting back its howl. But the unicorn is beautiful, as if caught in the rolling waves of music.

The island broadens out. A tent has been raised. Blue damask flashed with gold. The animals part the sides to make an opening, and almost plain in her royal apparel she steps forward. What are her pearls compared with her? The maidservant has opened a small box and lifts from it a necklace, a heavy, magnificent treasure that has always been locked away. The little dog sits beside her raised on a seat specially provided, and looks on. And have you discovered the motto along the top edge of the tent? It reads: 'A mon seul désir.*'

*to my sole desire

What has happened? Why is that little rabbit down there jumping? Why can you see immediately that it's jumping? Everything is out of joint. The lion has nothing to do. The woman is holding the banner herself. Or is she holding on to it? With her other hand she has taken hold of the unicorn's horn. Is this mourning? Can mourning be so upright? And can a mourning dress be as discreet as this one in green-black velvet with faded patches showing here and there?

But we come now to another festival. No one has been invited. Expectation has no role to play in it. Everything is there. Everything is always. The lion looks around almost menacingly: no one is allowed to come. We have never seen her tired before: is she tired? Or has she sat down only because she's holding something heavy? You may be thinking of a monstrosity. But she lowers her other arm towards the unicorn and the animal rears its head, flattered, gets to its feet and comes and rest its head on her lap. It's a mirror she's holding. Do you see: she's showing the unicorn its image--.

Abelone, I'm imagining you're here. Do you understand, Abelone? I think you must understand.

BOOK TWO

Now the tapestries of the Dame à la Licorne* are also no longer in the old chateau of Broussac. This is the time when everything is leaving great houses; they can no longer hang on to anything. Danger has become safer than safety. No one from the Delle Viste line walks beside us with all that in their blood. They are all gone. No one speaks your name, Pierre Aubusson, great Grand Master from an ancient house, at whose desire, perhaps, were woven these pictures which praise everything and disclose nothing. (Ah, why have poets written in a different way about women, written more literally, as they thought. It's certain that we weren't allowed to know otherwise.) Now we happen to be among others who happen to be here and it almost makes you afraid you haven't been invited. But there are some who go past when not many are around. Young people scarcely pause unless it's to see, with regard to this or that particular feature, what they are required, by whatever subject, to have seen once.

*Lady with the Unicorn.

Occasionally, though, you'll see young girls in front of the tapestries. For there are lots of young girls in the museums, girls from somewhere or other who have left homes that no longer hold on to anything; they find themselves in front of these tapestries and for a

short while forget about themselves. They've always felt that there existed this kind of quiet life whose slowly moving gestures revealed not quite all their significance and they dimly recall even thinking for a time that such would be their life. Then hurriedly they'd get out a sketchbook and begin to draw whatever presented itself: one of the flowers or a happy little animal. It didn't matter; they'd already been told exactly what they were looking at. And it really doesn't matter. Just keep drawing; that's the main thing; because it's for this they'd left home one day, rather stormily. They're from good families. But whenever they lift their arm as they're drawing you can see that their dress isn't buttoned at the back, or, at least, not all the way. There are a few buttons they can't reach. That's because when the dress was made there was not yet any talk of their suddenly leaving home, alone. In families you always find there's someone who sees to buttons like these. But here, dear God, who should waste their time doing that in such a big city? You'd need a friend; but friends are all in the same boat and what it comes down to is buttoning up each other's dress. Which is ridiculous and reminds you of your family, and that's what you don't want.

Now and then while they're drawing they can't avoid thinking whether or not it might have been possible after all to remain at home. If one could only have been religious, devoted, in step with the rest. But it would look foolish to be trying to be the same as everyone else. would look foolish. The path has somehow become narrower. Families are no longer able to turn to God. What remains is only various alternative ways, if need be, in which to share things. But what happened when sharing was honest was that each individual received so little it was a disgrace. And if there was cheating in the sharing-out, quarrels broke out. No, it's better to draw whatever you're drawing. In time you'll achieve a likeness. And with Art, if you take it bit by bit, the result will be really quite enviable.

And so, putting all their effort into the task they have set themselves these young girls forgo any longer view. They don't notice how in everything they draw they are doing nothing other than suppressing inside themselves the immutable life that in these woven pictures radiantly opens up before them. They are not willing to believe it. Now, when so much is changing, they too want to change. They're very close to giving up on themselves and to thinking about themselves in the way that how men might speak of them in their absence. This seems progress to them. Already they're almost persuaded that you search for one pleasure and then another and then an even greater one: that life consists in this, if you don't want to lose it through some kind of silliness. They've already begun to look around, to search; they whose strength has always resided in being found.

That, I believe, is a result of being tired. For untold centuries they have seen to the whole business of love. They have played the entire dialogue--both parts. For the man has simply repeated the words, badly. And he has made their shared learning difficult with his distractedness, with his thoughtlessness, with his jealousy, which itself was a kind of thoughtlessness. On the other hand women have persevered day and night and have increased their love and their misery. And from among them, under the pressure of endless needs, have arisen women, powerful in their love who, even while they called out for the man had surpassed him, and outgrew him when he did not return, like Gapara Stampa or the Portuguese nun, both of whom did not cease until their agony swung round to become a bitter, icy splendour that could no longer be confined. We know about each of these women because there are letters that have been preserved as if by a miracle and books containing poems of reproach and lament, and portraits in a gallery that look at us with an expression that betokens tears, which the artists succeeded in catching because they didn't know what it was. But there have been countless more of them, such as those who have burnt their letters, and others who had no strength left to write them. Old women who had become hardened but had a precious core within them which they concealed. Women who have grown stout and shapeless from fatigue let themselves resemble their husbands, though inside them where love had been at work in the dark, all was different. Child-bearing women who never wanted to bear children and who

eventually perished in their eighth delivery still had the actions and lightness of girls looking forward to love. And those who stayed with men who were violent or who were drunkards had found inwardly the means to keep at the greatest distance from them couldn't help shining as if they were perpetually surrounded by saints. Who can say how many such women there were or who they were. It's as if they've gone on ahead and destroyed all the words that could help others understand.

But now when so much is changing isn't it for us to change as well? Couldn't we try in some small way to develop and contribute our efforts slowly, little by little to the task of loving. We have been spared all the hardship which is why it has slipped in among our amusements in the way that a piece of genuine lace can sometimes fall into a child's toy-drawer and can take his fancy or cease to, and can finally lie there among the toys that have been broken or taken apart, in a worse state than them all. Though we're looked on as experts, like all dilettants we've been spoiled by shallow pleasures. But what if we were to despise our successes. What if we were to begin right from the beginning to learn how love works, something that has always been done for us. What if we went ahead and became beginners, now that much is changing.

O now I also know what was happening when Mama unrolled the short lengths of lace. You see, she'd taken one of the single drawers from Ingeborg's secretaire to use herself.

'Shall we have a look at them, Malte?' she would say happily as if everything in the little yellow lacquered drawer were being given to her as a present. And then from sheer anticipation she'd find it impossible to unfold the wrapping tissue. I had to do it every time. But I became quite excited when the pieces appeared. They were wound round a wooden spindle that was completely hidden beneath all of the lace. And then we would slowly unwind them and watch the patterns unrolling, and we were a little startled each time one of them ended. They stopped so suddenly.

First came selvages of Italian handiwork, sturdy pieces with drawn threads in which everything was repeated just as you see in a peasant's garden. Then a whole run of Venetian needlepoint suddenly latticed our view as if we were cloisters or jails. But it cleared again and we saw deep into gardens that became more and more artificial until everything was dense and warm to the eyes as in a greenhouse: magnificent plants that were new to us spread out their giant leaves, tendrils reached out and grasped one another as if they were dizzy, and the large open blooms of the Points d'Alençon made everything blurred. Suddenly, quite tired and muddled, we stepped into the long panel of Valenciennes lace where it was early on a winter's morning and all white with hoar frost. We pushed our way through the snowcovered bushes of Binche and came to places no one had ever visited; the branches hung down so curiously there could well have been a grave beneath them, but we hid that thought from each other. The cold pressed in on us more and more and when at last we got down to the small and altogether delicate Klöppel lace Mama said, 'O now we'll get frost flowers on our eyes.' Which is what happened, because for us, inwardly, it was very warm.

As we were rolling up the pieces of lace we both sighed; we were a long time at the task, but we didn't want to entrust it to anyone else. 'Just think, if we'd had to make them,' said Mama looking positively frightened. That was something I couldn't imagine that at all. I caught myself thinking of little animals constantly spinning and being left in peace so they'd get on with it. No, they'd been women, of course.

'The women who made them are certain to have gone to heaven,' I said admiringly. It occurred to me, I remember, that I hadn't asked about heaven for a long time. Mama gave out a breath, the spindles were back together.

After a while when I had already forgotten about it, she said very slowly: 'To heaven? I think they're definitely there. If one looks at it in that light it can well be an eternal bliss. We know so little about it.'

Often when we had visitors mention was made that the Schulins were economising. The big old manor-house had burnt down a few years before and they were now living in the two narrow wings, and were making that do. But hospitality was in their very blood. They couldn't give it up. If anyone arrived at our house unexpectedly, they would probably come from the Schulins, and if someone suddenly glanced at the clock and had to dash off in a fright, you could be certain they were expected at Lystager.

Mama never really went out any more, but that was something the Schulins couldn't understand. There was no alternative but to drive over to them. It was in December, after a few early falls of snow; the sleigh was ordered for three o'clock and I was to go with them. Not that we were ever a punctual. Mama didn't like the carriage to be announced and most times she came down far too early. Finding no one there she would always remember something she should have done a long time before, and upstairs somewhere she would start searching for or arranging things with the result that she could be difficult to find. Eventually we'd all be standing waiting. And when she was at last seated and wrapped up, it would appear that something had been forgotten and Sieversen had to be called because only Sieversen knew where it was. But then we would suddenly drive off before Sieversen came back.

That day the weather never brightened at all. The trees stood about in the mist as if they didn't know which way to go. And there was something cocksure in the way we drove driving among them. In between times the snow fell again silently and now it was as if the very last trace of everything had been erased and we were travelling into a blank page. All you could hear was the ringing of the sleighbells but you couldn't tell exactly from which direction it was coming. Then came the moment when it stopped; it was as if the last bell had jingled and then they'd all gathered again to give out the fullness of their combined sound. We could well have imagined the church steeple as being on our left. But the edge of the park suddenly appeared high, almost above our heads and we found ourselves in the avenue. The sound of the sleighbells no longer faded away; it seemed to hang from the trees right and left in clusters. Then we swung in and drove round something and past something else and halted in the middle.

Georg had completely forgotten that the house wasn't there and for a moment we all thought the same. We went up the steps that led to the old terrace and were simply amazed that it was so dark. All of a sudden to the left below and behind us a door opened and someone shouted: 'Over here!' and held up a hazy lamp and swung it from side to side. My father laughed: 'We're rising up around here like ghosts,' and helped us back down the steps.

'But there was a house here just now,' said Mama and wasn't particularly swift in adjusting her mood to Wjera Schulin who, warm and laughing, had come running out to us. At that point, we had, of course, to go quickly inside, which left no more time for thinking about the house. We left our coats in a narrow vestibule and then suddenly we were among lights and facing a warm fire.

These Schulins were a redoubtable line of independent women. I don't know if there were any sons. I only remember three sisters. The eldest had been married to a Marchese in Naples from whom she was now obtaining a divorce, slowly on account of many lawsuits. Then came Zoë of whom it was said there was nothing she didn't know. And first and foremost there was Viera, warm Viera; God knows what has become of her. The Countess, a Narischkin, was really the fourth sister, and in certain respects the youngest. She had no knowledge of anything and

had to be instructed by her children constantly. And Count Schulin, good fellow, felt as if he were married to all these women and went around kissing them as the occasion presented itself.

The moment we began to enter he laughed out loud and bid each one of us welcome. I was passed around the ladies who touched me and asked me questions. But it was my firm intention, when that was over, to somehow slip away and look around outside for the house. I was convinced it was there that day. Getting out was not so difficult; like a dog I scurried along beneath all the clothes and through the door that was standing ajar into the lobby. But once there I found the the outside door wouldn't budge. There were various devices, chains and bolts that in my haste I couldn't deal with. Suddenly the door actually opened, but it made a loud noise and before I could get outside I was seized and pulled back.

'Stop. There's no running away from here,' said an amused Viera Schulin. She bent down to me and I was determined not to say a word to this warm person. But when I said nothing she took it to mean that a call of nature had driven me to the door; she caught hold of my hand and without further ado she started to haul me away with the half-confidential half-lofty notion of taking me with her to some place or other. This intimate misunderstanding did more than hurt my feelings. I tore my hand away and looked at her angrily. 'I want to see the house,' I said proudly. She didn't understand.

'The big house outside at the steps.'

'You silly' she said making a grab at me. 'There's no house there any more.' I insisted there was.

'We'll go and look sometime during the day ' she suggested, giving way. 'We can't go crawling around out there now. There are holes there and right behind are Papa's fish-ponds which aren't allowed to freeze over. Fall in there and you'll turn into a fish.'

With that she pushed me along in front of her, back into the brightly lit rooms. They were all sitting talking and I ran my eyes along the row: they only go there, of course, when the house isn't there, I thought scornfully; if Mama and I lived here it would be there all the time. While the others were all speaking at the same time Mama looked preoccupied. She was bound to be thinking about the house.

Zoë sat down beside me and asked me questions. From time to time her face with its well ordered features would register new insights, as if she were constantly perceiving things. My father was seated leaning somewhat towards his right listening to the Marchesa who was laughing. Count Schulin was standing between Mama and his wife and was recounting something. But I saw the Countess interrupting him in mid-sentence.

'No, child, you're imagining it,' said the Count good naturedly, but suddenly he had the same troubled look on his face, which he stretched forward above the two ladies. The Countess was not to be deflected from her so-called imagining. She looked very strained like someone who doesn't want to be disturbed. With her soft, ring-laden hands she was making dismissive gestures when someone said 'shsh' and suddenly there was total silence.

From behind the people in the room the large objects that had come from the old house were pressing in far too close. The heavy family silver gleamed and bulged as if it were being viewed through a magnifying glass. My father looked around disconcertedly.

'Mama can smell something,' said Viera Schulin behind him. 'We must all be quiet; she smells with her ears.' But she herself was standing there eyebrows raised, attentive, all nose.

The Schulins in this particular matter had been a bit odd since the fire In the narrow, overheated rooms a smell could arise at any moment, and then it would be checked and each person would give their opinion. Zoë, practical and conscientious, tackled the stove; the

Count went round, stood in each corner for a little while and waited; 'Nothing here,' he would then say. The Countess had got to her feet but didn't know where to look. My father turned slowly about as if he had the smell behind him. The Marchesa, who had immediately taken it to be a nasty smell held her handkerchief over nose and looked from one person to another to see if it had gone. 'Here, here' Viera called out from time to time as if she had found it. And around each word there was a curious silence. For my part I had diligently sniffed about like the rest. But all at once (was it the heat of the room or the proximity of so many lights?) and for the first time in my life I was overcome by something resembling the fear of ghosts. It became clear to me that all these recognisably grown up people who just a short time ago had been talking and laughing were going round back bent busying themselves with something invisible, and that they were admitting they couldn't see the something that was there. And what was terrifying was the fact that it was stronger than all of them.

My fear increased. I felt as if what they were looking for could suddenly break out on me like a rash, and then they would see it and point at me. In utter despair I looked across at Mama. She was sitting curiously erect as she often did and she seemed to be waiting for me. Scarcely had I sat down beside her and sensed that she was trembling inside when I knew that the house just then was starting to die away again.

'Malte, you sissy,' came a laugh from somewhere. It was Viera's voice. But we didn't let go of each other and together we saw it through; and we stayed like that, Mama and I, until the house had once more entirely vanished.

It was birthdays that were richest in experiences that verged on the incomprehensible. You already knew, of course, that Life was happy to make no distinction between days; but on this day you got up feeling you had a right to joy, a right that was not open to doubt. The feeling that you possess this right probably takes hold within very early and at the time when you grasp at everything and clearly get everything, when, with an unerring power of imagination you enhance the things you already cherish with the same primary-coloured intensity that already governs your new desires.

But then suddenly those strange birthays come along when you're fully and confidently aware of this right but you see others becoming unsure. You would probably still like to have someone dress you as they did before and then accept everything that came along. But you're hardly awake before someone outside shouts that the cake hasn't arrived yet, or you hear something smash as the presents are being arranged on a table in the next room, or somebody comes in and leaves the door open with the result that you see all the presents before you should. That's the moment when something like an operation is performed on you. A short, terribly painful incision. But the hand that does it is practised and steady. It's soon over. And hardly is it finished before you stop thinking about yourself; what's needed is for you to rescue the birthday by observing the others and forestalling their mistakes, and confirming them in their illusion that they're coping splendidly. They don't make it easy. They prove to be unimaginably clumsy, almost mindless. They manage to come along with presents intended for other people; you run to meet them and then you have to act as if you were just running around the room for exercise, not for anything special. They want to surprise you and with a very superficial imitation of expectation they lift up the bottommost layer inside the gift-box where there's nothing but cotton wool; then you have to ease their embarrassment. Or, if its something mechanical they've given you, they ruin it on the first try by overwinding it. That's why it's a good idea to have practised beforehand by overwinding a mouse or some similar toy and pushing it along discreetly with your foot; this way you can often deceive them so as to help them over their shame.

In the end you'll have done everything asked of you and without any

special talent. Talent is only really necessary if someone has taken a lot of trouble and, displaying self-importance and good-humour, has brought you a joy and even from a distance you could see that it was a joy for someone quite different from you, a completely alien joy.

It must have been before my time when people knew, really knew, how to tell a story. I've never heard anyone telling one. Every time Abelone spoke to me about Mama's youth, it was clear she couldn't narrate. Old Count Brahe could, though. I want to write down what she said about that.

There must have been a period in Abelone's young life when her own emotionality was far from confined. That was when the Brahes lived in town in the Bredgade and did a fair amount of entertaining. When she went up to her room late in the evening, she would think she was tired like the others. But then all at once she would feel the window and--if I've understood rightly--she could stand facing the night for hours on end, thinking: this is about me. 'I stood there like a prisoner,' she said, 'and the stars were freedom.' Then she had no difficulty going to sleep. The expression 'to fall asleep' ill matches this year of her girlhood. Sleep was something that rose with you, and from time to time you opened your eyes and lay on a new surface that was still far from being the topmost one. And then you were up before daybreak, even in winter when the others would come sleepily and late to breakfast. Of an evening when it grew dark there were always only candles for the whole household, candles for sharing. But the two candles that were lit very early in the new darkness, giving everything a fresh start--those candles you had to yourself. They stood in their low two-branched candlestick and shone peacefully through the small, oval, tulle lampshades painted with roses that now and then had to be reset. That didn't disturb anything; for one thing you were in no hurry whatsoever, and for another there were the times you needed for looking upwards and reflecting when you were writing a letter or making an entry in the diary you'd started once when your handwriting was completely different--timid, beautiful.

Count Brahe lived quite separate from his daughters. He considered it sheer delusion when anyone claimed to be sharing their lives with others. ('Sharing, you say...', he would remark) But he didn't find it unwelcome to hear people talking of his daughters: he would listen attentively as if they lived in a different town.

It was, then, quite extraordinary when one morning after breakfast he beckoned Abelone to him: 'We have the same habits, it seems: I too write very early in the morning. You can help me.' Abelone remembered it as if it were yesterday.

The very next morning she was led into her father's reputedly inaccessible study. She didn't have time to take a close look at the room as she was immediately given a seat facing the Count across his writing table which seemed to her like a plain with books and piles of paper as villages.

The Count dictated. Those who maintained that Count Brahe was writing his memoirs weren't entirely wrong. Only, these didn't deal with his political and military reminiscences that were eagerly awaited. 'I forget them,' the old gentleman would say curtly when anyone dropped a hint in that direction. But what he didn't want to forget was his childhood. He held on to it. And in his way of thinking it was quite in order for his very distant past to have control of him now, and for him to turn his gaze inward where it lay as in a northern summer night, intensified and unsleeping.

Sometimes he would spring to his feet and speak into the candle flames, causing them to flicker. Or he would order whole sentences to be crossed out yet again; then he would pace violently up and down, his Nile green silk dressing gown billowing. Throughout all this there was one other person present: Sten, the Count's old Jutlander valet whose job it was when grandfather jumped up was to put his hands on top of the loose sheets of paper, covered with notes, that lay around on the desk. His Grace entertained the notion that modern paper was

worthless, being much too light so that, given the least opportunity, it would fly away. And Sten, whose long upper half was all you saw of him shared this distrust and appeared to sit on his hands, blind in daylight and solemn as an owl.

This Sten spent his afternoons reading Swedenborg and none of the other servants would ever have cared to go into his room because, so it was said, he was in communion with the dead. Sten's family had always sought contact with spirits and Sten had been marked out for this kind of communication. His mother had seen an apparition the night she gave birth to him. Sten had big round eyes and the other end of his vision lay behind the person he was looking at. Abelone's father often asked after spirits the same way you'd ask after relatives: 'Are they coming, Sten?' he would ask kindly. 'It's good if they come.'

For a few days the dictation continued. But then Abelone couldn't spell 'Eckernförde.' It was a proper noun but she'd never heard it before. The Count who, truth to tell, had been looking quite some time for an excuse to abandon the writing which was too slow for his memories, made out he was loath to continue.

'She can't write it,' he said harshly, 'and others won't be able to read it. So will they see what I'm getting at?' he continued angrily, not taking his eyes off Abelone.

'Will they see this Saint-Germain?,' he shouted at her. 'Did we say Saint-Germain? Cross it out. Write: The Marquis von Belmare.'

Abelone crossed it out and wrote. But the Count went on speaking so fast that no one could have kept up with him.

'Splendid man, Belmare; couldn't stand children but he took me on his knee, little as I was, and I took it into my head to bite his diamond buttons. That delighted him. He laughed and lifted my head so that we were looking into each other's eyes: 'You've got excellent teeth,' he said, 'teeth to tackle anything...'--But I was looking closely at his eyes. I've travelled around since that time. I've seen all kinds of eyes, but, believe me: never again eyes like those. For these eyes to see anything it needn't be there, it was already within them. You've heard of Venice? Good. I tell you, those eyes would have brought Venice into this room, and Venice would have been here, just as this desk is here. I was once sitting in the corner listening as he told my father about Persia: sometimes I think my hands still carry the smell of it. My father held him in high esteem, and His Highness the Landgrave was something along the lines of a pupil of his. But there were, of course, plenty of people who took it amiss that he believed in the past only when it was inside him. What they couldn't grasp was that stuff only makes sense if you're born with it.'

'Books are empty,' shouted the Count making a furious gesture at the wall, 'Blood, that's what matters; it's in there we have to be able to read.' This Belmare had wondrous stories in his with remarkable pictures; he could open the book where he wanted, there was always something written there; no page in his blood had been skipped. And from time to time when he locked himself away and leafed through it on his own he came to the passages on alchemy and precious stones and colours. Why shouldn't all that have been left in? They're certainly somewhere.

'This man would have had no trouble living with a truth, if he'd been on his own. But it was no small matter being alone with a truth like this. And it would offend his good taste to invite people to visit him on account of his truth; he didn't want his Lady to be an object of gossip: he was far too much an oriental in that regard. 'Adieu, Madame', he said truthfully, 'until a different time. Perhaps in a thousand years one will be stronger and more undisturbed. Your beauty, Madame, is only now revealing itself,' he said and it wasn't merely a compliment. And with that off he went and established his zoo for people to visit, a kind of Jardin d'Acclimatation for the larger species of lies which we had never yet seen and a palm-house for

exaggerations and a small well-tended fig grove of false secrets. People came from all around and he strolled about with diamond buckles on his shoes and was totally at the service of his guests.

'A shallow existence: how? Basically it was a token of chivalry for his lady, as well as being a boon for his lengthening years.'

For a while the old gentleman had nothing more to say to Abelone whom he had forgotten. He paced madly back and forth and cast challenging glances at Sten as if Sten at any given moment would transform himself into the man he was thinking of. But Sten was not going to transform himself yet.

'He had to be seen,' the Count persisted crazily. 'Time was when he was perfectly visible although in many towns and cities the letters he received were addressed to no one: they just had the name of the place on them, nothing else. But I saw him.'

'He wasn't handsome.' The Count gave a peculiar hurried laugh. 'He wasn't even what people call distinguished or refined, there were always more refined-looking men around him. He was rich: but to him it was simply a sort of notion that couldn't be relied on. He was well-built, although other men looked after themselves better. In those days, of course, I couldn't judge whether or not he was intellectually stimulating or this or that which showed him to be a man of worthy qualities- but he was.'

The Count, trembling, stood there and made a movement as if he were positioning something in space and leaving it there. At this point he became aware of Abelone.

'Do you see him?' he barked at her. And suddenly he seized one of the silver candlesticks and shone it blindingly in her face. Abelone remembered she'd seen him.

Over the next few days Abelone was summoned regularly and the dictation, after the incident, went on much more smoothly. Drawing from all kinds of documents the Count was compiling his earliest memories of the Bernstorff circle in which his father had played a certain role. Abelone was now so accustomed to the peculiarities of her work that those who saw them working could easily take their purposeful collaboration for a genuine closeness.

Once, as Abelone was about to leave, the old gentleman walked up to her and it was as if he were holding a surprise behind his back: 'Tomorrow we'll write about Julie Reventlow,' he said and, savouring his words, added: 'She was a saint.'

Presumably Abelone looked at him in disbelief.

'Yes, yes, there's still all that,' he insisted, as if issuing an order, 'there's all that, Countess Abel.' He took hold of Abelone's hands and opened them like a book.

'She had the stigmata,' he said, 'here and here.' And he gave a hard sharp tap on each palm.

Abelone didn't know the term 'stigmata'. It'll become clear, she thought; she was very impatient to hear about the saint whom her father had actually seen. But she wasn't sent for again, not on the next morning, nor later.--

'Countess Raventlow was often spoken of in your family,' Abelone concluded tersely when I asked her to tell me more. She looked tired; she also claimed to have forgotten most of it. 'But sometimes I still feel the two marks,' she said with a smile, and she couldn't stop smiling as she looked almost with curiosity into her empty hands.

Even before my father's death everything had changed. Ulsgaard was no longer in our possession. My father died in town in an apartment that seemed to me hostile and disconcerting. At the time I was living abroad and I arrived too late.

He was laid out on a bier between two rows of high candles in a room that looked out onto a courtyard. The smell of the flowers was an unintelligible medley like a lot of different voices all at the same time. His handsome face with the eyes closed had the expression of someone obligingly trying to cast his mind back. He was in the uniform of the Master of the Hunt, but for some reason or other the white ribbon had been put on instead of the blue. His hands were not folded, they lay crosswise and looked meaningless, like copies of hands. I'd been hastily informed that he had suffered a great deal: none of that was evident. His features had been tidied like the furniture of a room that a guest has vacated. I felt as if I'd seen him dead rather often; I was so familiar with it all.

Only the surroundings were, in an unpleasant way, new to me. This oppressive room was new, having windows opposite, very likely other people's windows. It was new to have Sieversen coming in from time to time and doing nothing. Sieversen had grown old. I was expected to have breakfast. Breakfast was announced several times. I couldn't possibly face breakfast breakfast that morning. I didn't notice that they wanted to get me out of the room; eventually, because I hadn't gone, Sieversen somehow made it known that the doctors had arrived. I had no idea what for. There was still something left to do, Sieversen said, and looked intently at me with her eyes strained and reddened. Then in came, rather precipitately, two gentlemen: the doctors. The first one lowered his head with a jerk, as if he had horns and intended to butt me, but in fact it was so that he could view us over his glasses, first Sieversen, then me.

He bowed with the formality of a student. 'The Master of the Hunt had one more wish,' he said in the same manner as when he had entered; again I had the feeling he was approaching things headlong. I somehow made it necessary for him to direct his gaze through the glasses. His colleague was a chubby, thin-skinned blond man; it occurred to me that it would be easy to make him blush. A pause. It was strange that the Master of the Hunt still had wishes.

For no reason I glanced again at that handsome well-proportioned face. And I knew that he wanted certainty. That basically was what he had always wanted. Now it was to be his.

'You are here to perforate the heart; please go ahead.'

I bowed and stepped back. The two doctors then bowed simultaneously and began straightaway to confer. Someone was already moving the candles aside. But the elder one of the doctors again took a couple of steps towards me. He saved himself the last part of the way by stopping at a certain spot and craning forward; he looked at me angrily.

'It is not necessary,' he said, 'that is, I think it is better if you...'

He seemed sloppy and shabby in his thriftily hurried posture. I bowed once more; it just happened, my bowing again.

'Thank you,' I said curtly, 'I shan't disturb you.'

I knew I could bear this and there was no reason for me to withdraw. It had to be. It lent reason to everything there. Besides, I had never seen what it was like when someone is pierced through the heart. It seemed the right thing to do not to turn down such an out of the ordinary experience when it arose as a matter of course. Already at that time I no longer actually believed in disappointments, so there was nothing to be afraid of.

No, no, there's nothing in the world that we can imagine, not the

least thing. It's because everything is composed of so many single details that are unforeseeable. We ignore them in the hurry of using our imagination, so we don't know they're missing. But realities are slow and indescribably detailed.

Who would have thought, for example, of this resistance? Hardly had the broad, high breast been exposed when the hurried little man found the relevant spot. But the swiftly applied instrument didn't go in. I had the feeling that all time was suddenly gone from the room. We could have been in a painting. Then time came plunging back with a faint gliding sound and there was more of it than we could use. Suddenly there was a tapping sound. I'd not heard tapping like that before: a warm, reserved double tapping. My hearing transmitted it and at the same time I saw that the doctor had pushed through to the bottom. But it took a while before the two impressions combined in me. Right, I thought, it's through. As far as the tempo was concerned the tapping was almost gloating.

I looked at the doctor whom I had now known for such a long time. No, he was in complete command of himself: a gentleman working briskly and objectively who had to leave almost rightaway. There wasn't a trace of pleasure or satisfaction about him. Only, on his left temple a few hairs were standing up out of some kind of ancient instinct. He carefully withdrew the instrument which left behind something like a mouth from which twice in succession blood emerged as if the mouth were saying something in two syllables. The young blond doctor absorbed it in his wad of cotton. And now the wound remained quiet, like a closed eye.

I assume I bowed once more, though without paying attention this time. I was astonished, to say the least, to find myself alone. The uniform had been straightened with the white ribbon lying across it as before. But now the Master of the Hunt was dead, and not he alone. Now our heart, the heart of our race, was bored through. All gone. Thus the shattering of the helmet: 'Today Brigge and nevermore,' a voice in me said.

I wasn't thinking of my own heart. And when it came to me later, I knew for the first time and with complete certainty that there was nothing that linked me with it. It was an individual heart. It was already beginning from the beginning.

I know I'd imagined I couldn't depart straightaway. First, I told myself, everything had to be put in order. As to what had to be put in order I wasn't quite sure. There was virtually nothing to be done. I walked around town and detected a definite change in everything. I found it pleasant to step out of the hotel where I was staying and see that it was now a city for grownups and that it was putting on its best front for me almost as if for a stranger. Everything had become that little bit smaller and I strolled Langelinie out as far as the lighthouse and then back again. As chance would have it, when I entered the Amaliengade district there came from I don't know where something I'd recognised years before, something that was trying to exert power over me once more. All around there were certain corner-windows or archways or street lamps that knew a great deal about one and were threatening one with it. I looked them in the face and made them feel I was staying at the Hotel Phoenix and could leave at any moment. But it troubled my conscience. The suspicion arose in me that none of those influences and connections had really yet been dealt with. Indistinct as they were I'd one day abandoned them secretly. Even one's childhood would still, as it were, need completing if one didn't want to give it up as lost forever. And while I understood how I had lost it, I felt at the same time that I would never have anything else to put in its place. I spent a few hours every day in Dronningens Tværgade in the cramped rooms that looked insulted, as do all rented rooms where someone has died. I walked back and forth between the desk and the big white-tiled stove burning the Master of the Hunt's papers. I'd begun by throwing the correspondence, already in bundles, in the fire but the bundles were tied too tightly and simply charred at the edges. It was a tussle working them loose. Most of them had a strongly persuasive smell that forced its way into me as

if it wanted to stir my memories. I didn't have any. Then some photographs, heavier than the others happened to slip out; these photographs took an unbelievably long time to burn. I don't know why but I suddenly imagined Ingeborg's picture to be among them. But whenever I looked I saw mature, splendid, distinctly beautiful women, and they took my thoughts elsewhere. That was proof enough that I wasn't entirely without memories. It had been in exactly such eyes as these that I, a growing boy, had sometimes seen myself when I crossed the street with my father. From inside a carriage they could surround me with a glance that I could barely shake off. I now know that they were comparing me with my father and that the result was not in my favour. Certainly not, the Master of the Hunt had no cause to fear comparisons.

It may be I know something that he was afraid of. I'll tell how I made this assumption. There was a piece of paper that had lain folded for a long time deep in his wallet and was now crumbly and broken at its corners. I read it before I burnt it. It was in his finest hand, firm and even, but I noticed rightaway that it was only a copy.

'Three hours before his death,' so it began, and it concerned Christian IV. Of course I can't repeat the contents word for word. Three hours before his death he wished to leave his bed. The doctor and the valet, Wormius, helped him to his feet. He was a little unsteady but he was standing and they dressed him in his quilted nightgown. Then he suddenly sat down at end of the bed and uttered something. It was incomprehensible. The doctor kept constant hold of his left hand to save him from sinking backwards onto the bed. They sat there like that and from time to time the King painfully and in a thick voice said a word no one could understand. Eventually the doctor started talking to him gently in the hope of fathoming what was in the King's mind. After a short while the King interrupted him and suddenly said quite clearly: 'O doctor, doctor, what is his name?' The doctor struggled to think.

'Sperling, most gracious Majesty.'

But that wasn't what he actually meant. The King, as soon as he heard that they understood him, opened wide his one remaining eye, the right, and using his whole face said the one word that his tongue had been forming for hours, the only word he still had: 'Döden', he said, 'Döden*'.

*(in Danish) Death.

There was nothing else on the paper. I read it several times before I burnt it. And it occurred to me that my father had suffered greatly at the end. So I had been told.

Since then I have thought a good deal about the fear of death, not without taking into account certain experiences of my own. I think I can probably say that I have felt it. It has come over me in crowded cities, surrounded by other people, has come over me often for no reason at all. Though it's true that often there have been plenty of reasons: take for instance when someone was sitting on a bench and the bench gave way and they all stood around and looked at him, and he was already far beyond feeling any fear: then I had his fear. Or that time in Naples when the young person sitting opposite me in the tram died. At first it looked like a faint, we even travelled on for a while. But then there was no doubt that we needed to stop. And the carriages behind us came to a halt all bunched up as if there was never going to be any traffic in that direction again. The pale, fat girl could well have died peacefully as she was, leant against the woman next to her. But her mother wouldn't allow that. She caused her all sorts manner of difficulties. She messed up her clothing and poured something into her mouth that couldn't keep anything in it any more. She rubbed her forehead with a liquid someone had given her and the moment the eyes rolled back a little she started shaking her to make them look

forwards again. She screamed into those eyes that did not hear, she tugged the whole of the girl's body this way and that as if she were a doll, finally she brought up a hand and slapped the fat face with all her might so that it shouldn't die. That's when I took fright.

But I'd been afraid even earlier. For example when my dog died. The same dog that made me feel blameworthy once and for all. He was very ill. I had been kneeling all day beside him when suddenly he gave a short jerky bark as he used to do whenever a stranger came into the room. It was the type of bark that was reserved for such occasions, so to speak, and I automatically glanced towards the door. But the bark was already inside him. Worriedly I searched his eyes and he searched mine; but not to say our goodbyes. He looked hard at me; he was displeased. He was accusing me of having let it in. He was convinced I could have prevented it. It was evident that he had always overestimated me. And there was no time left for me to explain. Disconsolate and lonely he kept his eyes fixed on me right to the end.

Similarly I was afraid in autumn when the first flies came into the rooms and revived themselves one last time in the warmth. They were remarkably dried looking and were terrified by their own buzzing; you could see that they no longer knew quite what they were doing. For hours they never made a move until it occurred to them that they were still alive; then they flung themselves willy-nilly in any direction and had no idea what they should do when they arrived; you could hear them dropping down again here, there and everywhere. And they ended up crawling all over the place, slowly mortifying the whole room.

But I could be afraid even when I was on my own. Why should I act as if those nights had never been, the nights when the fear of death caused me to sit up in bed clinging to the thought that sitting was at least something that only a living person could do; the dead couldn't sit up. This always took place in one of those chance rooms which deserted me immediately when things were going badly for me, as if they were afraid of being questioned and of being implicated my nasty affairs. There I sat and I probably looked so dreadful that there was nothing that had the courage to acknowledge me; never once did the candle, which I had obligingly lit, show it wanted anything to do with me. It shone as if it were in an empty room. My last hope every time was the window. I imagined that outside there still might be something that belonged to me, even now, even in my sudden desperate need in the face of death. But hardly had I looked towards the window when I wished that it had been barricaded, every inch, like the wall. For now I knew that out there things were going along with the same complete indifference, and that also out there was nothing except my loneliness. The loneliness that I had brought upon myself and to whose size my heart no longer bore any comparison. I thought of people I'd walked away from and I didn't understand how one could abandon people.

My God, my God, if nights like this lay ahead of me grant me at least one of the thoughts I've now and then been able to think. What I'm asking for now is not so unreasonable; for I know that they come directly from my fear because my fear was so great. When I was a boy they hit me in the face and told me what a coward I was. That was because I was still bad at being afraid. But since then I've learnt to be afraid with the real fear that only increases when the power to produce it increases. We can have no idea of this power except in our fear. For it's so wholly incomprehensible, so completely opposed to us that our brain disintegrates at the point where we struggle to think about it. And yet, for a while now I have believed that it is our power, the whole of our power, that is too strong for us. It's true that we don't know it, but don't we know least what is rightly our own? Sometimes I think about how heaven came to be, and how death; because we've distanced ourselves from what is most valuable to us, because there were so many other things to do first and because we were too busy to safeguard it. The passage of time has now obscured this, and we have grown accustomed to lesser things. We no longer recognise what is ours, and we are appalled by its sheer magnitude. Can that not be so?

Besides I now well understand someone carrying with him all these years deep in his wallet the description of another's last hour. It wouldn't even have to be anything specially chosen; they all have something that verges on the unusual. Can't you imagine, for example, someone copying out for themselves an account of how Felix Arvers died. It was in hospital. He was dying gently and composed, and the nun perhaps thought that he was further along his last journey than was. In a very loud voice she called out some instruction or other as to where they could find this and that. She was a somewhat uneducated nun; she had never seen the word 'corridor' written but she couldn't avoid using it at that moment; thus it happened that she said 'collidor', thinking it was the way you said it. Whereupon Arvers postponed his dying. It seemed to him necessary that the matter be cleared up first. He became completely lucid and set her right: the word is 'corridor'. Then he died. He was a poet and hated approximates; or perhaps to him it had to do with truth; or maybe it bothered him to be taking with him as a last impression that of world continuing on its way so carelessly. One can no longer say. But one shouldn't mistake it for pedantry. Otherwise the same reproach would be levelled at the saintly Jean de Dieu, who as he was dying jumped up and still managed to cut down the man who had just hanged himself in the garden. In some miraculous way a message of what was about to happen had penetrated the hidden tension of the saint's agony. He too was concerned only with the truth.

There exists a being that is perfectly harmless; if it comes into view you hardly notice it and you instantly forget it again. However, should it somehow invisibly invade your hearing, it starts to develop, it creeps out of itself, so to speak, and one has seen cases where it has got as far as the brain and has thrived in this organ with terrible effect resembling pneumococci in dogs that enter through the nose.

This being is your neighbour.

Now, because I'm never long in a particular place I've had countless neighbours; neighbours above and below me, neighbours on my right and on my left, and sometimes at all four places together. I could easily write the history of my neighbours; it would take a whole lifetime. Admittedly it would be more the history of the symptoms they have produced in me; but what they share with all such beings is that they can be detected only in the disturbances they give rise to in certain tissues.

I've had very unpredictable neighbours and very regular ones. I have sat and tried to find out the principle of the first ones because it was obvious that even they had a principle. And whenever my punctual neighbours stayed out in the evening I've pictured to myself things that could have happened to them and I've kept my candle burning and worried like a young wife. I've had neighbours who were downright hateful towards each other and neighbours who had become involved in an intense love affair; and I've known one of them turn over to the other in the middle of the night, and then, of course, sleep was out of the question. One can make the general observation that sleep is by no means as frequent as one thinks. My two neighbours in St. Petersburg, for example, didn't set much store by sleep. One of them played the violin standing and I'm sure that as he played he looked across into the over-wakeful houses that never stopped being brightly lit during those improbable August nights.

I know for a fact that my neighbour on the right lay in bed; while I was there he never got up at all. He even kept his eyes closed; but you couldn't say he was sleeping. He lay there and recited poems, poems by Pushkin and Nekrassov, with the intonation children have when they're asked to recite. And despite the music from my neighbour on the left it was this neighbour with the poems who spun a cocoon inside my head and God knows what would have crawled out of it if the student

who visited him occasionally hadn't one day got the wrong door. He told me his friend's story, and in a way it proved reassuring. Anyway it was a literal, unambiguous story which caused the teeming maggots of my conjectures to perish.

This humble civil servant next door had the idea one Sunday morning to solve a curious problem. He assumed that he would live for a very long time, say another fifty years. The generosity he thus showed himself put him in a splendid mood. But now he intended to surpass himself. He reasoned that these years could be changed into days, into hours, into minutes, and even (if you could bear it) into seconds; and he calculated and calculated and came up with a figure such as he had never before seen. It made him giddy. He needed a little time to recover. Time is money he had always heard said, and it surprised him that a man with such a lot of time wasn't guarded night and day. How easily he could be robbed. But then his almost exuberantly good mood returned: he put on his fur coat to appear somewhat broader and more imposing and made a present to himself of the whole fabulous capital, addressing himself a little condescendingly:

'Nikolai Kusmitsch,' he said benevolently and imagined himself, still the same but without the fur coat, thin and sickly on the horsehair sofa, 'I hope, Nikolai Kusmitsch, that you won't let your riches go to your head. You must always bear in mind that they're not the chief thing, there are poor people who are thoroughly respectable; there are even impoverished noble folk and generals' daughters who go round the streets selling things.' And the benefactor gave him all kinds of examples that were familiar all over the city.

The other Nikolaj Kusmitsch, the one on the horsehair sofa, the recipient, didn't look the least bit full of himself; one could take it that he was going to be sensible. In fact he made no changes to his modest and regular way of life and he now passed his Sundays putting his accounts in order. But after a few weeks he noticed that he was spending an incredible amount. I'll economise, he thought. He got up earlier, washed less thoroughly, drank his tea standing up, ran all the way to the office, and arrived far too early. Everywhere he saved a little bit of time. But on Sunday there was nothing left of all that he'd saved. Then he saw that he'd been deceived. I shouldn't have switched over, he told himself. How long one has in a year like this. But this infernal small change, it just disappears, goodness knows how. And one nasty afternoon he sat in the corner of the sofa awaiting the gentleman in the fur coat from whom he would demand his time back. He would bolt the door and not let him go until he'd coughed up. 'In notes', he wanted to say. 'Ten-year ones, whatever. Four notes at ten per cent and one at five, and he could keep the rest, devil take it.' Yes, he was prepared to make him a present of the rest, so long as there were no difficulties. Irritated he sat on the horsehair sofa and waited, but the gentlemen didn't show up. And he, Nikolai Kusmitsch, who, a couple of weeks previously, had seen himself sitting there without a care in the world, was now, when he actually sat there, unable to visualise the other Nikolai Kusmitsch, the one in the fur coat, the magnanimous one. Heaven only knows what had become of him, probably his fraud had been traced and he was now sitting in detention somewhere. Surely it was not only on him that the man had brought misfortune. Con men like him always operate on a grand scale.

It occurred to him that there must be some government bureau, some kind of time bank where he could change at least part of his paltry seconds. After all they were genuine. He'd never heard of such an establishment but there would certainly be something of the kind in the directory under 'T' or perhaps it was also called 'Bank for Time'; he could easily look under 'B'. Maybe he could also consider the letter 'I' for he assumed it was an imperial institution; that would accord with its importance.

Later Nikolai Kusmitsch would always assure people that although he was understandably in a very depressed mood that Sunday evening, he'd not had a single drink. He was, therefore, completely sober when the following incident took place, so far as one can really say what did happen. Perhaps he'd drifted off for a few minutes in his usual corner

of the sofa, which would be most likely. At first this little nap afforded him pure relief. I've been getting myself in a mess, he told himself. It's just that I don't understand a thing about numbers. But clearly they shouldn't be granted too much importance; they are, so to speak, only some arrangement introduced by the government. Yet no one has ever seen them anywhere except on paper. In a group of people it was impossible to meet, for example, a seven or a twenty-five. There simply aren't any. And that was how this slight mix-up had come about through sheer absent-mindedness: time and money, as if you couldn't tell them apart. Nikolai Kusmitsch nearly laughed. It was really good to have found the flaw, and at the right time, that was the main thing, at the right time. Now things would be different. Time, yes, that was very embarrassing. But could he be the only one that this had happened to? Didn't time pass for other people as well in the same way he'd discovered, in seconds, even when they didn't know it?

Nikolaj Kusmitsch wasn't entirely free from enjoying other people's misfortune: Anyhow, let it--, he was just about to think when something peculiar happened. It suddenly wafted across his face, it passed by his ears, he felt it on his hands. He opened his eyes wide. The window was closed tight. And as he sat there in the dark room with his eyes wide open he began to understand that what he was feeling now was real time passing. He actually recognised all these seconds, all tepid, uniform, but fast, fast. Heaven only knew what they still intended to do. Why did it have to be him in particular to whom every sort of wind felt like an insult? He would now sit there and it would go on blowing ceaselessly his whole life long. He could foresee all the attacks of neuralgia he'd get; he was beside himself with rage. He jumped up, but the surprises weren't yet finished. Under his very feet there was something like a movement, not just one but several strange movements interlocking confusedly. He was rigid with terror: could it be the earth? Certainly, it was the earth. Yes of course it moved. He'd heard about it at school, but the topic had been dealt with rather cursorily and later it had been readily hushed up as it wasn't considered suitable for discussion. But now that he'd grown more sensitive he could even feel it. Did the others feel it? Possibly, but they gave no indication of it. Perhaps, being sailors, they didn't mind. Of all people Nikolai Kusmitsch was somewhat sensitive on this point, he avoided even the trams. He staggered about in his room as if he were on deck and needed to hold on right and left. Unfortunately he recalled something else about the tilt of the earth's axis. No, he couldn't bear all these movements. He felt ill. Lie down and rest he'd read somewhere. And since then Nikolai Kusmitsch had been lying down.

He lay and kept his eyes closed. There were times, during the less choppy days, so to speak, when it was quite bearable. And then to help him he had thought up this procedure in regard to poems. It was unbelievable how much it did help him. To recite a poem slowly, maintaining a consistent stress on the end-rhyme, one produced, to a certain extent, a kind of stability that was visible and gave one inner understanding. By a happy chance he knew all the poems. But he had always been especially interested in literature. I was assured by the student who had known him a long time that he didn't complain about his situation. Only, in the course of time an exaggerated admiration had developed in him for those who, like the student, walked around and endured the motion of the earth.

I remember this story in such precise detail because I found it extraordinarily soothing. I can even say that I've never since had such an agreeable neighbour as this Nikolai Kusmitsch who, to be sure, would also have admired me.

Following this experience I resolved in similar cases to go straight for the facts. I realised how simple and easy they were as opposed to suppositions. As if I hadn't known that all our insights are entered up later, settling our account, no more than that. Immediately afterwards a totally different page begins, with nothing carried forward. What are helping me now in the present case are the few facts that have been child's play establishing them. I will list them the

moment I've explained my immediate concern: that these facts, if anything, have increased the burden of my situation which (I admit) was already very great.

It could be laid to my credit that I did a lot of writing in those days: I wrote frantically. Mind you, when I went out I didn't like the idea of coming back to the house. I even made slight detours and by doing so lost half an hour during which time I could have been writing. I admit, this was a weakness. But once back in my room my conscience was clear. I wrote, I had my life and the life next door was a totally different life, one with which I had nothing in common: the life of a medical student who was studying for his exams. I had nothing like that before me; a distinct difference. And in other ways our circumstances were as different as they could possibly be. All of that was glaringly obvious to me. Until the moment when I knew it would come; then I forgot that there was nothing we had in common. I listened so hard that my heart started beating very loudly. I stopped all I was doing and listened. And then it came: I've never been mistaken.

Nearly everyone will be acquainted with the noise any round tin thing makes--say, the lid of a tin--when it slips from your grasp. Usually it doesn't actually make a very loud sound when it hits the floor; just a short one before it rolls along on its edge and it doesn't offend until it stops travelling forward and rocks and clangs before coming to rest. Well, that's the whole story; some such tinny object fell next door, rolled, then, after pitching about at certain intervals, lay there. Like all sounds that assert themselves repeatedly, this one too had its own internal organisation, it modified itself, it was never exactly the same. But that spoke well for its law-governed regularity. It could be violent or mild or melancholic; it could, as it were, pass by in a rush, or glide as if into infinity before it came to rest. And the final wobble was always an unexpected surprise. By contrast the ensuing stamp that came right at the end seemed almost mechanical. But it always had a different time marking; that appeared to be its purpose. I'm now able to have a much better overall view of these details; the room next to me is empty. He's gone home, somewhere out in the country. He needed to recuperate. I live on the topmost floor. To the right is another building. No one has yet taken the room below me: I'm without a neighbour.

This being the state of things it's almost surprising that I didn't take the matter more lightly. Although my instinct warned me in advance every time. I could have taken advantage of it. Don't be frightened, I should have told myself, here it comes. I knew full well I was never mistaken. But maybe the reason for that were the facts that I'd been told about him; when I'd learnt them I became even more nervous. Almost eerily the thought came to me that what triggered this sound was the small, slow, silent movement with which his eyelid would capriciously lower itself over his right eye and close while he was still reading. This was the essence of his story, a trifle. He'd already had to let exams go by a few times, he'd become touchy concerning his ambition, and probably those at home were putting pressure on him every time they wrote. What else could he do except pull himself together. But a few months before a decision had to be reached, this weakness became apparent; this stuff and nonsense about being tired, was as laughable as a window blind that won't stay up. I'm sure that for weeks he took the view that he should be able to control it. Otherwise I would not have had the idea of offering my will. You see, one day I realised that he had exhausted his own. And after that, whenever I felt it coming I would stand at my side of the wall and beg him to help himself to mine. And as time went on it became clear to me that he was doing so. Perhaps he shouldn't have done it, especially when one considers that it didn't actually help in any way. Even assuming that we delayed matters a little it's still questionable whether he was actually capable of making the best use of the moments we had gained in this way. And as far as my expenditure of will was concerned I was beginning to feel its toll on me. I know I was wondering if things could go on as they were on the very afternoon that someone arrived at our floor: this was because the narrow stairs

always caused a lot of disturbance in the small hotel. A while later it seemed to me that someone was going into my neighbour's room. Ours were the last doors on the landing; his at an angle to mine and right next to it. I knew that friends of his occasionally called to see him but I took no interest at all in his affairs. It's possible his door opened several more times and that people came and went; I wasn't actually responsible for that.

But later that evening it was worse than ever. It wasn't very late yet but I'd been tired and had already gone to bed; I thought I'd probably fall asleep. Then I woke up with a start; it was as if I'd been touched. Immediately afterwards it broke out.

It leapt and rolled and ran into things and staggered and rattled. The stamping was horrible. While this was happening someone on a floor below was banging distinctly and angrily on his ceiling. Of course, the new tenant also was upset. Just now: that must have been his door. I was so wide awake I thought I heard his door, although he was being amazingly careful. He seemed to be coming nearer. It's certain he would be wanting to know which room the noise was coming from. But what displeased me was his exaggerated consideration. He couldn't have failed to notice, surely, that you wouldn't mistake this for a quiet house. Why in the world was he softening his tread. For a while I thought he was at my door; and then I heard him--there was no doubt about it--going into the room next door. Without hesitating he walked in.

And now (well, how can I describe it?), now it became still. Still as when a pain ceases. A strangely sensible, prickling stillness, like a wound healing. I could have slept instantly; I could have breathed in and gone to sleep. Only my amazement kept me awake. Someone was speaking in the room next door, but this was also part of the stillness. You need to have experienced what this stillness was like, it's impossible to explain it. Outside too it was as if everything had settled down. I sat up, I listened, it was like being in the country. Dear God, I thought, his mother's here. She was sitting by the lamp talking to him; perhaps his head was leant a little against her shoulder. Soon she would be putting him to bed. Now I understood how the footsteps outside in the passage came to be so soft. Ah, for this to be. A being such as this, before whom doors give way as they don't for the likes of the rest of us. Yes, now we could sleep.

I've already almost forgotten my neighbour. I can well see that it wasn't real sympathy that I felt for him. Downstairs I do ask now and then as I go by what news there is of him, if there is any. And I'm pleased when there's good news. But I exaggerate: I don't really need to know. The fact that sometimes I feel a sudden impulse to enter next door no longer has any connection with him. It's only a step from my door to the other and the room isn't locked. It would be interesting to see what the room is really like. You can have a notion of what some room or other looks like and as often as not be pretty close. The room next door to one's own is the only kind that's totally different from what one thinks.

I tell myself that this is what appeals to me in this case. But I know full well that what is waiting for me in there is a certain tin object. I've assumed that it's really all about the lid of a box, though of course I may be mistaken. That doesn't worry me. It simply accords with my disposition to put the blame on the lid of a box. There's the thought that he didn't take it with him. Probably the room's been tidied, the lid's been put on its can where it belongs. And now they both together form the concept 'box', 'round box' to be exact, a simple, very familiar concept. I seem to remember them standing on the mantelpiece, these two parts that make up the box; yes, even standing in front of the mirror so that behind it there's a second box, one that's deceptively similar, imaginary. A box, totally worthless to us but which a monkey, for example, would grab. Really there would even be two monkeys grabbing for it, since the monkey itself would be doubled as soon as it got to the edge of the

mantelpiece. So then it's the lid of this box that's had it in for me.

Let's agree on this: the lid of a box, of an undamaged box, whose edge curves no differently from its own should be aware of no other desire than to be on top of its box; this would have to be the very most it could imagine for itself; an unsurpassable satisfaction, the fulfilment of all its desires. What's more it verges on the ideal to be patiently and gently turned round, steadily coming to rest on the short length of projecting rim and feeling the interlocking edge elastic and just as sharp as the brink is for you when you're lying there on your own. Ah, but how few lids there are that can still appreciate this. Here the confusion caused among things by associating with human beings speaks for itself. You see, humans --if we're allowed, simply in passing, to compare them with tin lids-- humans sit on their occupations with the greatest reluctance and ill-humour. Some because in their hurry they didn't land on the right one; some because an agry person put them on crooked; some because the corresponding rims have been buckled, each in a different way. Let's be perfectly honest and say: basically they're thinking of only one thing which is jumping down as soon as they can and roll about and make tinny sounds. Otherwise where do all these so-called diversions and the sounds they make come from?

For centuries now things have been looking on at them. Small wonder that they're depraved, that they lose the taste for their natural, deep purpose and want to exploit existence in the way they see it exploited all around them. They make attempts to shirk their duties, they become listless and slipshod, and people are not at all surprised when they catch them running riot. People know that very well from their own experience. They get annoyed because they are the stronger ones, because they think they have more right to change because they feel mimicked; but they let the matter go, as they let themselves go.

But where you have someone who pulls himself together, for example a solitary person, who wants to be wholly content in himself day and night it immediately provokes the opposition, the scorn, and the hatred of of those degenerate items which, in bad conscience, can no longer bear to think that something can actually keep itself together and strive to follow its own significance. They join forces in order to cause trouble, to frighten, to mislead, and they know that they can do it. Winking to one another they begin their seduction which then grows to immeasurable proportions and carries along with it all creatures and even God himself against the solitary one, the one who will perhaps survive: the saint.

How I understand now the strange pictures in which things of limited and everyday use attempt to stretch out lecherously and inquisitively to one another, twitching in the indiscriminate depravity of their diversions. These vessels that go about boiling, these pistons that are getting all sorts of ideas, and the idle funnels that, for their pleasure, force their way into a hole. And there too, thrown up by the jealous void, are limbs with organs among them and faces that vomit warmly into them and windy rumps that add to their pleasure.

And the saint writhes and contracts; but in his eyes there was still a look which conveyed the thought that this was possible; he had seen it. And already his desires are being precipitated out of the pale solution of his soul. Already his prayer is shedding its leaves and showing itself in his mouth like a withered bush. His heart has tumbled over and emptied itself into the gloom. The lash of his scourge is as weak as a tail chasing away flies. His sex is once more in one place only and when a woman holding herself erect comes forward through the hustle with her naked bosom full of breasts it points at her like a finger.

There were times when I thought these images antiquated. Not that I had any doubts about them. I could imagine them happening now and again to saints who were zealous and in a hurry, who wanted to begin their life with God whatever it cost. We no longer expect so much from

ourselves. We suspect he's too difficult for us, that we must put him off for a while so that we can take our time with the task that separates us from him. I now know, however, that this task is as fraught with difficulties as is sainthood; for that reason it appears all round everyone who is solitary just as it shaped itself in the past round God's solitaries in their caves and empty shelters.

Whenever one speaks of lonely people one takes too much for granted. One thinks people all know what they're dealing with. No, they do not. They've never seen a lonely person, they've simply hated him without knowing him. They've been his neighbours of his who who've used him up, they were the voices in the next room who tempted him. They roused things up against him, getting them to make a din and drown him out. Children ganged up against him when he was a tender child, and at every stage of his growing up he grew hostile to grown-ups. They tracked him to his hiding-place like an animal of chase and throughout his long youth there was no closed season. And when he didn't allow himself to be worn out so that he got away they yelled about what came forth from him and called it ugly and were suspicious of it. And as he didn't stop they grew more obvious and gobbled up his food and breathed up his air and spat into his poverty so that he himself became disgusted at it. They brought him into disrepute as if he were a contagion and threw stones at him to speed his departure. And they were right to follow their age-old instinct: because he really was their enemy.

But then when he didn't look up they had second thoughts. They suspected that in all of this they had acted as he had willed them to act; they had strengthened him in his solitude and had helped him separate himself from them for ever. And now they'd changed their method and were bringing to bear the ultimate form of opposition: fame. And at this clamour practically everyone looked up and let themselves be entertained.

Last night my thoughts turned again to the little green book that must have been in my possession at one time when I was a boy; and I don't know why I imagine that it had originally belonged to Mathilde Brahe. It didn't interest me when I first got it and I didn't read it until several years later at Ulsgaard one holiday time, I think. But it was important to me from the first moment I saw it. It was filled with references through and through, including its covers. The green of its binding denoted something and you immediately understood that what was written inside had to be as it was. As if it had been arranged beforehand there came first the smooth white-in-watered white endpaper and then the title page signifying mystery. There could well have been illustrations inside but there were none and you had to concede, almost reluctantly perhaps, that this too was perfectly in keeping. It was a compensation in a way to find at a certain place the narrow woven bookmark, worn and a little askew, touchingly confident that it was still pink, lying as it had between the same two pages since God knows when. Perhaps it had never been used and the bookbinder working speedily had, without looking, caused it to slip into the pages. But it's possible it wasn't accidental. It could be that someone had stopped reading at that place, someone who had never returned to the book; fate at that moment could have knocked on his door calling him elsewhere where he'd be kept busy far from all his books, which, after all, are not life. You couldn't tell if more of the book had been read. But it could also be that it had been opened again and again at this place and that this had happened at whatever time, sometimes until late into the night. Anyway, looking at the two pages made me feel shy with the sort of shyness you get standing in front of a mirror. I never read the two pages. I don't actually know if I read the whole book. It wasn't very thick but there were lots of stories in it, especially in the afternoon; then there was always one I didn't know.

I remember only two of them. I'll say which they are: 'The End of Grisha Otrepyov' and 'Charles the Bold's Downfall'.

God knows if it made any impression on me at the time. But now after so many years I still remember the description of how the corpse of the false Tsar was thrown among the pile of others and lay there for three days torn to pieces with stab wounds all over and a mask on its face. Of course there isn't the faintest prospect of the little book ever coming into my hands again. But this marked passage must have been remarkable.

I would also have liked to re-read the passage that told of his meeting with his mother. He must have felt very secure because he let her come to Moscow; I'm even convinced that he believed in himself so strongly at that time that he thought that it was in fact his mother he was summoning. And this Marie Nagori, who arrived from her miserable convent after travelling at great speed for three days, had indeed everything to gain by giving her assent. But didn't this uncertainty stem from the very fact that she acknowledged him? I'm not disinclined to believe that the power of his transformation came from his no longer being anybody's son.

[Written on the margin of the MS:
That, in the end, is the strength of all young people who have left home.]

The fact that the people wanted him and had no other in mind left him all the more free and less restricted in his possibilities. But the mother's declaration, even if it was a conscious deception still had the power to diminish him; she lifted him out of the richness of his invented self, she confined him to a tired imitation; she reduced him to the individual he had not been; she turned him into an impostor.

And now in addition there was this Marina Mniczek who, breaking him down more quietly, denied him in her own way, as it later proved, by believing not in him but in anyone. I can't possibly say, of course, to what extent all that was taken into account in the stories but it seems to me that all of it should have been told.

But even apart from that what occurred has not aged at all. Time now perhaps for a narrator, one who would handle the last moments with great care; he wouldn't be wrong doing so. There's lots of things happening: as when from deepest sleep he jumps to the window and through it into the courtyard and the guards. He can't get to his feet; they have to help him. It's likely his foot is broken. Leaning on two of the men he has the feeling that they believe in him. He looks around: the others believe in him too. They almost feel sorry for him, these enormous streltsy; how things must have changed: they had known Ivan Grozny in all his reality, and they now they believe in him. He would have tried to explain but if he opened his mouth he would simply let out a scream. The pain in his foot is driving him mad and he thinks so little of himself at the moment that he's conscious of nothing except the pain. And then there's no time left. Others are forcing their way in; he can see Schuisky and all those behind him. It will be over quickly. But now his guards close round him. They're not going to give him up. And a miracle happens. The faith of these old men spreads; suddenly there is no one who wants to step forward. Schuisky, right in front of him, in desperation calls up to an upper window. The impostor doesn't look round. He knows who's standing there. He realises silence will fall, it will happen abruptly. Now the voice will come that he knows from former times; the high, false voice that overstrains itself. And then he hears the Tsarina Mother repudiate him.

This far the story has told itself, but now, please, a narrator, a narrator: because from the few lines remaining there has to come forth a mighty force that will transcend any opposition. Whether or not it's been said, you must swear that between voice and pistol shot, infinitely compressed, there was once again inside him the will and power to be everything. Otherwise people don't understand how brilliantly consistent it is that they bored through his nightshirt and stabbed him all over as if they were trying to strike the hardness of a person. And that in death he wore the mask for three whole days,

the mask he had almost already dispensed with.

When I think about it now, it seems strange to me that in this same book the tale would be told of the last days of a man had been one and the same all his life, hard and unchangeable like granite and weighing more and more heavily on all those who could put up with him. There's a picture of him in Dijon. But he was known, anyway, to be short, thick-set, truculent and prey to despair. His hands are perhaps the only thing about him that we might not have thought of. They're terribly warm hands that are constantly trying to cool themselves and of their own accord, fingers outspread with air between them, they come to rest on anything that's cold. His blood could shoot into these hands as it might rush up into another's head; and when clenched they were actually like the heads of madfolk raging with crazy notions. It took an unbelievable amount of caution to live with this blood. The Duke was locked in with it inside him and at times when it wandered around, dark and crouching, he was afraid of it. Even to him it could seem to be gruesomely alien, this agile half-Portuguese blood he scarcely knew. He was often frightened it might attack him as he slept and tear him to pieces. He pretended it had been subdued but he always stood in fear of it. He never dared love a woman lest it became jealous; and so rapacious was it that wine never passed his lips; instead of drinking he pacified it with rose-leaf jam. But he did drink once, when he was in camp at Lausanne following the loss of Granson; he was ill at the time and on his own and he drank a lot of undiluted wine. But that was when his blood was asleep. In his useless last years he would sometimes fall into this heavy bestial sleep. It then became clear how great was its power over him; for when it stopped he was nothing. Then none of the people he had around him was allowed to enter; he didn't understand what they were talking about. Being so dull meant he couldn't show himself to foreign envoys. receive foreign envoys. He'd sit and wait for it to awaken. And more often than not it would run and jump up and burst out of his heart and bellow.

For the sake of this blood he dragged around with him all the things that didn't matter to him. The three large diamonds and all the precious stones; the Flemish lace and the Arras tapestries all in piles. His silken tented pavilion with its spun-gold cords and the four hundred tents for his retinue. And pictures painted on wood and the Twelve Apostles all in silver. And the Prince of Tarent and the Duke of Cleve and Phillip von Baden and the Master of Château-Guyon. Because he wanted to make his blood think he was emperor and that there was nothing above him: so that it would fear him. But his blood didn't believe him, despite all proofs of this kind; for it was a mistrustful blood. Perhaps he kept it in doubt for a while longer. But the Horns of Uri gave him away. From that time onwards his blood knew it was inside a lost man and it wanted to leave.

That's how I see it now but back then what impressed me most was reading that it was the Day of Epiphany when they went to look for him. searched for him.

The young Lorrainian prince, who on the previous day, straight after his remarkably hurried battle had ridden in to his wretched city of Nancy, had wakened the entourage and asked for the Duke. Messenger after messenger was dispatched and the Prince himself from time to time appeared, restless and anxious, at the window. He didn't always recognise those who were being fetched in on carts and stretchers, he only saw it wasn't the Duke. He wasn't among the wounded and no one had seen him among the prisoners who were constantly being led along. Refugees gave varying reports on all sides and were confused and easily startled as if they were afraid of running into him. It was already growing dark and nothing had been heard of him. During the long winter evening the news that he had disappeared had time to spread. And wherever it went it produced in everyone a sudden exaggerated confidence in his still being alive. Never, perhaps, as on that night had the Duke been so real in everyone's imagination. There wasn't a house where people weren't awake, waiting for him and

imagining his knock on the door. And if he didn't come it was because he had already gone by.

It froze that night and it was as if the idea that he was still alive had frozen as well, so firm it was. And years and years went by before it melted away. Without proper knowledge of the facts, all these people were now insistent that he was alive. The fate he had brought upon them was made bearable only by means of his image. It had been hard for them learning that he continued to be; but once they had done that they found it easy to keep him in their minds and not forget.

But, all the same, the next morning, the seventh of January, a Tuesday, the search began again. And this time there was a guide. It was one of the Duke's pages and he was said to have seen, from a distance, his master fall; now he was to show them the place. He himself had said nothing, the Duke of Campobasso had brought him and had spoken for him. Now he was walking in front and the others kept close behind him. Anyone looking at him now, muffled up and oddly unsure of himself would have had trouble believing that it was actually Gian-Battista-Colonna, the page who was as beautiful and slender-limbed as a young girl. He was shivering with cold; the air was stiff with the night frost, and underfoot the snow sounded like teeth grinding together.

Indeed they were all freezing. Only the Duke's fool, known by the nickname of Louis-Onze, kept himself on the move. He pretended to be a dog, running on ahead, coming back, and toddling along for a while on all fours close to the boy; but whenever he saw a corpse in the distance he bounded across to it, bent over and told it to pull itself together and be the one they were searching for. He gave it a little time to consider, then made a sullen return to the others, threatening and cursing and complaining about the stubbornness and lethargy of the dead. Thus they kept on walking on without any sign of an end. The city could hardly be seen for in the meantime, despite the cold, bad weather had closed in, and the air had become grey and dense. The countryside lay flat and indifferent and the little close-knit group looked to be straying the further it moved along. No one spoke; there was just one old woman who had kept up with them, muttering something and shaking her head; perhaps she was praying.

Suddenly the one furthest ahead stood still and looked around. Then he turned abruptly to Lupi, the Portuguese doctor, and pointed to something in front. A few steps further on there was a stretch of ice, a kind of pond or pool and in it, half fallen through the ice lay ten or twelve bodies. They were almost completely stripped of their clothes and belongings. Lupi went from one to the other bending over and examining them. And now Olivier de la Marche and the chaplain could be seen doing the same separately. But the old woman was already kneeling in the snow and whimpering as she bent over a large hand whose rigid splayed fingers gaped at her. All the rest came running over. Lupi with some servants tried to turn the body over because it was lying on its front. But the face was frozen into the ice and when they dragged it out one cheek, thin and brittle, peeled away and one could see that the other cheek had been torn off by dogs or wolves, and the whole head had been split by a large wound that ran from ear to ear so that there was really no face to speak of.

One after another the men looked around, each thinking to find the Roman behind him. But they only saw the fool who came running towards them angry and bloodstained. He was holding out a cloak and shaking it as if expecting something to fall out of it; but the cloak was empty. So they set about searching for any known markings, and some were found. They had made a fire and had washed the body in warm water and wine. The scar on the neck appeared and the locations of two large abscesses. The doctor was no longer in any doubt. But they still looked for other confirmations. A few steps further on Louis-Onze had discovered the carcass of Moreau, the large black stallion the Duke had ridden that day from Nancy. He was astride it with his short legs hanging down. Blood was still running from his nose into his mouth and one saw that he was tasting it. One of the servants across the other side remembered there was an ingrowing toenail on the Duke's left

foot; now everyone looked for the nail. But the Fool wriggled as if he itched and cried out: 'Ah, Monseigneur, forgive all these idiots for revealing your unsightly blemishes and for not recognising you in my long face where your virtues abide.'

[Written on the margin of the MS:

The Duke's Fool was also the very first to see the corpse when it was laid out. It was in the house of a certain Georg Marquis, though no one knew why. The pall had not yet been put on so he was able to take in the whole scene. The white of the doublet and the crimson of the cloak stood in harsh and forbidding contrast with the two blacks of canopy and couch. Placed in front pointing towards him were scarlet highboots with their large gilded spurs. And that up there was a head--no disputing that when you saw the crown on it. It was a large ducal crown with some kinds of precious stones. Louis-Onze walked about and had a close look at everything. He even felt the satin although he understood very little about it. It could be good satin, perhaps a tiny bit cheap for the House of Burgundy. He stepped back to survey the whole scene one more time. In the light coming off the snow the colours were in a strange way at odds with one another. He committed every single feature to memory. 'Well arranged,' he said in a final acknowledgement, 'perhaps a touch too obvious.' Death seemed to him like a puppeteer in sudden need of a duke.]

Without regretting facts or even simply judging them one does well, with certain things, simply to recognise that they're not going to change, ever. An instance is my realising that I was never a proper reader. As a child it seemed to me like a profession to be taken up sometime later when one by one all the professions came to be considered. To tell the truth I had no particular idea when that might be. I relied on being able to tell when life turned about, so to speak, and came only from outside just as it had previously come from inside. I imagined it would then become clear, unambiguous with no misunderstandings possible. Definitely not simple; on the contrary, very demanding, complicated and, as far as I'm concerned, difficult, but always visible. Then I would have been able to withstand the strange unconfined world of childhood, its lack of proportion, it's never foreseeing properly. True, I can't actually see how I could have done it. Basically it kept on increasing and closed itself off on all sides and the more I looked outside the more I stirred up what was inside me. God knows where it came from. But it probably grew to its furthest limits and then, at a stroke, ceased. It was easy to see that grownups were only slightly disturbed by it. They went round judging and dealing with matters and whenever they got into difficulties they put it down to external circumstances.

As well as other things I put off reading to the time when such changes should start to happen. When the time came I would treat books as I treated friends: there would be time for them, a definite, regular and pleasant allocation of time, exactly as suited me. Naturally there would be some who were closer to me than others, and this is not to say that I could be sure of not being delayed by them, now and again, for half an hour when I was going for a walk, keeping an appointment, arriving in time at the theatre or writing an urgent letter. The chances of a person's hair being put out of shape and tousled as if he'd been lying on it, of his ears becoming burning hot and his hands as cold as metal, of a large candle beside him burning down into the candlestick--all were, thank God, completely out of the question.

I cite these aspects because I experienced them personally and in rather striking ways during those holidays at Ulsgaard when I so suddenly took to reading. It was obvious rightaway that I couldn't do it. Admittedly I'd begun reading before the time I had originally planned. But the year I spent at Sorö among nothing but boys of roughly my own age had made me distrustful of such calculations. There were a number of rapid, unexpected experiences that caught up with me, and it was clear that the other boys treated me as a grownup. The experiences were as large as life and made themselves as heavy as they

were. But to the same degree that I understood their actual truth, my eyes also opened to the boundless reality of my childhood. I knew it wouldn't cease just because the other was beginning. I told myself that everyone was free to make dividing lines but that they were made up. And it turned out that I wasn't clever enough to think it out for myself. But if I insisted that my childhood was past then at the same moment all that is coming is also gone and I'm left with no more to stand on than a tin soldier has.

Understandably, making this discovery isolated me even more. It preoccupied me inside myself and filled me with a kind of final joy which I took to be sadness because it was way beyond my years. It also unsettled me, I remember, to think that, since nothing was destined for me for a definite period of time, there were so many things that I could miss entirely. And so, when I returned to Ulsgaard and saw all the books, I pounced on them in a real hurry and with an almost bad conscience. At that time I somehow had a presentiment, which I so often felt later on, that we didn't have the right to open a book if we weren't committed to reading all of them. With every line you broke off a piece of the world. Before books the world was unharmed and perhaps in time it would be whole again. But how could I, unable to read, be a match for them all? There they stood, in such a hopeless bulk even in that modest library. Defiant and desperate I flung myself from book to book and fought my way through the pages like one who has to carry out a task that's too big for him. During that time I read Schiller and Baggesen, Öhlenschläger and Schack-Staffeldt, whatever I could find by Walter Scott and Calderon. Many a book that came into my hands were ones that, one might say, I should have read already, while for other ones it was still too early; there was almost nothing contemporary. And I read on regardless.

In later years it occasionally happened that I would wake in the night and the stars that were out would look so real, making their way so meaningfully that I couldn't understand how people could bring themselves to miss so much world. So similar was the feeling I had, I think, whenever I looked up from the books and glanced outside where summer was and where Abelone was calling me. It came as a great surprise to us both that she should be calling and that I didn't even answer. It was in the middle of our most blissful time together. But because it was then that reading first held me in its grip I clung desperately to it and in my self-importance I obstinately hid myself away from our daily holidaying. Unskilled though I was at taking advantage of the many and often homely opportunities to enjoy a natural happiness, I promised myself, not reluctantly, future reconciliations from our growing discord, reconciliations that were becoming all the more charming the longer they were postponed.

As it happened, one day my reading sleep ended as suddenly as it had begun; and then it was we made each other thoroughly angry. For Abelone didn't spare me any of her ridicule and superiority and whenever I met her in the summerhouse she would make out she was reading. One particular Sunday morning her book was next to her and in fact it was closed but she seemed inordinately occupied with the redcurrants which she carefully stripped from their little clusters with a fork.

It must have been one of those early mornings that July brings—hours when things are rested and there's something joyful and spontaneous happening everywhere. Millions of small irrepressible movements collect in the most convincing mosaic of Being; things leap and merge into one another and soar high in the sky, and their coolness makes the shadows distinct and gives the sun a light spiritual appearance. In the garden there is nothing that stands out from the rest, the effect is overall and you need to be in everything and to not miss any of it.

And the whole scene was played out again in Abelone's natural little movements. There was such a happy inventiveness in what she did and and likewise in the way she worked. Her hands looked bright in the shade and worked together so easily and knowingly; the round berries leapt mischievously from the fork into the bowl lined with dewhazed vineleaves, adding to the others already piled there, red ones and

white ones, glistening, the seeds intact within the tiny tart globes. All I wanted then and there was just to stand and watch; but since I'd likely be told off and also because I wanted to appear casual, I grabbed the book, sat down at the other side of the table and without leafing through it for too long picked a place at random.

'You could at least read out loud, bookworm,' said Abelone after a while. The tone was no longer quite so querulous and since, in my opinion, it really was time we made up I immediately began to read out loud, going to the end of a section and continuing to the next heading: 'To Bettina'.

'No, not the replies,' said Abelone interrupting me, and all of a sudden, as if she were exhausted, she set the fork down, following it straightaway with a laugh when she saw the way I was looking at her.

'My God, but you read that badly, Malte.'

I had to admit that not for a moment had I followed what I was reading. 'I was only reading so that you'd interrupt me,' I confessed, becoming hot, and turning back to the title page of the book. It wasn't until then that I knew what it was. 'Why not the replies?' I asked, curious.

It seemed as if Abelone hadn't heard me. She sat there in her bright dress as if she were becoming quite dark inside her: as dark as her eyes were becoming.

'Give it to me,' she said suddenly as if in anger, and took the book out of my hand and opened it right at the page she wanted. And then she read one of Bettina's letters.

I don't know how much of it I understood but it was as if I'd received a formal promise that one day I would understand it all. And while her voice grew until eventually it was almost the same voice I knew from her singing, I was ashamed that my scheme for our reconciliation had been so weak. For I well understood that it was. But now it was happening on a grand scale somewhere far above me, somewhere beyond my reach.

The promise is still fulfilling itself; at some time or other that same book turned up among my books, among the few that I never part with. Now it opens for me too, at the very places I'm thinking of, and when I read them I can't make my mind up if I'm thinking of Bettina or of Abelone. No, Bettina is the one who has become more real in me; Abelone, who I knew, was like a preparation for her and for me now she had disappeared into Bettina as if into her own instinctive self. This strange Bettina, with all her letters, had brought space, had given form measureless space. From the start she had spread herself out whole as if she had died. She had put herself deeply everywhere into being, had become part of it and no matter what happened to her was, in her nature, from eternity; it was where she recognised herself and detached herself from it, almost with pain; she took trouble to guess her way back as if she were revisiting like an enduring spirit.

There you were just now; I can recognise you. Isn't the earth still warm from you and don't the birds still leave room for your voice? The dew is a different dew but the stars are still the stars of your nights. And isn't the world altogether yours? For how often have you set it on fire with your love and seen it blaze and burn itself out; and how often have you secretly, while everyone slept, replaced it with another. You felt so fully in harmony with God when every morning you asked him for a new earth, so that all the ones he had made could have its turn. It seemed small-minded to keep them and repair them; you used them up and held out your hands for more worlds. For your love had grown in all ways.

How is it possible that the story of your love is still not on everybody's lips? What has happened since then that was more

extraordinary? What are they busying themselves with? You yourself knew the value of your love; you shouted it from the rooftops to your greatest poet so that he would make it human for it was still elemental. But by writing to you he led people away. They have all read his answers and believe them more because the poet is more recognizable to them than is nature. But someday, perhaps, it will be shown that they mark the limit of his greatness. This woman in love was imposed upon him and he couldn't match up to her. What does it mean, his not being able to respond to her love? It contains both call and answer; it answers to itself. But he should have humbled himself before her in all his finery and should have written what she dictated with both hands like John on Patmos on his knees. But there was no choice in respect of this voice that 'served the angel's part' and had come to enfold him and take him away into eternity. Here was the chariot for his fiery ascension. Here, prepared against his death was the dark myth he left empty.

Fate loves to invent patterns and designs. Its difficulty dwells in its complexity. But life itself is hard because of its simplicity. It has only a few things whose magnitude is beyond our measure. The saint, while rejecting Fate, chooses them for his godly purpose. But the fact that the woman, following her own nature, must make the same choice with regard to the man, calls up the catastrophe inherent in all love relationships: determined and fated like an immortal, she stands beside the one who is transformed. The woman who is in love always surpasses the man she loves because life is greater than fate. Her devotion wants to be immense: this is her bliss. But the nameless sorrow of her love has always been this: that what is asked of her is that her devotion be kept within limits.

Women have poured out their sorrow for no other reason: Heloise's first two letters of contain only this, and five hundred years later it rises from the letters of the Portuguese nun; it's as recognisable as a bird-call. And suddenly through the bright space of this knowledge passes the remotest figure of Sappho whom the centuries never found because they looked for her in fate.

I have never dared to buy a newspaper from him. I'm not sure he always actually has copies with him when he moves slowly back and forth all evening outside the Jardin de Luxembourg. He turns his back to the railings and his hand rubs along the stone coping from which the bars rise. He makes himself so flat that every day people go past and never see him. True, he still has what's left of his voice and he calls out to remind people of this, but it's no different from the sound from a lamp or a stove or from drips falling at odd intervals in a cave. And the world is ordered in such a way that there are people who, their whole life long, go past in the intervals when he, making less sound than anything that moves continually like the hands of a clock, like shadows, like time.

How wrong it was of me to be reluctant to look at him. I'm ashamed to write that when I approached him I adopted the way other people walked: as if I didn't know he was there. Then I heard something inside him say 'La Presse' and say it again immediately after that and then a third time, rapidly with hardly a breath between. And the people near me looked about them trying to locate the voice. My own reaction was to hurry on, leaving the others behind, as if I hadn't noticed anything, as if I were greatly preoccupied.

As in fact I was. I was busy picturing him in my mind and the the sweat from the effort was running off me. For I had to construct him as they construct a dead man for whom there is no evidence are no remains proofs, no integral parts, absolutely nothing to go on. I know now that it helped me a little to remember all the many figures of Christ made from striated ivory that had been taken down and that lie around in all antique shops. The memory of some or other Pieta came and went--: all no doubt to help me recall a certain tilt of the long

face, the grim stubble in the shadows of his cheeks, and the definitively painful blindness of his locked expression that slanted upwards. But, nevertheless, there was so much that belonged to him; for even then I could tell there was nothing trivial about him: not the way his jacket or his coat stood away from the back of his neck and let his collar show all the way round--that low collar, that formed a wide arc round his stretched and pitted neck without touching it; not the greenish black tie hanging slack all the way round; and especially not the hat, an old high-crowned stiff felt hat which he wore the way all blind men wear their hats: bearing no relation to the lines of the face and without the possibility of deriving anything from this and developing for themselves a new outward unity; but no different from any old accepted deviation. My cowardly refusal to look at him grew to such a pitch that eventually the image of this man, often for no cause at all, severely and painfully contracted inside me into to such a harsh misery that, driven by this, I resolved to scare and get rid of the increasing skill at imagining things that were foreign to me. It was getting towards evening. I would immediately walk past him and take a good look at him.

Now it's important to know that it would soon be Spring. That day the wind had died down, the streets were long and contented; at the end of each street houses gleamed, looking as new as fresh cuts into a white metal. But it was a metal that surprised you by its lightness. In the wide endless roads there were throngs of people moving almost fearlessly among the vehicles, which were very few. It must have been a Sunday. The topmost parts of the towers of St.Sulpice stood out cheerfully and unexpectedly high in the still air and through the narrow, almost Roman streets you couldn't help looking out into the season. Inside the Luxembourg Gardens and in front there was so much movement that I didn't see him rightaway. Or was it that I didn't recognise him at first through the crowd.

I knew immediately that my picture of him was worthless. His very abandonment to poverty, unconfined by any wariness or feigning, went beyond my scope. I had understood neither the angle at which his head inclined nor the horror with which the inside of his eyelids filled him. I had never given a thought to his mouth which was drawn in like a drain spout. He may possibly have had memories but now there never came anything into his soul other than the shapeless feel of the stonework that trailed behind him and wore away at him. I had stopped and all the while I was watching everything almost simultaneously, I sensed that he was wearing a different hat and a necktie that doubtless was kept for Sundays; it had a diagonal pattern of yellow and violet checks, and as for the hat, it was a cheap new straw hat with a green band. The colours, of course, are of no account and it's small-minded of me to have remembered them. I just want to say that on him they were like the softest down on a bird's front. He himself got no pleasure from the colours, and whoever among all the people there (I looked around me) could have thought that this finery was for their sake?

My God, I thought impetuously, so you exist, then. There are proofs of your existence. I have forgotten them all and have never even wanted them, for what a dreadful obligation would lie in your own certainty. And yet that's what's being indicated to me now. This is what you relish, what you take pleasure in. That we learn to endure everything and not to judge. What are the difficult things? What are the gracious things? Only you know that.

When it's winter again and I need a new coat--grant that I wear it like that for as long as it's new.

It's not that I want to draw a distinction between me and them when I walk around in better clothes--that were mine from the beginning--and insist on having some place to live. It's that I haven't got as far as they have. I haven't the courage to live their kind of life. If my arm withered I think I'd hide it. But she (apart from this I don't know who she was), she appeared every day in front of the cafe terraces and

although it was very hard for her to take off her coat and extricate herself from the blur of various clothes beneath, she didn't spare herself the time or trouble of slowly removing one article after another even though the anticipation was scarcely bearable. And there she stood, in front of us, modestly, with her dried, wasted stump and you could see it was something rare.

No, it's not that I want to set myself apart; but I would be considering myself superior if I tried to be like them. I'm not. I would have neither their strength nor their measure. I keep myself fed and from one meal to the next I don't make a secret of what I'm doing; but they keep themselves alive as if they were immortals. They stand at their daily corners, even in November, and don't cry out when winter comes. The fog comes and makes them hard to see so you're not sure: they're there, nevertheless. I went on a long journey. I fell ill, a lot of things happened to me; but they haven't died.

[Written on the margin of the MS:

I don't even know how it's possible for schoolchildren to get up in little rooms full of grey-smelling cold; who keeps giving them the strength, these tumbling skeletons, to run out into the grown-up city, into the cheerless dregs of the night, into the everlasting school day, still small, full of foreboding, always late. I can't imagine the huge amount of help that is constantly being consumed.]

The city is full of others who are slowly sliding down to their level. Most are reluctant at first; but then there are these fading, ageing girls who constantly let themselves go over the edge without resisting, strong girls, still unused in their innermost selves, who have never been loved.

Perhaps, Lord, you mean me to leave everything and go love them. Otherwise why is it so difficult for me not to follow them when they pass me in the street? Why do I suddenly invent the sweetest, most nocturnal words, and why does my voice settle sweetly inside me between my throat and heart? Why do I imagine how I, with unutterable caution, would hold them to my breath, these dolls that life has been playing with, flinging their arms apart springtime after springtime for nothing, and again for nothing, until they became slack in the shoulders. They've never fallen from a very high hope, so they're not broken; but they're badly chipped already and too far gone. Only stray cats come to them in the evening in their rooms and keep giving them furtive scratches and then sleep on top of them. Sometimes I follow one of them down a couple of streets. They walk past the houses, people are continually coming along who blot them out, they go on fading until they are nothing.

And yet I know that if someone was loving towards them, they would weigh upon him like people who have walked too far and are going to stop. I believe only Jesus could bear them, he who still has resurrection in all his limbs but he's not interested in them. Only women in love tempt him, not those who wait with a small talent for being loved, as it is with a lamp that has turned cold.

I know that if I'm destined for the highest things, then it won't help me in any way to disguise myself in my better clothes. When he was in his kingdom did he not float down to be amongst the lowest? He, who instead of rising sank all the way to the bottom. It's true that at times I've believed in other kings although their parklands don't prove anything any more. But it's night, it's winter, I'm freezing, I believe in him. For glory lasts only for a moment and we have never seen anything more lasting than wretchedness. But the King shall endure.

Isn't he the only one who bore up beneath his madness like wax flowers under a glass cover? They prayed for others in the churches that they might have long lives, but Chancellor Jean Charlier Gerson demanded that he have eternal life and that was when he was already the neediest one, ill and living in abject poverty, despite his crown.

It was in the days when, from time to time, men, strangers with blackened faces, would pounce upon him in his bed in order to tear off his shirt which had rotted into his ulcers that for a long time now he had regarded as part of himself. In the room the darkness had deepened and they ripped off the putrid tatters from under his stiff arms. Then one of them brought a light and it was only then they discovered the suppurating wound on his chest where the iron amulet had sunk in because every night he would force it in with all his strength; it was now deeply embedded, this awful priceless thing edged with pearls of puss like a miraculous remnant in the hollow of a reliquary. Hard-bitten fellows had been picked but they weren't inured to the sight of maggots, disturbed, rearing up and reaching across to them from the Flemish fustian and dropping from the folds started to work up their sleeves. Without a doubt he had got into a worse state since the days of the 'little queen' for she, young and clear-headed as she was, still wanted to lie by his side. Then she died and now no one dare put another bedfellow beside this rotting carcass. She'd bequeathed to no one the words and tendernesses with which she had soothed the king. There was no one whose voice could now be heard in the wilderness of his mind, no one to help him out of the ravines of his soul, no one who could understand when he suddenly walked out of them of his own accord, feasting his eyes like an animal going to pasture. And when he recognised the pre-occupied face of Juvenal he was reminded of the kingdom and how it had been before. And he wanted to make good that which he had neglected.

But in keeping with those times nothing was spared when events were retold. When something happened it happened with full force and was all of a piece with other things that were spoken of. How could you cancel out the fact that his brother had been murdered; that yesterday Valentina Visconti, whom he had always called his sweet sister, had knelt before him and had done nothing more than lift her veil away from the lament and accusation that disfigured her face. And today a tenacious and verbose lawyer had stood for hours and had proved that the princely murderer had been justified to the point where the blemish of a crime became a transparency and seemed like a bright light heavenbound. And justice meant allowing everyone to be in the right; for Valentina von Orléans died of grief although she had been promised revenge. And what was the use of pardoning the Burgundian duke only to pardon him again; and for weeks now, visited by the rutting passion of despair he had been living in a tent deep in the Forest of Argilly and declared that what gave him relief was having to listen to the deer belling in the night.

If one had thought about it, over and over right to the end, brief as it was, people craved to see a person; and see him they did: perplexed. But people were gladdened by the sight; they realised that this was the King: this quiet, patient man who was there only to let God in His overdue patience have sway over him. In his lucid moments on the balcony of his palace at Saint-Pol, perhaps the King had inklings of the secret progress he had made; he would remember the day at Roosbeke when his uncle, the Duke of Berry, had taken him by the hand and had led him to the site of his first out-and-out victory; there in the strangely prolonged November light he surveyed the bodies of the Ghentians so tightly massed together that they were choked by the cavalry attacks from all sides. Intertwined with one another like an enormous brain they lay there in the clumps they had formed in order to keep tightly together. It took one's own breath away to see their smothered faces; one couldn't help imagining the air being driven far above these huddled upright bodies by the sudden expulsion of so many despairing souls.

This had been impressed upon him as the beginning of his glory. And it stayed with him. But if that battle had been the triumph of death, standing here like this, weak in the knees but upright in the view of everybody: this was the mystery of love. He had seen that to others this battlefield, immense as it was, could be understood. But this scene here refused to be understood; it was just as marvellous as the stag with the golden collar that he had seen all that time ago in the Forest of Senlis. Except that now he was the apparition and others'

eyes were upon him. And he didn't doubt that they were breathless and had the same broad expectations that had overtaken him as a youth out on a day's hunting when that calm face had eyed him as it came out of the branches. The miracle of his materializing was spread all over his gentle form; he didn't stir for fear of fading away; the thin smile on his broad, simple face took on a natural permanence as if it were on the stone statue of a saint and need not trouble itself to move. That way he held out and it was one of those moments that are eternity writ small. The crowd could hardly bear it. Nourished and strengthened with an inexhaustible and increasing consolation it broke through the silence with its cry of joy. But on the balcony above only Juvenal des Ursins was left and he shouted into the next lull in the shouting from the crowd that the King would be coming to the Passion Brotherhood in the rue Saint-Denis to see the mysteries.

On days like this the King's consciousness was filled with a gentle awareness. Had a painter of that time been searching for some clue as to what being in paradise looked like he couldn't have found a more perfect model than the still figure of the King as it stood beneath the curve of its shoulders in one of the high windows of the Louvre. He was leafing through the little book by Christine de Pisan, which is called 'The Way of Long Study' and was dedicated to him. He wasn't reading the scholarly polemics of that allegorical parliament which had set itself the task of finding the prince worthy to reign over the world. The book always opened for him at the simplest passages: where it spoke of the heart which for thirteen years had been like a retort over the fire of pain which had served only to distil the water of bitterness for the eyes; he understood that true consolation only began when happiness was sufficiently faded to be gone forever. Nothing was dearer to him than this solace. And while his gaze seemingly embraced the bridge beyond he loved to see the world through Christine's heart which had been seized by the powerful Cunaean and taken along the great pathways of heaven; he loved to see the world as it was at that time: seas to be ventured upon, strangely towered cities shut tight by their remoteness, the ecstatic solitude of the assembled mountains and the skies that were explored in fear and doubt and were only now closing like an infant's skull.

But whenever anyone entered the room the King gave a start, and his mind slowly receded. He was content for them to lead him away from the window and give him something to do. They'd got him used to spending hours at a time going over illustrations and he was satisfied with that; only one thing piqued him: it was that when he turned the pages he could never have a number of pictures together in front of him because they were all bound into the folios and couldn't be moved about. Then someone remembered a pack of playing cards that had been completely forgotten and the King indicated his royal pleasure to the man who brought it; so dear to his heart were these individual pieces of card that were full of images done in bright colours. And although card-playing became the custom among courtiers, the King sat in his library and played alone. Just as he now turned up two kings, side by side, so God had recently brought him and Emperor Wenzel together; sometimes a queen died and then he would put an ace of hearts on her like a gravestone. It didn't surprise him that there were several popes in this game; he set Rome over by the edge of the table and here on his right was Avignon. Rome didn't interest him, for some reason or other he imagined it to be round and left it at that. But Avignon was somewhere he knew. And no sooner had the thought occurred to him when his memory—before it overtaxed itself—showed him again the lofty hermetic palace. He closed his eyes and needed to take a deep breath. He feared he would have bad dreams that night.

But on the whole it was a soothing occupation and they were right to keep bringing him back to it. The hours spent like this confirmed him in the view that he was the King, he was King Charles VI. That is not to say that he was exaggerating his own importance; he was far from thinking that he was anything more than one of those pieces of card; but he had a growing certainty that he too was a particular card—perhaps a bad one, one that had been played in anger, and that always lost: but always the same card: never any other. And yet, when a week had gone by, steadily gaining confidence like this, he began to

experience inside him a feeling of restriction. There was a tightness around his forehead and in the back of his neck as if he suddenly felt his own too-defined outline. No one knew what temptation he was yielding to when he then asked about the mysteries and could hardly wait for them to begin. And once that time had arrived he lived more in the rue Saint-Denis than in his palace at Saint-Pol.

What was fateful about these dramatic poems was that they continually added to and extended themselves so that time in them eventually became real time; rather as if someone were to make a globe as big as the earth. The hollow podium, with Hell beneath, had above it built onto a pillar and denoting the level of Paradise, the unbalustraded framework of a balcony which only served to weaken the illusion. For that century had in fact made heaven and hell earthly; it lived by the power of both so that it might survive its own self.

Those were the days of Avignonese Christendom when, a generation before, so many followers in involuntary need of refuge had gathered around John the Twenty Second, that at the site of his pontificate, immediately after his arrival, the mass of this palace had been built, closed and heavy like a protective outer body for all the homeless souls. But he himself, this small, slight, spiritual old man still lived out in the open. He had scarcely arrived when he began without delay to deal with matters on all sides swiftly and summarily, and all the while, there appeared on his table dishes of food spiced with poison; the first cup always had to be tipped out since the piece of unicorn was discoloured when the cupbearer took it out again. The seventy year old man was at a loss; he had no idea where to hide the wax images that his enemies had made so they could destroy him; he was also being scratched by the long needles that were stuck through them. They could be melted down; however, he had been so horror-stricken by these secret simulcra that against his powerful will he found himself several times thinking that such an action might be fatal for him and that he could disappear like the wax in the fire. Horror made his shrunken body drier still and more durable. But now it was the body of his empire that was being attacked; from Grenada the Jews had been incited to kill off all Christians and this time they had hired mercenaries of a more terrible kind. Right from the very first rumours no one doubted the plot by the lepers; already several people had seen them throwing horrible decomposing bundles into the wells. It wasn't due to any credulity on their part that people immediately thought it possible; faith, on the other hand, had become so ponderous that it had dropped from those shivering hands and gone straight to the very bottom of the wells. And once again the zealous old man had to keep poison away from his blood. During his bouts of superstition he had prescribed the Angelus for himself and his entourage to ward off the demons of twilight; and now every evening across the whole agitated world the bells rang out for that calming prayer. With the exception, however, of all the bulls and epistles he sent out which were more like spiced wine than herb tea. The empire had not committed itself to his care for treatment; but he didn't tire of inundating it with proofs of its sickness; and already people from the farthest east consulted this imperious physician.

But then the incredible happened. On All Saints Day he had preached longer and more fervently than usual; prompted by a sudden need to look over it again himself he had revealed his faith; he had lifted it slowly with all his strength out of its eighty-five years old tabernacle and had exhibited it in the pulpit. They had all yelled at him. All Europe yelled out: this was a poor faith.

Then the Pope disappeared. For days no instructions were issued by him; he kept to his prayer room, remaining on his knees and exploring the mystery of those who by their actions do harm to their souls. Eventually he reappeared, exhausted by his arduous self-examination, and recanted. Time and again he recanted. It became the senile passion of his mind to recant. It wasn't unheard of for him to wake the cardinals in the night so that he could talk with them about his repentance. And perhaps what kept him alive well beyond his allotted span was, in the end, simply the hope even then of humbling himself before Napoleon Orsini who hated him and would not come.

Jakob von Cahors had recanted. And one might think that God himself had wanted to prove the Pope's error, because so soon afterwards he took to himself that son of Grafen von Ligny who seemed to await his coming-of-age on earth only so that he could take up the soul's sensuous pleasures as a grown man. There were many still living who could remember this serene boy when he was in his cardinalate and could recall how, at the beginning of his adolescence, he was made bishop and died in an ecstasy of fulfilment when he was barely eighteen. One still met those who had been brought back to life: for in the air at his graveside there was pure life that had become free and had a long-lasting effect on corpses. But wasn't there something desperate even in this precocious saintliness? Wasn't a wrong done to everyone by the way the clean fabric of this soul, which had had only a brief immersion in life, was dyed in the intense scarlet of the time to make it shine? Didn't it feel something like a counter-thrust when this young prince leapt from this earth into his passionate ascension? Why didn't these givers of light go and live among the toiling candlemakers? Wasn't it this darkness that had brought John XXII to declare that before the Last Judgement there can be no perfect bliss anywhere, not even among the blessed? And indeed, how much self-opinionated determination did it take to imagine that, while such dense confusion existed here, somewhere there were already faces bathed in the light of God, leant on angels and calmed by the inexhaustible vision of Him.

Here I sit in the cold night, writing, and knowing all this. I know it perhaps because I met that man when I was little. He was very tall, I'd even say he must have been strikingly tall.

Unlikely as it may be, I'd somehow managed some time towards evening to get away from the house by myself; I was running; I turned a corner and at the same instant I ran straight into him. I don't understand how what had occurred at that moment could take place within about five seconds. The telling of it, however concisely, takes much longer. I had hurt myself colliding with him; I was little and I felt I already deserved a lot of praise for not crying; naturally I also expected to be comforted. As he wasn't doing that I supposed he was embarrassed. I took it that he couldn't think of the right sort of joke that would relieve the situation. I was quite happy to help him but that would have meant looking him in the face. I've said he was tall. Now, he hadn't bent over me which would have been the natural thing to do; he stayed at the height I couldn't deal with. In front of me was nothing but the smell and the peculiar hardness of his suit, which I had felt. Suddenly his face appeared. What was it like? I don't know. I don't want to know. It was the face of an enemy. And next to this face, right next to it, at the same height as his terrifying eyes, like a second head was his fist. Before I even had time to lower my face I had already taken to my heels, slipping away to the left and down this empty, horrible street in a city I didn't know, a city where nothing was ever forgiven.

It was then that I experienced what I now understand: that heavy, massive, desperate period in time. That age when the kiss of reconciliation between two men was simply the signal for the murderers stationed about. They drank from the same cup, mounted the same horse while everyone looked on, and the news spread how they would be sleeping in the same bed that night: but with every contact their distaste for each other was so strong that whenever one of them saw the pulsing veins of the other a sickly revulsion caused him to jerk backwards as if he'd seen a toad. The age when brother attacked brother and held him prisoner because of the other's larger share of their inheritance; true, the King interceded on behalf of the ill-treated younger brother and managed to get his freedom and property restored to him; and the elder brother occupied, as fate would have it, with matters far away, sent him greetings of peace and in his letters repented of the wrong he had done. But after all that had happened the freed man was never himself again.

The century slows him in pilgrim's clothes, wandering from church to church making up wondrous vows. With amulets hanging from his neck he whispered his fears to the monks of Saint-Denis and for a long time their records showed the hundred-pound wax candle that he had thought good to dedicate it to Saint Louis. He didn't get to have a life of his own; to the day he died he felt his brother's jealousy and anger as a warped constellation above his heart. And that Count de Foix, Gaston Phoebus, whom everyone admired—hadn't he openly killed his cousin Ernault the English King's captain at Lourdes? Yet what was this patent act of murder compared with the terrible accident that occurred because he hadn't put his sharp little penknife down before allowing his famously beautiful hand, now all a-twitch with reproach, to graze the bare throat of his sleeping son? The room was dark; they needed light to see the blood that had come from so far and was now, as it stole away from the tiny wound on this exhausted boy, leaving a magnificent lineage for ever.

Who could be strong and refrain from murder? Who in that age didn't know that one couldn't avoid the extreme? Some place a strange presentiment would come over a man whose glance during the day had met the gauging glance of his murderer. He would withdraw and shut himself in, would write his will, ending with directions for a litter of woven willow twigs, the habit of a Celestine monk, and the scattering of ashes. Strange minstrels appeared in front of his castle and he paid them royally for their singing which was in accord with his vague forebodings. The dogs, looking up at him, showed doubt in their eyes and they were becoming less confident in reading his wishes. From the motto that had held good for him all his life there gently emerged a newer, clearer second meaning. Many longstanding habits appeared to have lost their relevance but there didn't seem to be any others developing that could replace them. Whenever plans were drawn up he dealt with them without really believing in them; on the other hand, certain acts of remembrance took on an unexpected finality. In the evening at the fireside one thought of abandoning oneself to them. But the night outside that no one knew any more all at once sounded quite loud in one's ears. The ear that was experienced in so many free or dangerous nights distinguished individual pieces of the silence.

And yet this time it was different. Not the night between yesterday and today: a night. Night. Beau Sire Dieu, and then the Resurrection. Praisings of a loved one scarcely reached him at times like these: for him the women were all turned out in aubades or the submissive songs of troubadours, now incomprehensible with their long, convoluted showy calls. Best suited to the dark, like the full feminine, upward gaze of a bastard son.

And then, before the late supper, this pensiveness over the hands in the silver washbasin. One's own hands. Could a coherence be conveyed to them? An ordered sequence to reaching for things or leaving them be? No. Everyone tried both the part and the counterpart. The one cancelled the other. There was no line of action.

The only exception were the missionary brothers. When the King had seen how they conducted themselves he devised the charter for them himself. He spoke of them as his dear brothers; never had anyone affected him so deeply. They were given verbal permission to go in their own guise among the worldly; for the King wished for nothing more than that they might infect many others with their zeal and draw them enraptured into their powerful movement where order dwelt. As for himself, he so longed to learn from them. Didn't he wear, exactly as they did, the symbols and clothes that held meaning? When he watched them he found it possible to believe that these things might be learned: how to come and go, how to speak out and how to turn away so that no one could be in any doubt. Enormous hopes spread across his heart. Every day he sat in the best seat in the fitful light of the strangely characterless hall of the Hospital of the Trinity and he would stand up out of sheer excitement and then pull himself together in the way schoolboys do. Others wept but he was inwardly filled with shining tears and pressed his cold hands together only to bear it all. Sometimes at heightened moments when one of the card players left the game and suddenly stepped out of his wide gaze, the King lifted up his

face and was afraid: how long had he been there: Monseigneur Saint Michel, up there, had advanced to the edge of the scaffolding in his dazzling silver armour.

At moments like this he would sit bolt upright. He would look around as if he were trying to make a decision. He was very close to seeing the counterpart to this sort of dramatic action: the great, uneasy, profane passion play he acted in. But suddenly it was gone. Open torches came towards him, throwing their formless shadows onto the vaulted ceiling. Men unknown to him were tugging at him. He wanted to act his part but nothing came from his mouth, his movements produced no actorly gestures. People were crowding around him so oddly that it occurred to him that he should be carrying the cross. And he wanted to wait for them to bring it. But they were stronger and slowly they pushed him out.

Outside much has changed. I don't know how. But within and before thee, Lord, within and before thee, Thou who looks on: are we without a line of action? We indeed discover that we don't know our role; we look for a mirror, we'd like to remove our make-up and take off all that's false and become real. But somewhere there's still a piece of our disguise clinging to us that we've forgotten about. There's a trace of exaggeration on our eyebrows; we don't notice that the corners of our mouths are twisted. And this is how we go around, an absolute laughing-stock: neither a real being nor an actor.

It was in the amphitheatre at Orange. Without taking a proper look upwards and being aware only of the rustic cleft that now locates the façade, I had entered by the caretaker's little glass door. I found myself among bodies of columns lying on the ground and small althaea trees, but it was only for a moment that they hid from me open mussel shell of the sloping auditorium lying there divided by the afternoon shadows like a gigantic concave sundial. I quickly went towards it. As I climbed between the rows of seats I felt how I was diminishing in this setting.

A little further up a few foreigners were standing around, poorly set out, idly curious; their clothing was unpleasantly eye-catching, and its quality wasn't worth discussing. For a while they looked straight at me, astonished at my smallness. That made me turn round.

Oh, I was totally unprepared. A play was being performed. A huge, superhuman drama was in progress, the drama of this vast backdrop which had three roles in that it resounded with grandeur, was almost annihilating, and suddenly brought to scale what was excessive.

I was carried away by a joyful alarm. Towering there with the face-like arrangement of its shadows gathered at the centre in the dark of its mouth, and bordered above by cornices adorned with a wreathed symmetry of coiffed curls. This was the all-disguising mask of antiquity behind which the world fits together as a face. Here in this great inward-curving seating space reigned an expectant, empty, intaking entity: everything took place across there: gods and fate. And from there (looking upwards) came, lightly, over the topmost part of the wall, the never ending entrance of the sky.

That hour, I realise now, turned me away from our theatres for ever. What am I supposed to do in them? What should I do in front of a stage-set where this wall (the icon screen in Russian churches) has been dismantled because the strength is no longer there to press through its hardness the gaseous plot that comes out in big, heavy, drops of oil.

Nowadays plays now fall in lumps through the torn coarse sieve of the the stages and pile up and cleared away when there's enough. It's the selfsame raw reality that lies around on the streets and in houses except that more of it gathers there than would fit into a single evening.

[Written on the margin of the MS:

Let's be frank, we don't have a theatre, any less than we have a God: for those you need community. Everyone has special ideas and fears of their own and reveal only so much of them to others as they need to or as suits them. We're continually diluting our understanding just so there's enough to go round instead of wailing our common needs towards the wall behind which the incomprehensible would have time to gather its strength and exert it.]

Were we to have a theatre would you, woman of tragedy, stand there again and again--so slender, so pure, as yet so unmoulded--in front of those who delight their hurried curiosity with the pain you display? You move us in ways we cannot express, you foresaw the reality of your own suffering that time in Verona when, appearing on the stage while you were almost still a child all you simply held roses before your face like a mask meant to hide your new stature.

It's true, you were a child of the theatre and whenever your parents performed they wanted to be seen; but that was not your way. This profession was to become for you what becoming a nun was, without her knowing it, for Marianna Alcoforado, a disguise, dense and sufficiently lasting to be relentlessly miserable behind, yet with the fervour with which invisible blessed ones are blest. In all the cities you came to people would describe your gestures; but they didn't understand how you, growing helpless daily, held a poem up in front of you to see if it might hide you. You held your hands, your hair or anything opaque in front of where you shone through. You breathed on those places; you made yourself small; you hid the way children do, and then you gave that short, happy outburst and nothing lower than an angel should have been allowed to look for you. But next, when you looked up cautiously there was no doubt that they had watched you the whole time, all of them in that ugly, hollow space filled with eyes: you, you, you, and nothing else.

I can still clearly remember once, long ago, at home, finding a jewel case; it was the size of a couple of hands, fan-shaped, with a border of flowers stamped into the dark green morocco leather. I opened it: it was empty. I can tell this now it's so long past. But at the time I opened it I saw only what its emptiness consisted of: there was velvet, a small mound of light-coloured velvet that had lost its newness; and there was the empty jewel groove running through leaving around it a hint of a lighter melancholy. For a moment one could bear it. But for those who are in love and who are left behind, it is perhaps always thus.

Leaf back in your diaries. Wasn't there always a time around spring when the burgeoning year had a reproachful effect on you? There was a desire in all of you for happiness and yet, when you stepped out into spacious freedom there was something displeasing in the air and your steps were unsure as if you were on a ship. The garden was beginning but you (that was it) you dragged winter in as well as the year that had gone; for you it was at best a continuation. While you were waiting for your soul to take part, you suddenly felt the weight of your limbs; and something like the possibility of becoming ill entered your open anticipation. You put it down to your dress being too thin; you drew your shawl round your shoulders; you ran down the allee to the end, then you stood, your heart pounding, in the wide turning-circle, determined to be at one with it all. But a bird-call sounded, and was alone, and denied you. Ah, should you have been dead?

Perhaps. Perhaps what is new is that what we survive are: the year and love. Flowers and fruit are ripe when they fall; animals go by what they feel, and they find each other, and are satisfied with that. But we who resolved to have God for ourselves, we can never finish. We throw off our nature; we need more time. What is a year to us? What are they all? We who began God ages ago, we are still praying to Him: see us safely through the night. And then illness. And then love.

That Clémence de Bourges had had to die in the dawn of her life. She

who was without equal; she who knew how to play instruments like no one else could make the most beautiful of them play unforgettably by the least sound of her voice. Her girlhood was one of such high resolve that one woman bounteously in love could dedicate to this rising heart the book of sonnets in which every line was unfulfilled. Louise Labbé wasn't afraid of frightening the child with her woeful accounts of love. She depicted the nightly heightening of her longing; she promised pain as if it were a wider world and suspected that the grief she herself had experienced would remain far behind the grief that was darkly anticipated and gave the young girl her beauty.

Girls where I grew up. Say the most beautiful one among you had gone on a summer afternoon into the darkened library and had found the little book printed by Jan des Tournes in 1556. Say she took the cool polished leather volume out into the humming orchard or over to the phlox in whose oversweet scent can be found a residue of pure sweetness. Say she came upon the book early. In the days when her eyes are beginning to take note of what they see, while her younger mouth is still capable of biting from an apple pieces that are far too big, and be full.

And then when the time of more emotional friendships comes along, it could be your secret, girls, to use the names Dika Anaktoria, Gyrinno and At this with one another. It might be a neighbour, an older man who travelled about when he was young and has long been regarded as an eccentric who betrays these names to you. Perhaps he sometimes invites you to his house to taste his famous peaches or to view upstairs in the white corridor his Ridinger equestrian engravings that are so much talked about that one had to have seen them.

Perhaps you'll persuade him to tell you stories. There may be one among you who can get him to bring out his old travel diaries, who knows? This same girl may one day coax him into revealing that several fragments of Sappho's poetry have come down to us and the girl can't rest until she knows what is almost a secret: that this man who lives a secluded life liked now and then in his leisure time to turn to translating these pieces of verse. He has to admit that for a long time now he hasn't given them a thought and that what there is, he assures her, isn't worth mentioning. Still, if they really want him to, he'll happily recite a stanza to these guileless friends. He even discovers he remembers the Greek text and recites it because the translation doesn't capture, in his opinion, the meaning and because he wants to show these young people the beautiful authentic fragment of this massive adorned language, fashioned in such strong flames.

All of this fans his love for his subject once more. Evenings become beautiful again and for him they could almost be the evenings in his youth, autumn evenings, for example which prelude hours and hours of peaceful night. Then the light burns long in his study. He doesn't stay bent over the pages all the time, he often leans back and closes his eyes over a line he has re-read and its meaning spreads through his blood. Never had he been so sure of antiquity. He might almost smile at the generations that mourned it like a lost play in which they would have liked to act. Now, he instantly understands the dynamic significance of that early world unity which was something like a new simultaneous incorporating of all human labours. He's not deterred by the fact that the consistent culture with its almost total openness appeared to many later eyes to form a whole, a whole that was wholly past. To be sure, in those days the ethereal half sphere of life did really fit that of existence and the two coming together formed one golden ball. Yet hardly had this happened when the spirits locked inside it felt that this entire achievement was nothing more than a comparison; the massive orb lost substance and rose into space and its golden curve dully reflected the sadness of everything that still could not be coped with.

As he is thinking this, thinking and understanding it, the lonely man in his night notices a plate of fruit on the window-seat.

Unconsciously he takes an apple and puts it in front of him on the table. He thinks: How my life is around this fruit. Around everything that is complete rises what is still to be done and adds to itself. And then beyond what is not done there arises before him, almost too quickly, the small figure that reaches out into infinity, the figure, whom (according to Galen's testimony) they all thought of when they said 'the poetess'. For in the same way that, after the labours of Heracles, the demolition and rebuilding of the world came about because it was earnestly desired, so too the ecstasies and despairs, which future ages would have to address, thronged to the deeds of her heart to be given life.

All of a sudden he knows this resolute heart that was prepared to let the whole of love have its way to the last. It doesn't surprise him that people failed to recognise it: in this woman in love who was so very much the future they saw only excess, not the new measure of love and heart sorrow. It doesn't surprise him that they interpreted the inscription of her existence with exactly the same conviction it carried at the time, in that they finally included her death with the deaths of those women whom the god incites, individually, to pour themselves out in a love that is not returned. Perhaps even amongst the girls she had tutored there some close to her who didn't understand: that at her prime she lamented not one who had left her embrace empty but the one who was no longer possible, the one who had grown by their love.

At this point the meditating man stands up and crosses to his window; his high-ceilinged room is too close for him, if it were possible he'd like to see the stars. He has no delusions about himself.

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At this point the meditating man stands up and crosses to his window; his high-ceilinged room is too close for him, if it were possible he'd like to see the stars. He has no delusions about himself. He knows he's being led by emotion, because among the young girls of the neighbourhood there's one who matters to him. He has wishes (not for himself, but for her); at some fleeting moment in the night he understands the claim that love is making. He promises himself to say nothing of this. It appears to him the finest thing is to be by himself, wakeful, and thinking, on her account, how very right that woman in love had been in her knowledge that sexual union can have no meaning other than an increase in one's loneliness; that her breaking through the temporal aim of sex had an infinite purpose of its own; that in the depths of an embrace she delved not for satisfaction but for yearning; that she scorned the notion of one being either the lover or the loved; that before they left her, she had led the weak loved ones to her couch and imbued them with the ardour of lovers. By such noble partings her heart became part of Nature. She sang the bridal song about fate to her more mature favourites; exalted their nuptials; exaggerated the qualities of the approaching bridegroom so that they might prepare themselves for him as for a god and might survive even his splendour.

In recent years, Abelone, there was one occasion, when, unexpectedly, I felt your actual presence and understood you, even though you had not been in my thoughts for a long time.

It was in Venice, in autumn, in one of those salons where foreign visitors foregather around a hostess who is as foreign as they are. These people stand about with their cup of tea and are delighted whenever a well-informed fellow-guest turns them swiftly and discreetly towards the door and whisper a name that sounds Venetian. They're ready for the most outlandish names; nothing can surprise them, for limited as their experience may be, in this city they blithely surrender to the most extravagant possibilities. In their normal day-to-day lives they are forever confusing what is extraordinary and what is forbidden, but here they grant themselves the expectation of something wonderful, which appears on their faces as an expression of coarse licentiousness. What might come over them only fleetingly at home--say at a concert or when quietly reading a book--they now, in this flattering setting, make show of as if by entitlement. Similarly, being unprepared for and ignorant of any danger they allow themselves to succumb to almost baneful musical outpourings as if they were yielding to a physical indiscretion, and thus they deliver themselves to the rewarding swoon of the gondola ride without coping in the least part with Venetian life. Couples, no longer newlyweds, who have spent their entire journey making nothing but spiteful exchanges now settle into a companionable silence; the pleasant fatigue of his ideals descends on the man while the woman feels young and nods cheerily to the indolent locals, giving them smiles as if she had teeth of sugar that were continually dissolving. And if you were to catch what was said, it turns out they are leaving tomorrow, or the day after, or at the end of the week. I now stood there among them, glad not to be leaving. It would shortly turn cold. The soft, opiate Venice of their preconceptions and requirements disappears with these somnolent foreigners, and one morning the other Venice is there, the real Venice, wideawake, brittle enough to shatter, not in any way the stuff of dreams, willed into being in the midst of the void, on sunken forests, finally forced into being here and now. The toughened body, stripped of inessentials, through which the ever wakeful arsenal drove the blood of its toil; and the spirit of this body which, more penetrating, incessantly expanding, was stronger than the fragrance of aromatic lands. The influential State which exchanged the salt and glass of its poverty for the treasures of nations. It is to the world's a counterweight of beauty and even within its ornamentation The beautiful counterweight to the world that even its ornamentation is full of latent energies that branch out ever more finely like nerves--this Venice.

The realisation that I knew this came over me when I was in the midst of all these self-deluding people and so made my hackles rise that I looked up to see how I might somehow convey what was in me. Was it conceivable that in these rooms there wasn't a single person, who, without knowing it was waiting to be enlightened about the essential nature of his surroundings? Some young person who would immediately understand that what was being offered here wasn't a delight but an example of will-power more demanding and severe than could be found anywhere else. I walked around, my truth had made me restless. Because it had taken hold of me here among so many people, it brought with it the the desire to have it expressed, defended, proved. I had this grotesque notion in my head that in the next moment I would clap my hands out of hatred for all their chattering misunderstanding.

It was while I was in this ridiculous mood that I noticed her. She was standing by herself in front of a window that was flooded with light, observing me, not really with her eyes which were serious and thoughtful but actually with her mouth which was ironically imitating the unmistakably annoyed expression on my face. I immediately felt the impatient tension in my features and affected a look of calm. Whereupon her mouth reverted to its natural haughtiness. Then, after a brief moment of reflection we smiled at each other.

She brought into my mind, incidentally, a certain early portrait of the beautiful Benedicte von Qualen who played a role in Baggensen's life. It was impossible to note the depth of stillness of her eyes without presuming her voice to have a deep clarity. Moreover, the braiding of her hair and the style of the neckline of her dress were

so very Copenhagen that I made up my mind to speak to her in Danish.

But before I could get closer a stream of people had pushed towards her from the other side of the room; our warm-hearted Countess, carried away by her own delight, dashed over to her, accompanied by a number of those present, and led her off there and then to sing. I was sure the young girl would excuse herself by saying that no one in the company could be interested in listening to songs in Danish. And as soon as she got the chance to speak that is what she said. The crowd round this shining figure urged her all the more; someone knew she also sang in German. 'And in Italian,' a laughing voice added with malign satisfaction. I don't know any excuse that I might have wished her to offer--but doubtless she would have resisted it anyway. It was when looks of dry-eyed offence were already appearing among the faces of the petitioners, now released from their prolonged smiling; and when the good Countess, to save herself embarrassment, had already taken a step back, sympathetically and with dignity, and when it was no longer at all necessary, that the young woman gave in. I felt myself grow pale with disappointment; reproach was written all over my face; but I turned away; there was no point letting her see. However, she broke away from the others and all of a sudden was at my side. Her dress shone onto me, the flowery scent of her warmth was around me.

'I really want to sing,' she said in Danish along my cheek, 'not because they want me to; not for appearance's sake: but because now I must sing.'

In her words one could hear the selfsame vicious intolerance from which she had just freed me.

I slowly followed the group that were leading her away. But I kept at the back by a tall door, allowing people to shift around before finally settling themselves. I leant against the black mirroring surface of the inner door and waited. Someone asked me what was happening, whether there was going to be any singing. I pretended not to know. Even as I told my lie she had already begun to sing.

I couldn't see her. There was getting to be a space around one of those Italian songs which foreigners take to be the real thing because they so clearly follow conventions. And she who sang didn't believe in it. It was an effort for her to deliver it; her singing was far too laboured. One could tell it was over by the applause that came from the front. I was sad and ashamed. People began moving about and I decided that as soon as anyone left I would do the same.

But suddenly the room fell silent. It was a silence that a moment before one wouldn't have thought possible; it went on, it intensified; and there rose from within it her voice. (Abelone, I thought, Abelone.) This time the voice was strong and full and not at all heavy; all of a piece, no break, seamless. It was an unknown German song. She sang it in a way that was both simple and strange, as if it were something vital. She sang:

'You, whom I do not tell
I lie weeping
In the night,
Lulled by your being,
Like a child in a cradle.
You do not tell me when it wakes,
for my sake:
What if this glory grew in our hearts
And was not silent.'

(short pause and then hesitantly):

'See: with lovers
When they start to confess,
How soon they tell lies.'

Again stillness. God knows who started it. Then people stirred, jostled one another, apologised, coughed. They were already thinking

about joining in a general blurring of what had been heard when suddenly her voice burst forth, resolute, unconfined, urgent:

'You leave me by myself alone
But from the merest rustling
Or wafted fragrance I can create you.
In your arms everything falls from me
But you alone are born anew.
I do not cling to what is already in my heart.'

I almost believe so when I consider how women in love as naive as Mechthild, as passionate as Teresa of Avila, as wounded as the Blessed Rose of Lima, could swoon with relief, knowing they were in God's care and were loved. Ah, He who was a helper to the weak is an injustice to the strong such as they; when they were expecting nothing save an unending road there reappeared a known figure coming out to meet them in the thrilling forecourt of Heaven, cossetting them with lodgings and distracting them with masculinity. His heart's powerful refracting lens brings together once more the already parallel rays coming from theirs, and they whom the angels hoped to preserve intact for God flame up in the dryness of their longing.

[Written on the margin of the MS:
To be loved means to be consumed by fire. To love is: giving light with inexhaustible oil. To be loved is to pass away; to love is to endure.]

Nevertheless it's possible that in later years Abelone tried to think with her heart so as to enter directly and unobtrusively into relationship with God. I could imagine there being letters from her reminiscent of the considerate introspection of Princess Amalie Gallitzin; but if these letters were addressed to someone she'd been close to for years how pained he may have been by the change in her. And she herself: I suspect she feared nothing except the ghostly alteration which we in fact fail to take note of because all evidence of it seems so utterly foreign that we let it pass.

It is difficult to persuade me that the story of the Prodigal Son is not the legend of one who didn't want to be loved. When he was a child everyone in the house loved him. He grew up knowing nothing different and, being a child, he grew accustomed to their tenderness of heart. But once he became a youth he wanted to cast all that aside. He wouldn't have been able to say it, but even when he spent the whole day wandering around outdoors he didn't want the dogs with him ever again because they loved him as well; because looking in their eyes he could read watchfulness, sympathy, expectation, and concern; because when they were with him there was nothing he could do that didn't either delight them or hurt their feelings. But what he was aiming for at the time was that indifference of heart which early in the morning out in the fields sometimes seized him inwardly and with such purity that he would start to run in order to leave himself no time or breath to be more than a weightless moment in the morning's returning consciousness.

The mystery of his yet-to-be life spread itself out before him. For no reason he would quit the footpath and go on through the fields, his arms outstretched as if he were able to cope with several directions at once. And then he would fling himself down somewhere out of sight and no one would care a jot about him. He would peel himself a flute, or fling a stone at a small predator, or bend down and force a beetle to turn around: none of this could count as destiny, and the sky passed over him as it passed over all nature. Eventually afternoon came and with it the chance to let his fancy roam; one could be a buccaneer on the island of Tortuga, and still be free of any obligation to actually be one; one could lay siege to Campêche, or capture Vera Cruz; one could be an entire army or a leader on horseback, or a ship at sea: whatever one felt like being. If it came into one's head to kneel, in a trice one was Deodat von Gozon and had slain the dragon and still hot from the struggle, had seen that his

act of heroism lacked obedience and was really haughtiness. For one omitted nothing regarding subject matter. And, however much rein one allowed one's imagination, there were always intervals when one could simply be a bird, without specifying which kind. Then it was time to go home.

Dear God!--how much there was to cast aside and forget; for it was right to forget; it was necessary; otherwise one would give oneself away if one were questioned closely. No matter how much one tarried and looked around, the gable eventually came into view. The topmost window gazed down; someone may well have been standing there. The dogs in whom expectation had been growing all day, tore through the shrubs and hustled one back into the figure they kept in their heads. And the house did the rest. One needed only to step into the fullness of its aroma for most things to be as they should be. Trivial matters could still change; but in all, here one was the person one was always taken to be; the one for whom they had long since structured a life out of one's small past and their own desires; the being they all shared and who day and night was subordinate to the influence of their love, between their hope and their doubt, their censure and their applause.

There's no point taking infinite care climbing the steps. They'll all be in the sitting room, and the door has only to open for them to see him. He remains in the dark, anticipating their questions. But then the worst happens. They take him by both hands, lead him across to the table and all of them, every single one, line up, curious, in front of the lamp. It's all very well for them: they're in the shadow; it's on him alone the light falls as well as on all the disgrace of having a face.

Will he stay and lie through his teeth about the general sort of life they'd assigned to him? Will he stay and come to resemble them in every part of his face? Can he divide himself between the tender truthfulness of his will and the crude deceit that spoils it for him? Will he abandon becoming something that might harm those of his family who have nothing left but a weak heart? No, he'll go away. It could be while they're busy with his birthday table, setting out those ill-chosen items that are meant once again to put everything to rights. He'll go away for good. Only long after will it become clear to him how great had been his resolve at that time never to love, so as not to put anyone in the appalling position of being loved. He will be reminded of this years later and like other good intentions this also will have been impossible to hold to. For in his loneliness, he had loved and loved again, each time wasting his whole nature and entertaining inexpressible fears for the freedom of the other person. Slowly he had learnt to shine the rays of his emotion into his beloved instead of consuming the emotion in her. And he was spoiled by the joy of recognising through her growing transparency the vistas she opened to his boundless urge to possess.

How he could weep night after night, yearning to be filled with light himself. But a woman beloved, who yields, is still a long way from being a woman who loves. O the nights of desolation when the gifts that had flooded from him were returned to him in pieces, heavy with the passing of time. How often he thought then of the troubadours, who feared nothing more than having their wishes granted. All the money he had acquired and increased he gave away to avoid having that same experience. He hurt her feelings with his ill-mannered payments, afraid every day that she might try to answer his love. For he had lost hope of ever meeting a woman whose love could pierce him.

Even when poverty terrified him every day with new hardships, when his head was misery's favourite plaything and no longer any good, when sores were breaking out all over his body like emergency eyes coping with the blackness of affliction, when he was horrified at the filth to which he'd been abandoned because he himself was filthy: even then, when he thought about it, his greatest terror was that someone would respond to him. What were all the hellish times since then compared with the profound sorrow of those embraces in which he lost everything? Didn't he wake up feeling he had no future? Didn't he walk around with his mind vacant and without the right to all the dangers?

Hadn't he had to promise a hundred times not to die? Perhaps it was the obstinacy of this terrible memory wanting a place in him to keep coming back to, that allowed him to continue his life amid squalor. Eventually he was found again. And not until then, not until his years as a shepherd did his crowded past come to rest. Who can describe what happened to him then? What poet's persuasion can reconcile the length of those days with the brevity of life? What art has scope enough to show simultaneously his thin cloaked form and the vast space of his colossal nights?

That was the period which began with his feeling as ordinary and anonymous as a convalescent making slow progress. He didn't love-- apart from, one could say: loving life. The simple love of his sheep didn't affect him; like light falling through clouds, it was scattered all about him and shimmered softly upon the meadows. Following in the innocent trail of their hunger, he strode silently over the pastures of the world. Strangers saw him on the Acropolis and for a long while perhaps he was one of the shepherds at Les Baux and saw petrified time outlasting that noble family, which, despite all their hard-won victories under the numbers seven and three, was not able to defeat the sixteen rays of its own stars. Or should I picture him at Orange, resting against the rustic triumphal arch? Should I see him in the soul-haunted shade of Alysamps where among the tombs that lie open like the tombs of the resurrected, his eyes pursue a dragonfly?

No matter. I see more than just him. I see his whole existence, which was then taking up the long love to God, the silent goalless toil of it. For he who had wanted to hold himself back forever was once more overcome by the increasing inability of his heart to wish it otherwise. And this time he hoped his wish would be granted. His entire being that through his long solitude had become more foreseeing and unwavering, promised him that He who now dominated his thoughts knew how to love with a love that was penetrating and radiant. But while he yearned to be loved at last so masterly, his emotion which was accustomed to things far off, understood the utter remoteness of God. There were nights when he had a mind to hurl himself into space towards God; hours full of discovery when he felt strong enough to dive back to the Earth and pull it up on the storm-tide of his heart. He was like someone who hears a wonderful language and feverishly resolves to write poetry in it. Still ahead of him lies the dismay he will experience at how difficult the language is; he was unwilling at first to believe that you could spend your whole life shaping your first trial sentence only to find they didn't make sense. He launched himself into learning it like a runner starting a race, but the denseness of what had to be surmounted slowed him down. Anything more humiliating than this apprenticeship didn't bear thinking about. He had found the philosopher's stone and now he was being forced to ceaselessly convert the swiftly made gold of his good fortune into the lumpen lead of patience. He who had adapted himself to space now dragged himself like a worm through crooked passageways without egress or direction. Now that he was learning, with so much difficulty and worry, to love, he was shown how careless and trivial all the love had been which he'd supposed he'd achieved. How nothing could have come from that kind of love because he hadn't begun to work on it and turn it into a reality.

During those years great changes were taking place within him. Working hard to draw close to God, he almost forgot Him; and all that he perhaps hoped to attain in time was 'sa patience de supporter une âme'* The accidents of fate which people go by had long since relinquished all meaning for him; and now even the spicy flavour that's essential to pleasure and pain became for him pure and nourishing. From the roots of his being grew a sturdy overwintering plant of a fruitful joyousness. He was completely absorbed in being master of what constituted his inner life. He wanted to leave nothing out, for he had no doubt that his love resided in all of this and was growing. Indeed his inner composure was so far-reaching that he decided to make up for the most important of the things he had merely endured. He thought mostly of his childhood, and the more calmly he tried to picture it the more incomplete it seemed to have been. All his memories of it had about them the vagueness of premonitions and

the fact that they were taken as past virtually put them in the future. To really involve himself in all this once more was the reason why this erstwhile stranger returned home. We don't know if he stayed there: all we know is that he went back.

*(his) patience to put up with a soul

Those telling the story make an effort at this point to remind us about the house as it was; for by then only a short time had elapsed, only a small amount of measured time; everyone in the house would be able to say how much. The dogs are grown old but they're still living. Reportedly one of them howled. Everyone leaves what they're doing. Faces appear at the windows, old faces and grown up faces, all of them showing a touching likeness to faces remembered. And in one very old face recognition bursts forth. Recognition? Is it really just recognition?--Forgiveness. Forgiveness for what?--Love. My God:love.

He, the one they recognised, no longer thought--his mind being so occupied--that love might still exist. With all that was happening at the time it's understandable that the only thing they would tell of later was what he did, the incredible action he performed, which no one had seen before: the gesture of supplication, in which he threw himself down before them, imploring them not to show love. Alarmed by this and shaking they raised him to his feet. They interpreted his impulsive behaviour in their own way, while at the same time forgiving him. He must have found it indescribably liberating to find that they'd all misunderstood him, despite his desperately explicit manner. It was likely they'd let him stay. As the days passed he came to see more clearly that the love they were so vain about and which they secretly encouraged in one another did not affect him. He almost had to smile at the trouble they took and it became obvious that their concern for him could not amount to much.

What did they know about who he was? He was now so terribly difficult to love, and he felt there was only the One who was capable of it. But He was not yet willing.

End of the Notebooks