

The background of the entire cover is a repeating pattern of stylized yellow roses and leaves on a white background. The pattern is dense and covers the entire surface.

SENSITIVA AMOROSA

Ola Hansson

Translated by Paul Norlén

WITS II, NUMBER 11
2002

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INTRODUCTION

Ola Hansson (1860–1925) was born on a farm in southern Sweden and educated in Lund. He began his literary career as a poet. Hansson's first poetry collection, simply titled *Poems* (1884), is considered largely derivative, inspired by the Danish writer, J.P. Jacobsen, and Albert Bååth, a local Scanian poet. Hansson's second poetic attempt, *Notturmo* (1885) garnered much more critical attention, not all of it positive. The reason for the critical hesitation seems to have been the stylistic innovation of the collection. Hansson wrote prose poems and did not seem particularly restrained by rhyme and meter, the poetic ingredients that most traditional critics expected. Further, Hansson appeared to use the landscapes he described as projections of the soul. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, we can identify these qualities as early modernism. Hansson's contemporaries thought it to be merely bad poetry, with the exception of Vilhelm Ekelund, who called it, "the first landmark in Swedish poetry since Stagnelius." Controversy and innovation are two of the hallmarks of Hansson's entire literary career.

Sensitiva Amorosa (1887) appeared during the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough in the midst of a raging debate about sexual morality. The morality debate was launched in 1883 by the publication of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *The Gauntlet*, which proposed that both men and women should stay chaste until marriage. Most Scandinavian authors of the day weighed in on the issue, either siding with Bjørnson or arguing the cause of free love. The apparent public sanction of prostitution was of central concern and was treated in such books as Hans Jaeger's *Christiania Bohemians* (1885) and Christian Krohg's *Albertine* (1886) to the alarm and outrage of the conservative middle class. Hansson admitted in a private letter to Georg Brandes that his own disgust from his physical experiences with prostitutes had inspired him to create the "sensitiva amorosa" who savors the erotic situation from a distance.

Men of the middle class routinely found sexual experience in the arms of prostitutes or working-class mistresses, while they waited for the financial security that would enable them to marry. Middle class women, on the other hand, were kept in ignorance of all things sexual until marriage, which often resulted in psychological trauma and frigidity. The plight of such women was powerfully depicted by Victoria

Benedictsson in *Money* (1885) and Amalie Skram in *Constance Ring* (1885). One of Hansson's good friends and confidantes, Stella Kleve, scandalized the public with *Bertha Funcke* (1885), a novel about a woman who enjoys engaging in erotic flirtations without ever actually committing a sexual indiscretion. That women should have any erotic impulses at all was a source of dismay to the establishment. The flirtations of Kleve's book may be yet another source of inspiration for Hansson. It has been claimed that a number of the scenarios in *Sensitiva Amorosa* were based on Hansson's conversations and interactions with Kleve herself.

While writing *Sensitiva Amorosa*, Hansson published articles on the French authors Paul Bourget and J.K. Huysmans. Hansson felt considerable affinity with these writers at the fountainhead of literary decadence. Hansson became an important mediator of decadent writers, presenting both Poe and Baudelaire, among others, to the Swedish public. Resonances can be found between *Sensitiva Amorosa* and the flirting club of Bourget's *Lost Profiles* (1884). Like Hansson, Bourget felt that people lacked a stable character, and that at any moment behavior was determined by an almost mystical interaction of heredity, upbringing, and the influences of the moment. Savoring the thrill of erotic impulses without giving into them is also something Bourget's characters have in common with Hansson's. The hypersensitivity of Huysman's archetypically decadent character Des Esseintes from *Against Nature* (1884) is echoed by the refined sensibilities of Hansson's characters. Des Esseintes' aestheticism prevents him from enjoying life in the unlovely bustle of the urban landscape, and so he retreats to an artificial paradise of his own creation. In Hansson's novel, an unappealing visual impression is sufficient to end a love affair or make a man go mad. *Sensitiva Amorosa* has been called the first decadent novel in Sweden.

The prose masterpieces of the Scandinavian Modern Breakthrough tended to be presented in the mode of objective realism. George Brandes had called for authors to bring up issues of current interest for debate. Ola Hansson is one of the early pioneers of an interest in psychological subjectivity that would come to dominate the literature of the 1890s. Rather than large public issues, Hansson was interested in the individual's response to the world. Moreover, he was interested in mysterious, irrational behavior, and avoided the logical cause-and-effect explanations of most 1880's prose. He referred to the vignettes of *Sensitiva Amorosa* as "studies in spiritual anatomy." His characters are driven by biological determinism, but the roots of their behavior remain obscure to both the actors and the reader. Many have wanted to classify *Sensitiva Amorosa* as a collection of short stories, but the thematic and

stylistic unity of the piece could argue for its status as an experimental novel. The book presents fragmented episodes and lacks the chronological beginning, middle, and end structure of most other Modern Breakthrough novels. Thus, in several respects, *Sensitiva Amorosa* represents a marked stylistic break with the usual tone of 1880s fiction.

Because of the erotic themes in the book, Hansson had difficulty finding a publisher. His previous publisher had joined a confederation of publishers against immorality, and, thus, would not touch the book. The short novel was eventually published by Hans Österling, who, that same year, had also dared to publish August Strindberg's *The Father*. The reception of *Sensitiva Amorosa* was brutal. The comments made by an anonymous reviewer in the December 9, 1887 issue of *Aftonbladet* make the point: "One of the most nefarious works of a depraved imagination, dragged into the daylight by publishers profiteering on immorality! Let me just say that this disgusting and rude self-confession appears to be intended as an 'aesthetic' for the perpetrators of certain unnatural vices." Karl Warburg complained that the book was a waste of paper and not why Gutenberg's printing press had been invented. The erotic flirtations of Hansson's novels may seem tame by today's standards, but they struck his contemporary audience as immoral and perverse.

Hansson's friend Stella Kleve defended *Sensitiva Amorosa* as a lyrical poem in prose in the style of Baudelaire and J.P. Jacobsen. George Brandes also approved of the book in a review in *Politiken*, December 17, 1887. Brandes observed the decadent overtones of the work: "This book is not for the rabble...The soul the book shows to us is as receptive to impressions as an egg without a shell...None of Sweden's female authors possess such a feminine, such a mimosa-like sensibility as this author, who is the descendent of farmers, but is more aristocratic in his emotional life than any refined last heir to a noble house." Another positive review in the German press by a Laura Marholm caught Hansson's eye, and cheered him considerably. In 1888, Laura Marholm and Ola Hansson met at the home of Georg Brandes in Copenhagen. They were married in 1889.

Like many other authors of the Modern Breakthrough, Ola Hansson went into European exile because of the scandals caused by his work at home in Scandinavia. His new wife, Laura Marholm, was an experienced translator of Scandinavian literature into German and enabled Hansson to have an important career as a critic in Germany. He is credited with having reintroduced Friedrich Nietzsche to Germany, and, in German newspapers and journals, he waged a significant crusade against the aesthetics of naturalism. In 1891, Hugo von Hofmannsthal tried to entice the critic and author Herman Bahr back to Vienna by

describing the pleasures of Arthur Schnitzler's bachelor apartment, which was equipped with a subscription to the journal *Freie Bühne*, so that Bahr could "weep tears of joy over Ola Hansson."

Hansson never returned to Scandinavia except for brief intervals and spent most of his literary career in France and Germany. Hansson's popularity started to wane towards the end of the 1890s, at the same time that he began to develop paranoid tendencies. Poverty and alcohol abuse only aggravated the situation, and, in 1905 Laura Marholm and Ola Hansson were visited by the Munich police for having written threatening letters to the Bavarian royal house. The result of this visit was that Laura Marholm was forcibly committed to a mental institution. Although Marholm was released shortly thereafter, this episode marked the end of the couple's influence upon European letters. After years of shifting abodes and trying to recapture the vitality of his youthful writing, Hansson died in Turkey in 1925 from the complications of appendicitis.

Sensitiva Amorosa has perhaps had a greater impact than any other of Hansson's literary works. In one vignette, a romantic aesthete takes up his abode in a rural spot and distresses the local population by taking long rambling walks in nature. Against his will he becomes besotted by a local beauty from the *petit-bourgeois* circles of the town. Although the episode continues in a different direction, up to this point, this plot could also serve as a summation of Knut Hamsun's *Mysteries* (1892). The secret passion of a man for a beautiful fourteen-year-old boy in another vignette recalls the plot of Thomas Mann's short masterpiece, *Death in Venice* (1912). The characters so affected by an ugly visage that they change their lives would find a kindred spirit in the title character of Hjalmar Söderberg's *Dr. Glas* (1905), who murders the Reverend Gregorius, in part, because he does not like the look of him.

Susan Brantly

"----- I now have no more than one lone interest left: to study and enjoy sex. All of those root filaments, by means of which my being has become intertwined with life, and through which my being has drawn nourishment from it, have dried out and shriveled up, one after the other, all but one. And this alone has grown large and satisfied itself with sap, burrowed down and spread out, and now it is a network of fine branches, which alone give me a hold on life. All the other organs in my being have, gradually and one after the other, ceased working. The channels, which carried blood from life's heart into their vessels, have been blocked. They have been paralyzed and shrunk into dead rudiments—all but one, through which I study and enjoy sex, and which has acquired a further differentiation in its construction and become like a fragile mechanism with microscopically small and spider-web-fine wheels and cogs. I have made this study and this enjoyment into an exquisite art, and I have no other goal or interest in this life than to pursue this art to perfection.

For men like me, sooner or later there always comes a point in time when you grow tired of all actual relationships with women. There are, in all such relationships, however they otherwise are, so much that is banal and painful. I have had more than enough of that and now I enjoy women at a distance, through the study of them within my mind, and, in this way, I can remove all the trivial aspects which inhere in sexual relationships, as well as enjoy the pure essence without distasteful additions.

There is something so frighteningly dreary in this business of striving for and getting a woman. It causes disgust and pain from beginning to end. First there they are, the two of them, the man and the woman, rubbing up against each other like two rutting cats. And every secret glance which they exchange reveals, in its lustful glow or pining moistness or shamefaced shyness, this sexual drive which physically soils them both. I have always felt loathing for the sight of this squalid and ludicrous flirtation, at which the whole world smiles meaningfully and cynically and which constantly reminds me of the foppish rooster's elegant courting antics before the prudish hen. And then when that grand happiness and that overflowing bliss which is the wretched act of copulation has been achieved, then the story is over and then there is not so

particularly much more to get, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred you find yourself, sooner or later, face to face with a being whom you had never seen before, much less made the acquaintance of or longed to have for yourself. And one fine day you awaken in your bed with a strange woman at your side, and you cannot recognize a single feature of her face or her soul. If she is your mistress without our Lord's special consent, the whole painful unpleasantness of a break-up is in store for you. And if you have entered into a relationship controlled by society, you have to live your whole life through intimately together with this unknown being, whom you never wished to have but who is now clinging to you like a burr. You may have studied a woman however thoroughly and you may think you know her inside and out—you are still never really sure that one day she won't shed her skin like an eel and suddenly stand before you as unlike the one, whom you knew and loved before, as black is unlike white. You see, a human being is not something fixed and unchangeable, which you take hold of and say that it is this or that. In its being unceasing secret processes take place, which transform its body and its soul minute by minute, processes in you and in those whom you have cared for in life and drawn close to you in tenderness, processes which neither you nor they know of what they consist. Is it you who now sees with different eyes, or is it the other one who has changed and become someone else? That you don't know. The only thing you know is that this person, who has come closer and closer to you, until you have merged with her and she with you, has suddenly been pulled away and is now standing far, far away from you and stands there like an indifferent or hateful object, with which you want nothing to do or which you shun with aversion.

This is what my experience has taught me, and I will no longer run the risk of surrendering to life body and soul, for then women cause us more harm than good. But since for me sex is everything and life without it would be without content or meaning— and I have never been able to understand how people otherwise care to live—I have learned to enjoy it in another fashion and in my own way, so that I can drink the pure wine without also getting the dregs.

All these women whom I meet on walks and in theaters and wherever the road leads for such random strollers through life as I—I don't want to get close to them and I don't want to talk with them, for then the stupidity in those beautiful or characteristic heads would soon emerge, and then all the rest of the misery, and then everything would be ruined for me—but I enjoy them all, with my entire body and with my entire soul, with sight and smell and feeling and thought. I single out each and every one of them from the crowd and bring out her innermost self, the

aroma of her being, the nuances of her face and the characteristic features of her form and the fleeting bouquet of her disposition, grasp this in a gesture, a look, an expression in her glance, in her way of walking, in any trifles, which no one else would take notice of, but in which the individual particularities reveal themselves completely exposed, or I sound the depths in this hidden personal life with my most sharp-sighted thought. And when the woman stands there before me, alone among all the others with her fragile, but distinct, individuality in skin and glance and brain and heart, then I enjoy her. And what does it matter then, that I don't have her in a close embrace. She can still never come closer to me than she is, and the man who will one day hold her in his arms will not come any closer to her, for I know the basis of her, the depths and the foundation, recognize them in their sheerest inner and outer nuances. And I have taken her, completely without her own knowledge, more than any other man would be able to do with her consent. Therefore I can also at the same time love and enjoy any number of them and all that I meet, for it is the essential nuance which I love and enjoy in each and every one of them, and this is different from one to the other.

First there are the types, the ones which I enjoy as general models: the lithely and buxomly firm with black hair and dense eyebrows and wax-colored skin, which remind me of tasteful dresses of black and gold silk; the slender, somewhat lanky brunettes with an apricot-soft bloom on their cheeks, which make you think of the velvety, dewy petals of violets; the blondes with all-too-ample forms, with their fragrance of sickly sweet warmth; the small and slender light ones, resembling tea roses or tulips; the ones with smoothly combed hair parted in the middle and forget-me-not-blue eyes and with a face in cream white and strawberry red, a *l'anglaise*, and which make you think of potted flowers in the windowsill of a *petit-bourgeois* home on the distant side streets of a big city—and many others. And then—and those are the ones which I love and enjoy most exquisitely—come all of the innumerable nuances, those which cannot be grouped under any category at all, but live each her peculiar independent personal life by themselves, and who in their outer appearance have some enigmatic quality or other, in which the particular nuance in their intellect and sensibility can be found. When I meet such a woman on my path, I forget the whole world around me and I am not at peace until I have completely grasped her. I place her on the dissection table before me, and I probe her with my searching thought, and I meld with her with my most intimate feeling. I scrutinize every particle in her under my analysis and look at the center of her being with my intuition, and thus I finally possess her totally, the way she issued from the great, mysterious workshop of nature, in her complex and unitary

personality. For it is, above all, the characteristic details in a person which mystically entice me. Those which others dismiss as ugly may be the most interesting to me, and those who pass as beauties may seem as expressionless to me as an unwritten slate -----

-----You see, there is growing in the over-cultivated soil of modern society a strange and singular plant, which is called *Sensitiva amorosa*. The veins of its petals are filled with morbid oils. Its scent has a sickly sweetness, and its coloring is subdued, like the light in a sickroom with drawn curtains and pink as a dying sunset glow. If you search in your own or your friends' lives, you will find many differing varieties of it. And if I were you, I would pick a few of these and sell them in the market -----"

II

We were three good old friends, who for a long time had lived together in intimate, daily contact and who knew each other inside and out and whom life had driven in scattered directions and who now were meeting again after many years separation, during which the one had not heard much about the other, other than through rumor and the casually snapped-up words of mutual friends, whom you happened to run across on your way through life. By chance now our paths had crossed once again—fate does have little whims like that—he who was living at the place had arranged dinner. We had been by ourselves as in old times. Our senses had gradually relaxed. All the forgotten memories from our friendship had risen from the dead, and all of our youth appeared suddenly before our eyes like a silent, slumbering *fata morgana*, doubly magical for being so distant. We had rented a coach. The city was already behind us, and we rode slowly along the shore. It was a day in early spring, toward evening. The sound lay shining in the evening sun. Steam rose from the fields. The village groves were shot with delicate green, and it was so silently lonely as it can be only on the plains. Only the larks were singing up in the blue sky. Memories surfaced from the past, one after the other, now a happy one, now a melancholy one. They turned into words and sights, and we relived them together, calmly and sweetly like the spring evening around us and as you do only in recollection, after life has released its hold and left you free.

A name came to my lips, I don't know how or why, a name which is borne by a person whom all three of us had been close to, and we began to discuss his fate. A few years back he had become engaged to a girl with all conceivable good qualities and before whom the whole world had fallen to its knees. And when the engagement had gone on for several months, he had broken it off without anyone being able to find a reason. The girl had accepted her lot and consoled herself over her misfortune, and soon enough found another who knew better to appreciate his good fortune, as the world said, and he was a well-situated official in some provincial hole. None of us knew her, and we had nothing to go by, as we delved into his character and made guesses.

"It's no use trying to guess," said the friend who sat across from me, "No one knows what made him decide to act as he did more than

himself, and if he had said so, probably no one would have understood and perhaps least of all she, who, if anyone, could make a claim to an explanation. I still recall, when I got their card, how I predicted to myself that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they would drift away from each other, that even though I didn't have the least idea of how she looked or what she was like, simply because I knew that people like him, and us, *cannot* bind themselves for life. For us marriage is a game of chance, a high bet on low cards. It is the trivialities which rule our life and create the turning points, those unaccountable small things, which you don't discover before it is too late and which you can't see at first glance. Our friend has met on his path a woman, in whose entire outer and inner being his own sensitive and delicate being has rediscovered its secret needs and dreams, and he has heard, like a high violin tone which set his entire soul and all of his senses quivering, everything which was the purest within him. And he has forgotten that in these anxiously brittle bow strokes, discord lies in wait at its most alert. And then one fine day he has heard this false nuance, and the discord has grown and gotten sharper, minute by minute, and he may have put his fingers in his ears and writhed and agonized. That hasn't helped in the least. And the whole melody has burst apart and collapsed into an insufferable mish-mash of harsh and grating sounds—and he has flown. It may have been a little word that did it, a tone in her voice, an expression in her face or a movement in her body. It may have been anything at all, something outside her which has changed his view of her, perhaps simply an association in his thoughts, which had no real basis whatsoever, or a sudden shift in his emotions, with which she had nothing to do and regarding which he himself was totally unaccountable, just as when we, purely physically, without discernible reason, have hallucinations of smell and taste which are unpleasant to us. But this unpleasant impression of disgust, which perhaps originally had no connection whatsoever with her, has been more than sufficient to repel him from her as though from a loathsome object, and he has *had* to make himself free from her, a mystery to all and a mystery to himself.

A young man of my acquaintance has told me such a story from his own life. He had fallen in love with a girl. She appeared to be obliging. They met daily in a free and intimate association and had good opportunities to get to know each other as much as it is possible for two people to get to know each other. And he found her with each day coming closer and closer to him, and his own being more and more ardently became part of hers and settled down there, as though there it had its true home. Then it happened one evening in a gathering that another person, towards whom from the very first moment of their acquaintance he

had harbored one of those antipathies which we can never fully analyze, but which we feel in all of our being, paid court to the young girl, and he seemed to find, whether it be with or without reason, that she accepted his banal phrases favorably. He felt this first like a burning wound deep in his soul and like an excruciating pain in his emotions, and then it was to him as if something of this repellent person's being had penetrated into hers, in a physical and spiritual fusion. As if something of this unknown element in his rival, which cut against the quintessence of his own nature, had communicated itself to this woman, he suddenly had a sense of repugnance towards her appearance and presence, entirely the same antipathy that he felt for the other person, unexplainable and uncontrollable. It was as though her soul and body had been surrounded and filled with a new substance with which his being could not mingle, but from which it drew back in disgust in an instinctive reflex motion, as when our senses, our nerves of smell and taste, are affected by something loathsome.

I know of a young girl too, to whom something similar happened. She had become engaged to a young man, and they were as fervently fond of one another as one can be here in this world, and they seemed to be expressly made for each other. He brings her home with him to present her to his parents. She is seized by an instantaneous, violent distaste for the father's face, and when she then sees him standing there side by side with his son, she seems to find—perhaps it really was there, but it may just as well have been quite simply her imagination—in this bloated, repulsive face something in common with the facial features of her beloved. And soon she saw in them nothing but all those small, characteristic peculiarities which she had previously discovered, one after another, and which were so dear to her, because she alone in all the world knew them, and because they were therefore hers and no one else's. They all disappeared, and there was nothing left other than this indeterminate likeness to the father, which, though she could not figure out where it was and of what it consisted, she felt was there, and which she alone saw before her, always when they were together, he and she, and which she constantly, day and night, thought about and suffered from and was disgusted by, and which grew formlessly and froze in a fixed idea which filled her entire existence, her senses, feelings and thoughts, as it can happen to us in nights of fever that a melody comes again and again to our hearing, always the same, and we can't be rid of it. It rides us like an incubus on our chest, and we sweat and shrink under it, and it hurts like a knife in a half-healed wound and buzzes like a fly inside your brain as an infinite, soundless space."

The sun stood big and yellow far down by the horizon. The sky was turning white. The night chill could already be felt in the air, and it became even more silent out over the fields.

"I too," continued our friend after awhile, "To you I can tell this, for now I can think about the whole thing without torment and talk about it without embarrassment—I have myself once in my life had an experience which makes all this into something intimately familiar, which I really deeply understand. One summer a few years back—I had had a winter of strained and monotonous drudgery—I was tired in body and soul, fed up with the bachelor life of the cities and the company of people, and I wanted to get away from all of it. I took off at random, and finally settled down in a distant rural corner in an idyllic area with forest and a lake, which was like a world of its own without connection to the one from which I had come and to which the commotion of the world did not reach. It felt like coming out of a dance hall, out into the night and the open air, and you're dizzy and your blood and nerves are on fire, and the noise is still buzzing inside your head. And I seemed to walk around in an infinite emptiness, which fell over me and was like an oppressive dizziness. The days came and went, and I had what was like a single feeling of summer and repose, that the sky was blue and the air filled with warm light and that it was cool in the green light under the vault of the beeches, as when a woman's hand is placed on your hot forehead. I wandered around for days on end. I became like an animal of the forest and a plant of the ground, and there was a quiet resurrection of the child in me, as when a plant, which has been singed by sun and coated with dust, slowly lifts its withered leaves after a shower. Those last years lay behind me like a creeping and mumbling darkness, and it was as though I were suddenly stepping out into the sunlight and felt it permeate my frozen being and thaw it out. And when evening came, and the sun had gone down, and it became silent, and the summer night lay turning blue over the area, I was sentimental as one is in the unforgettable days of early youth.

When on one such evening I came home after an entire day spent outdoors, I found on my table a letter of invitation from one of the town's notables, a Danish landowner whose family I met often on my excursions—presumably viewed as a strange bird, when for weeks at a time I lived like a hermit with no other human contact than my hosts, humble tenant farmers on the property. I was not at all happy about the letter, for I wanted to be left alone and had had it so good and felt inside me that now it was over. But I went. There were some people from the surrounding area. We amused ourselves in an unpretentious *petit-bourgeois* manner. It was neither fun nor boring for me, but when later in the

evening I set off on my way home and, alone with myself, could really think over what had happened and what it was I was about to embark upon and what would come now, I felt discouraged. I observed with ruthless irony all of the familiar symptoms of falling in love, and I knew myself all too well to know that I already was in love and that I had nothing to do other than to let it all take its course. And I was afraid of this new attraction, which soon would likely develop into passion—and thus the good days were over. One of two alternatives, it was clear to me: leave or embark upon the unavoidable "hook, line, and sinker." It turned out to be the latter.

And as the days passed and autumn was approaching, our young summer love grew full and ripe, and our souls intertwined as when two adjacent trees braid their roots and crowns together. And the forest stood dark, and the sunlight became hard and thin, and all the lights and shadows and lines were sharpened. And then one evening in September, when the landscape was like a fairyland in the moonlight, we exchanged our first mute confession in this glance, which to me is the culmination and the quintessence of all love and compared to which everything that comes afterward is empty and impoverished. Every person probably has such a moment in his life, which he values and loves as his best. *Mine* is this minute: when we, this woman and I, rested in each other's being, eye to eye. I would gladly give all my hot sense intoxications and all my swooning nights of sensuous pleasure for this single, mute, tear-filled glance, which made my pleasure so fine and so anxiously fragile that it turned to pain.

Now when I look back on my youth and stand free vis-à-vis all my experiences and can compare and judge—now I believe that I can say that of all my attractions, this has been the strongest, perhaps the only one which I can call by the great name of love. And yet it took nothing more than a small, pitiful, random event to transform my feelings all the way into my innermost soul, as though black were to become white.

One beautiful September day I followed my Danish friend to the local sheriff, who was part of this social circle and who had his residence in the vicinity. A ready carriage waited before the door, and just as we drove into the yard, a young girl, followed by two men, came out of the office. The farmhand, who came running, was in a hurry to tell us that this was the child murderess, of whose frightful deed rumors were rampant in the area, filling minds with fear. She had confessed to the whole thing. It was confirmed that the murder had been committed, certainly in a moment of unaccountability, but nevertheless under the most loathsome circumstances, and the poor criminal was now to be transported to the county jail to await sentencing. Her clothing was black and soiled.

Her skirt was hanging askew, exposing her shift on one side, and on the other, the worn boot and a dirty stocking far up her calf. There was something disgustingly loose and hanging in all of this young female body. And her face...it was the face I saw. It was the face on which my eyes were stuck like glue, the terrible ash-gray face, swollen from crying, streaked with tears and which remorse and emotions of all types had already furrowed and disfigured—and then her eyes, black underneath, red-rimmed, lackluster, with a frozen stare in her eyes, as though they constantly saw before them the sight of the misdeed, with an expression as of a stifled scream of anguish. And next to this face I saw another, innocent, blooming and rosy, but yet similar, in what way I could not say and still don't know, but to each other they were alike, these two faces, and they flowed together into one, and I could not separate them from each other. As in the foundation of a new building there are the spores of fungi, which breed and flourish and shoot up throughout the whole house, stealthy, sly, and insidious, and eat the marrow out of the wood, in the same way, out of this small seed sown by chance, a poisonous plant developed, which branched out into all of my emotions and laid them waste, entirely and incurably."

The coach had turned, the roofs and spires of the town were outlined in sharp silhouettes of black paper against the smoky red reflection of the sunken sun, and between this and the chilly blue-white sky above us, with fine shadings into both, a narrow band of velvet green formed, from which shone a single, large star.

"What good does it do to try to build up a life, when we are governed by forces that we don't know and when we know no more about our secret emotions than the sprouts and buds which now are swelling and germinating around us know how their cells are formed?"

III

One evening in May we had accompanied the newlyweds, our friend and his young wife, down to the boat that was to take them on their honeymoon. He had looked like a person to whom a great good fortune has occurred, and who is standing in quiet bewilderment before all of these unforeseen splendors, and who doesn't recognize himself in this new world, and there was like a light calm over his face and words and manner. And she—she had been like a sun-warmed spring day, when life is flooding over its banks in the fragrant and opulent fullness of flower essences. And when the boat glided out of the harbor, it felt to the two of us who had remained standing on the pier as though the sun had gone behind clouds and as though far out there over the sea lay a fairy land in slumbering peace, into which they would enter and which we would never see, and we were seized by life's great feeling of loneliness.

Three months later, on a moonlit evening in August, they had come back and landed again at the same place, and we had met them. Then he had appeared to us like a restless person who is about to abandon everything, and there was something around his mouth and an expression in his eyes as though he were constantly brooding over a painful mystery, which left him no peace and which he could not be rid of or find the solution to.

They returned home, and a year went by, and then two, and we didn't hear much from them, until one fine day there came a long letter, sent to one of us but meant for both of us. It read as follows:

"It will soon be years since we last saw each other, and I have hardly even answered your friendly letters with a few pitiful lines, but you must not be angry about that. Things haven't been good for me during these two years. I have had a restlessness in my blood which has consumed me and made my soul as sensitive as an exposed nerve, and when I sometimes took up a pen and thought that now I should write to you both, I have always set it down again immediately and jumped up from my chair and felt that I didn't have anything to write about. That I am doing so now is due to the fact that, at this moment, I so painfully feel that I am sitting here like a person around whom everything has collapsed and fallen apart. I feel so sick and empty and alone.

We're not doing so well together, my wife and I, but however heavy it feels, I still often bless that moment when I asked her to be mine, for together with her I have tasted the best in life, even if only for a few pitiful weeks. And I believe that the person who has done this for however brief a second does not have the right to complain, for even so, he has gotten what he could get, and that is basically enough to balance out the misery of an entire lifetime.

She met me halfway with an unpremeditated devotion, a devotion without reflection and which took her entire being prisoner, body and soul. She guessed my most secret wishes, before they were fully formed, even when they could only dimly be glimpsed in my expression or eyes, my wishes in small things, and she put everything right for me as for a child. She revealed herself unreservedly, and without knowing it herself, she would sit for long periods and simply look at me, so that no words could give such a strong expression to her thoughts. And then I married her without actually loving her more than I might have been able to love many other women who had come my way, simply because I found her devotion so touching and felt sorry for her and was tired of my bachelor relationships.

I understood well enough how cold I was in my feelings and senses regarding this love, but she knew how to find more in my tenderness than there was, and I myself was happy because she was happy. I have never been so peaceful and even, as one can be early one morning in summer, a morning with lark song and the coolness of dew and the newly risen sun.

This lasted for two whole months, while we came further and further down into the south and the southern spring blazed around us. We traveled up the Rhine, rested at the green sun-sparkling Lac Lemán, hurried through St. Gotthard, down the southern slopes of the Alps with their crashing cascades hanging on the rock faces like white veils and out onto the Lombardian plain, that boundless complex of gardens over which the towns lie strewn about like optical illusions. In all of this changing throng of human faces and sceneries, transient and seen *en passant* from the windows of train cars, on the decks of steamboats, and at the *table d'hôtes* of restaurants. We were melded more and more ardently with each other. It was as though we mixed blood with each other. I went about with a child's Sunday mood and a happy peacefulness, and something good came up inside of me as when a rotted tree stump sends forth a new shoot.

One beautiful morning at the end of July we came ashore in Bellagio, a small town, which climbs and clings to the steep promontory around which Lake Como stretches its blue arms. We felt so comfortable

in this place that we really settled down. We wandered around up on the heights or rowed along the beaches and let the days come and glide by without knowing how the time passed. We used to sit awhile after dinner under the trees down by the lake right in front of the hotel, the heat heavy and dense without, and it felt doubly cool within the green half-light. One day we found our customary places occupied by a couple of newly arrived travelers, whom I had noticed at the *table d'hôte*. He looked like an English military man, and the young woman was clearly his daughter. This was one of those female faces, which in the downy soft roundness of its lines, recall fine cameos and to which the contrast between large, dark eyes in pastel and luxuriant dull-blond hair gives a character of exquisite fineness of soul, like an unusual nuance of color in a common flower. And alongside this face with a skin like the mealy flesh of an Astrakhan apple, I saw my wife's, plump and blossoming and trivial as a child's. And I felt that, before this landscape of blue, blue water and white sunlight as of molten silver and bluish white villas in abundant dark greenery, before this landscape, which was as light and bright as a morning slumber when the sun is shining behind the shades—I felt that while one of these women, lithe and refined in intelligence and feeling, could enjoy the essence of this landscape, its finest aroma and its most fleeting bouquet, as one enjoys an exquisite perfume or an old wine, the other woman threw herself over it like a hungry child, which satisfies itself greedily and tastelessly.

I felt this almost like a great disappointment, which fell heavily over me and bored itself into me, and then it seemed to me as though bonds slackened and as though I was growing back out into myself again, separating from the foreign being into which I had been merged. I felt like myself again as I had been before. I got my old self back and my old eyesight. Everything around me became itself anew. A light went out inside and outside me, and it felt like in the concert hall when a piece ends to which everyone has been listening down there in the darkness and silence, and there is light and the hum of voices. But above all else, I had this sense that something with which I had grown together was loosening around me on all sides. It was as though I had gotten up after a purely physical embrace, and I felt ashamed and foolish and sick with disgust, like after an intimate night with a strange woman.

We roamed here and there and to me she became more and more an unknown woman, who was my traveling companion and for whose tickets and lodgings I was paying. Her loud enthusiasm for everything that we encountered was grating on my refined moods. It embarrassed me and I found it puerile. Her aggressive devotion to me seemed unrefined and grotesque, and I treated it like a bargain item, which you buy

because you can't really say no. I became constantly more irritable and ironic towards her, and I could not, with all the best intentions in the world, give her more than what you give the first best woman that crosses your path. Naturally she couldn't avoid noticing for long that I was different towards her than before. At first she countered this with all of her unsuspecting and uncomplicated nature and looked down on the whole thing as trifles and temporary outbursts of a bad mood, which it wouldn't occur to her to take any too seriously. Then, when she found that her outbursts of feeling and expressions of tenderness constantly bounced back against my coldness and drew blood and were tossed aside like worthless trash, then I would notice how she started to wonder, and she would look at me with a child's long, astonished gaze, which hurt my sick conscience. After that, when she came to the certainty that this was a serious matter and that I was dragging her with me like an inconvenient knapsack, coldly, mechanically, and unwillingly as when you perform a boring duty, then she retreated into herself. And I saw her often staring before her with a helplessly brooding expression in her eyes, as though she were enduring a painful puzzlement and was suffering beneath it and could not find the solution. Finally—this was after we had come back to our home out here in the countryside—when on one occasion my irritability and my irony had been coarser and more wounding than usual, she had, as it were, made a final momentary calculation in her mind, and a sudden and violent reversal took place in her innermost feelings. And to me it was as though she had gathered all of her strong nature into that look of proud and resolute contempt, which she directed at me, and which she then retained toward me, and which I felt like a sting, half evil defiance, half sympathetic pain.

It had already been painful out there, although then we felt it less. The uninterrupted change of people and scenery had constantly offered some new thing or other, which had seized our sight and thought. And while this lasted, we had been able to live each in a world of our own without constantly being forced into an intimate *tête-à-tête* in which we, placed face to face, had to come to terms. But this became insufferable when we had come to be by ourselves out here in the loneliness, and day after day found us reduced solely to one another's company. What use is an explanation? She still won't understand me, when I don't even understand myself. For what do I know about this process, which has gone on inside me, whereof it consists, or by what it has been caused? It is likely nothing other than a reformation, called forth by natural necessity, in my physical vessels and cells, a disposition which is an unconditional effect of a given cause, which can't be seen and can't be described and which nothing would have been able to prevent. But I see that she

expects something or other from me, and I suffer from that. I search with greedy, gluttonous thoughts for a way out, and I find none. Our future life lies before me like a mysterious grin, and I must close my eyes to avoid seeing, but I see it anyway.

For both of us life has come out of joint, and it is a trifle and a bit of nonsense that caused it. I can't hate life and I can't despise it. My scorn has been struck dumb, and laughter freezes on my lips. When I am sitting in the midst of existence I feel only terror, for then I have always imagined meeting the hideous squinting gaze of a madman, which we all must follow blindly and unconsciously like somnambulists."

IV

It was on the steamboat which heads south from Lucerne, one morning early in June. The city already lay a good bit away in the background, elegant, airy, and delicate as a display of shiny new toy houses in a shop window or a piece of dainty latticed confectionary architecture. The Lake of Lucerne began to cut itself into and meander along between steeper and steeper stone walls. The air, which played up over the mountain tops and the Alpine peaks, saturated itself with chill from the eternal snow before it glided down along the dark green precipitous slopes and ran like a brisk breeze over the little glass-green basin, down there in the depths, and the small object which was moving over it, like a dot with a black streak after it.

The upper deck was full of people under the skylight, which fluttered and flapped—this strange, cosmopolitan society in miniature, which is constantly broken up and reconstituted on every train and on every steamboat deck in this great international *pension* called Switzerland. I was sitting on one of the middle benches and diagonally in front of me, on the bench which ran around the deck, I became aware of a young couple who had come from Lausanne to Lucerne on the same train as I, put up at the same hotel, and now were continuing their journey on the same boat. In the hotel register I had seen that he was a teacher from a small north German coastal town, and on the basis of a whole series of small observations, I had come to the conclusion that they were newlyweds and were on their honeymoon.

He was standing upright with his face down in his Bædeker. She sat and gazed out on the landscape, with her elbows against the railing and her chin supported on the inside of her hand. Over her, just as she was sitting there diagonally in front of me, rested this chaste calm and this plastic purity, which from the very first moment had struck me about her. Her attitude had the same unconscious *noblesse*, her bust the same firmly cast roundness, her profile the same regular line, and when once she turned her face towards me, I was met by those eyes, which look long and calmly and firmly at you and look straight into your own with a certain noble lack of constraint, a certain natural straightforwardness, a certain honestly hesitant trust which has much of pleading in it. He, on the other hand, was of that type which gives an impression of half pedant, half charlatan. His appearance was limp. His suit hung like a

sack and lacked cut. His damp soft black hair was bushy on his neck and over his coat collar, but thin on top with a bald spot in the middle and two receding bald indentations on both sides of his forehead. His face had something of the stale dampness of a sponge with a sparse beard and piercing nearsighted eyes behind his spectacles.

He held his face deep down in his Bædeker, now and then lifting his head, pinching his eyelids together so that puffy rolls of fat creased around the corners of his eyes, squinting nearsightedly out after some sought-after point in the surroundings and then directing to his wife a historic or topographical observation, which he underscored with his lecturing tone in order to really emphasize its importance and interest. She nodded distractedly or impatiently, and I noticed how each time he lifted his head and squinted out, a dark cloud came and passed like a painful spasm over her face before he had even said a word, as though she knew in advance what was coming and suffered from this expectation. I observed this time after time, to me it was as though the whole story of this marriage and this young woman's fate had lain inside this small, apparently so insignificant phenomenon like the plant in the seed. This put me at once in the very midst of these two, to me completely unknown, individuals' lives. And while the steamboat wound its way into the narrow, glass-green water alleys of the Lake of Lucerne, between the more and more rigid stone walls, and Mt. Pilatus raised its slender barren rough points to the right and Rigi spread out its mighty green slopes to the left—during all this I sat as though within this central point and watched this life unfold before me in one view and one interior after the other. And there wasn't a movement of soul or a nuance of feeling in this woman, which escaped me. To me it was if I had known her as a child and as a young girl and had lived with her all of my life and, therefore, understood this painful spasm in her face, each time that he lifted his head from his Bædeker and squinted with his nearsighted eyes and directed to her his historic or topographical observation, and as if we should have understood one another like two good old friends, if I had only stepped forward, and we had exchanged a glance and pressed each other's hands.

I seemed to see her wandering along through the narrow winding streets of her hometown with their buildings in the styles of every era, all the way down to the Hanseatic stepped gables and the medieval projecting upper stories with fantastic carvings in the ends of the roof beams. She is walking diagonally across the large square, which lies deserted and empty of people in the glare of the sun, down to the harbor, out on the pier, where she stops, leaning against the wall of the quay, looking out over the sea, in silhouette against the pale sky. It is toward

evening. The sun is low and is about to go down. The sea gulls circle and screech. The Baltic is wide in playing green reflections, and her own maiden soul is like this sunlit shifting endless surface, over which the seagulls circle and screech—wide, empty, saturated with calm, with smooth changes of feeling and circling, sorrowfully screeching thoughts, which suddenly again fall silent and rest.

During the autumn evenings the family sits around the work lamp in the living room, which is large and low with small windows and furnished in that old-fashioned stylish elegance which is like the scent of hidden winter fruit. The women are sitting around the table and working in silence. The old consul keeps himself further away in the half-shadow with his evening pipe and his easy chair. Only seldom does a word fall heavily and bottomless down into the silence, which immediately closes itself again around it, doubly tight. The rain showers patter in gusts against the pane, and the wind comes rushing out from the sea, flings itself against the walls and howls in the chimney flue as though it would come in. She lifts her head from time to time and straightens her arm, her elbow aching from fatigue, and lets her work sink down into her lap and listens with a fearful and wondering look, for to her it is as if she were hearing something which was admonishing and warning her, as if a danger awaited her or she were about to lose something which now was going its way and would never return, and as if she sensed inside herself this slow, strange wailing and this suddenly suppressed scream, with which the storm moved along over the city out there in the night.

Then one evening he is there too in the circle around the lamp in the middle of the large, low room. The old consul smokes his pipe over in the half-shadow. The women are sitting bowed over their embroidery, and he is talking. Now and then she lifts her head and looks at him with her long, open gaze. He is so unlike everything that she has seen till then. He is completely different from the young men of the town. His manner is more free and at the same time more respectful. He has not said a single word about weather and wind the whole evening. He comes directly from the great world to their out-of-the-way corner and speaks of nothing but great subjects, nothing at all of the common, the banal. He handles the most difficult fields of knowledge as though they were the ABCs and mentions great men as though they were daily companions. All this secretive and incomprehensible something which life out there in the world is for her, this which she could never even imagine how it looks, but which fills her with vague melancholy, a sweet unease, every time she thinks about it—suddenly everything comes so strangely close to her that she almost seems to be in the midst of it and starts to

feel completely familiar with it. But it has come through him, and without her recognizing it in the least, it has soon fused together with him, so that she, without having become conscious of it, can no longer tell them apart. And to the same extent that she is growing into this new life, which through his conversation has sprouted more and more luxuriously around her, she is becoming connected to him, to be sure, as though with something purely impersonal—her own dreams deepest down—but still she is becoming connected to him, so that when one day she hears the first teasing hint from one of her sisters, she senses within herself a feeling of pride, more or less as from a well-earned word of praise.

The wedding night, their trip together, only a few pitiful days—and as she now sits there on the steamboat on the Lake of Lucerne with her elbow on the rail and her chin in her hand, she wonders if she is the same person who recently was there at home with her father and mother in the little out-of-the-way town on the Baltic, or if it is he who has changed, he who is standing there with his face buried in his Bædeker, with his limp form, his ill-fitting suit, his soiled collar, his vapid, spongy face and his nearsighted squinting eyes. Now when she herself is in the midst of the wonders of nature, and the life of the great world is moving about her, and she herself sees everything with her own eyes and has all of this so intimately near at hand and at first hand, so that she can touch it simply by reaching out her hand and would be able to enjoy the quintessence of it with what is most blindingly pure within her—now *that* becomes separate which before had been *one*. Now he glides out of that as out of something where he doesn't belong, but at the same time he doesn't remain the same as he was before, but rather another whom she has never known, a loathsome larvae which creeps along over her hand with its stale coldness, a strange person who disgusts her, at night a brutal animal, by day a pedantic drudge, with his brain prop full of historical and topographical facts, nicely ordered in pigeonholes and shelves. And for days on end she is tormented in her nervous expectation of having to hear the next word, and every evening, when she has gone to bed and it has become quiet in the hotel, she recoils in anguished loathing, awaiting that moment when she would feel his cold, damp face like a sticky leech against hers and his groping, trembling hand... She is like a person who in a dream feels persecuted, and who runs and runs in order to save herself, but who, even so, can't move an inch, and who wants to cry out but can't open her mouth...

And as I sat there within the center of her personality and her fate, I didn't simply look back but also into the future—saw, how this painful spasm would by and by work its way into this noble young face and turn into two distinct furrows of sorrow on both sides of her upper lip, which

could never be erased—saw, how the expression in the clear restless look would more and more come to saturate itself from that well of pain which had begun to flow in her innermost being through an artery that never runs dry, and how this look would become misty and deep in a mute, wondering helplessness and appear as though veils to the holiest part of her soul were torn by brutal desecrating hands from top to bottom—

They had landed in Vitznau, so they could go up to Rigi and watch the sunrise.

V

What is this, this endless dread, this depression of the soul, this fistular pain of being, which hurts as though the fibers of flesh in a fresh wound quiver around the sharp instrument, this general angst which so many of our contemporaries carry around with them—what is it, what is its essence and what is its cause? A purely physiological disposition, secret disease processes in the blood and the nerves? Yes, but what are these murky expanses, in which the inner eye so full of anguish searches for something sensed, lurking, and threatening, which is, to be precise, the content of this abnormal yet constant condition of the soul, which is the hidden source of poison from which it draws its nourishment. What kind of monstrous parasite is this which has attached itself to the center of the sensory organism and which is laying its eggs and hatching its offspring there? Is it dissolution which has drawn closer to contemporary man, death which he sees follow him like his own shadow and which he constantly hears pattering behind him and whose icy breath he feels on his neck, the skeleton-man, putting his white toothless jaws and his empty black eye sockets close to his face? Or is it fate, insane, evil fate, which raises its Medusa's head before the modern fatalist? Or the concrete spectacle of the struggle for existence, the forward-rolling Juggernaut of time and the millions of human insects trampled to death? Is it perhaps the universe's own sick essence of being which modern man with his sharpened sensitivity senses in himself?

In that person from whose life I am going to relate an episode below, angst had eaten away all that, through which alone a person can grow into and become part of life. It was as though a fungal spore had lain concealed in his father's seed and in his mother's egg and, after conception, had begun to grow in the very embryo of this organism and then spread through the whole cell tissue and had so intimately infiltrated it, that it was able to insert an occasional fine root filament into every product of its activity, every perception, every sensation, every mood, every thought, every act of will and impulse to action. His childhood had been a feverish and anxious brooding, his youth spasmodic and impotent graspings after the moment. He wanted to enjoy this with all of his being, settle down in it like a bird in its nest, or move within it as care-free as a fish swimming in water, but it always crumbled between his fingers. It was like the jellyfish which a moment ago shone so purely

down there in the depths and which is now only a slimy mass which you hold in your hand; for to him, it was always as though he had forgotten something or other which he was supposed to accomplish, but couldn't remember what it was, however much he tormented himself into a cold sweat, and as though something awaited him, he knew not what or where, but something that existed out there, in life and in the future and which would turn into misfortune for him and which he almost already felt in agony like a burning wound in his soul. It lay in there, inside him, this feeling, like a glowing coal, and he was never rid of it, not even for a fraction of a second, for even when it had still not turned into conscious angst, it weighed on him and quivered like a nervous depression down in his unconscious. He could lose himself as best he could, in work or pleasure, concentrate his whole being in the activity of his brain or his senses, but still, maybe at that very moment when all of his heightened thoughts had converged in one single sharp shining point like the sought-after focal point, or the substance lay glowing hot to be formed in the workshop of his brain, perhaps in the midst of the most intimate sexual intercourse, anxiety would rise up within him and paralyze him. And he felt suddenly empty, cold, weak, somewhat like a chain that has wound itself around a wheel until it is stretched taut and then it suddenly runs back and the chain slackens. At night he would wake up when his soul was shrinking and groaning under this anxiety, when hallucinations flashed piercingly and extinguished soundlessly before him like a flash of lightning when a thunderstorm is near. It was as though all of this mute darkness around him was a single, crawling mass and as though the spirit of existence sat by his pillow and whispered and giggled like a madman. When he was sitting in the midst of merry companions or in a group of people, in the middle of a conversation which he attended to with his entire interest, the anxiety could suddenly make itself felt, and then it was to him as though somewhere far away, there were something or other which exhorted and called to him, something which boded misfortune, something which he ought to think about and see what it was. It spread through the entire life of his soul like a cancer, and it caused the mechanism of his feelings to stop or to function abnormally, so that he feared the joy, which heated his brain to delirium, and laid bare his nerves, and soon turned up its reverse side, which was anxiety and always left behind a feeling of anguish, while he pressed sorrow and adversity to his bosom in painful tenderness like the female animal her sick offspring. It dripped its venom into the trivialities of everyday life as well as into the great turning points in his fate. It ate itself into his love as into everything else, and this is what I am going to tell about here.

He believed that he had come so far that he could stand critically above every weakness for sex and in time withdraw, inasmuch as he had become part of life already at a very young age and was now approaching thirty—when, during a summer sojourn to a small out-of-the-way health spa in Småland, a young woman crossed his path, who was once more to teach him that the ways of the god Amor are always equally unpredictable, as well as once more to awaken from the dead and lure forth into light and life all this abundantly painful mass of feelings which is true passion.

In accordance with a psychological phenomenon, which although strange and unexplained is rather common, this woman, with whom passion had bound him so firmly, was his complete contrast in outer and inner being. He himself, with his slender figure, his delicate face, and his almost meticulously cared for clothing, recalled a dainty piece of Saxon porcelain, whereas she belonged to this female type of concentrated power and repressed passion, whose forms almost possess the hard elasticity of steel, at the same time buxom and firm, with a noble head on a strong neck, modeled in fine lines between two somewhat raised shoulders, which gave her bust a certain thickset appearance, black lusterless hair, parted to the side over one of those low, fine foreheads which are characteristic for women, the lower part of her face especially developed with shading on her upper lip, and then a pair of dark gray, not large, eyes, whose turbid fervor hinted at a strong sex life, something characteristically sensuous lingering in her gait and movement, in words and looks. It wasn't long of course before he, with his practiced eye in such matters and sharpened mind, noticed that she saw everything which went on inside of him and from her side was fond of him. And even now, in the first stages of this relationship, before any promises or signs whatsoever of mutual tender understanding had been given with a word, a glance, a press of the hand, it was with a feeling of dread and uneasiness permeating the general mood on such occasions, gushing and speeding instantaneously through his entire being like warm light and a suddenly clearing sky, that he time and again observed that they, he and she, had now come closer to each other than they were the moment before.

Ten or so people from the spa were out on their customary morning walk one hot day in the middle of the dog days of summer. They passed the gate at the edge of the forest, turned off from the main road and wandered into the pine forest, at random, here and there, two by two or in groups. He and she had kept a bit behind the others, as they always did, purely instinctually, as though by way of a silent agreement, so that they could be more to themselves as well as avoid having anyone behind their backs spying on them. Soon they had all disappeared, all in differ-

ent directions. The two walked alone on a path, which snaked along between the tree trunks, the forest, endless on all sides around them, was like a single giant room, where the ceiling is low and the air feels heavy. The tree trunks stood like massive pillars, which bore up this giant roof, through which the sunshine was playing in spots and streaks on the brown bark and the brown needles, which formed a dense soft carpet over the ground. They walked for a long time without exchanging a single word, with boiling and turbulent senses and feelings, until they finally, as though involuntarily, stopped before a round clearing overgrown with heather at the top of a small hill, which lay there sunlit in the midst of the forest gloom like a bald pate. It was silent around them and they were alone, those two, he and she. And they felt this: to them it was as though the whole world was deserted and there was not a single person remaining besides those two, he and she, like Adam and Eve in paradise. The silence and the heat and the dry, sweet smell of the heather wafted around them like thick blankets and pressed them closely together. The whole complicated mechanism of civilization buzzed dizzily around like a propeller in the air, while the simple apparatus of primeval being was laboring heavily and groaning down in the depths. And something came up into them, something warmly surging, the voracious sexual desire of the animal, the male and the female, our first ancestors who wandered around and copulated in the primeval forests. He didn't realize himself that he had put his arm around her and, in the abandonment of passion, had whispered her name before it was already done. And he felt a firm and buxom woman's body press itself heavily against his own, and a warm face against his, and a wet trembling mouth against his and saw beneath him two large burning opaque eyes. And it would only have taken a single second more of delirium, one higher degree of heat, a single, small movement on the shaking beam of the scale, for them to have thrown themselves down on the ground and brutally satisfied themselves. But there was something which suddenly dissipated the mist around his brain and caused him to draw back, and when he later thought about what sort of thing that was and analyzed the condition of his soul at that decisive moment and during their walk back, during which they walked closely entwined and she in mute rapture gazed into his face and constantly stopped to put her arms around his neck and offer her wet trembling lips up toward his, then he found deep down in it, at its core and heart, the dread of—what?—of everything and nothing. The voice which close beside his ear, warningly and slowly, spoke its name, angst.

And it remained the same later on when they again were together with the others. He had rapid thrills and shivers of lust as he sat there silent and heard their chatter all around him and knew that he possessed

something inside himself, which they didn't suspect and which none of them possessed, and that he was alone among them all with his great secret happiness. But there was still something which gnawed inside him at their cheerful unconcern, a feeling of uneasiness, a gnawing awareness that he was not free, bound, from here on, and that he must act in a certain defined way, without any possibility of acting in another way if he wanted to. And often, when he met her glance, saturated with jubilation or dreaminess, he felt a rancor in his soul, and it touched a sore spot in him, this thing that he found in her glance, that she was so totally aware that her life was irrevocably linked to his. And she sat there believing, as the most natural thing which could not be otherwise, that he felt the same way as she—and he retreated into himself in protective anxiety, like a frightened and mistreated hedgehog. In the evening, out in the chilly, magical moonlight, this painful mood dissolved into cool tranquility, but then when he was alone at night with himself, then came the reaction, suddenly and violently, and he almost collapsed in icy terror under this savage anxiety which welled up in him—like when it is dark night outside and you are alone and pacing up and down in your room, deep in thought, and then suddenly with a turn you see a strange face pressed flat against the windowpane.

With every day that passed this became more and more corrosively sharp, this feeling of anxiety, above all since the engagement had been announced and the date of the wedding had been set. On both of these occasions it had risen within him like a mighty wave, which may well have broken and receded, but which remained like a murky billowing in his soul and rose anew, ever higher and wider each time that he, with his fiancée or with someone else, encountered something—a meaning smile, an insinuating word, some work on the wedding outfit, curiously observing glances, any trivialities whatsoever—all this which pulled the knot more tightly together and, as it were, drew the final insoluble connection closer to him. The marrow of his love was eaten up, particle by particle, there was nothing else left in him than the fixed idea that he was tied to her, and that misfortune stood outside the door waiting for them, and that therefore he had to tear himself loose. And in those moments, when the anxiety had worked itself tired and his tormented soul collapsed, to him it was as though he were standing outside of everything and as though this were something, which did not concern *him* at all and with which *he* had nothing to do. And out of this awareness that the work of dissolution would in this way be completed by itself, he derived the only comfort he could get for his soul, which otherwise was like one single wound, into which a knife was continually cutting and carving.

It had become late summer and it was the last evening they had together. They were sitting on the bench below the veranda. In the room inside someone was playing the piano. The earth lay down there like a small flat dark circle, and the sky stretched up there like a great light vault. The red full moon with its charcoal drawing raised itself round over the rim of the forest, and over the region hung this heavy stillness, which is like a mute, nameless pain, which you feel all the way into your soul. The music stopped. It became so painfully, achingly silent for a few seconds and as though there was a flickering agony within the silence. Suddenly she threw herself towards him and threw both of her arms around his neck with a sob of desire, of tenderness, of pain, violent, passionate, immediate as the shriek of the female animal in the forests in an unconscious lurch of primeval existence. At this moment he felt within himself the whole unresolved secret pain of existence, and it flowed in toward her like an irresistible feeling of sympathy. But then, in the next second, he saw, as in a giant panorama, life and the world resting before him, growing up and out in colossal dimensions, the granite pinnacles of the mountains up over the forests, and the great rivers gliding out into the oceans with their water masses, and the metropolises like small creeping anthills in a giant forest. And he searched for himself but could not catch sight of himself. Then in a flash it all changed appearance and turned into a steaming whirlpool down into a precipice in which they, he and she, would go down together in order to come over to the other side. And then, suddenly he had the lurking ghost behind him, and he thought that it was hurrying along in order to place itself between them and warningly, as in a hoarse whisper, speak his name: he let go of her, drew back and collapsed, listless, limp, and coldly feeble.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, it's because it's our last evening."

Sometime thereafter he sent back her ring and gifts with the information that he, for reasons which she would never be able to understand, must break off the relationship, along with a plea for forgiveness. He got the ring back, and his engagement gifts, but not a word in reply.

VI

My old friend!

This year you are receiving my annual letter at an unusual time. I never would have sent it, if I didn't know you so well, but instead when I had written it—and write it I must, and why shouldn't I write it when it was a necessity and a pleasure for me—I would have torn it to pieces or burned it up or tossed it into my desk drawer. Then no one would have seen it, except me, when on some rare occasion I read through my old letters. It would have brought me an abundant and painful memory of the last disappearing sunset glow of my emotional life. But now I will send it off and you'll receive it, for I know with such total certainty that you won't laugh at me like all the others would have done who know me less well, but rather, that you'll understand that this is the innermost in me and the best in me which here in these lines has flared up like the blue flames in a fire in a great and rapid flickering before they go out over the charred wood—at once, from the very beginning, understand this. For you know the key in which my life has played, and you have heard that motif which has come again and again in the many melodies of my emotions, and you have been able to capture the silent, indefinable vibration in my personality, because it resonated in yourself. And why shouldn't I, I who with the trembling shyness of a twenty-year-old gave you my first delicate confidence, also give you my last, now that I am alone and weary and old.

I had eaten my dinner at the same place where I had eaten for ten years, among almost the same people, had exchanged the same phrases with the serving girl which had been repeated almost every day during those ten years, and had gone home through the same streets in which I knew every sign by heart, and recognized every uneven spot on the sidewalk, and seen the same faces behind the windowpanes. I had sat down in the rocking chair as usual to smoke my cigar before I set to work on the tall pile of examination books which lay waiting for me on the work table, exactly as I had sat and smoked my cigar and looked at those examination books during all of those ten years: in the same room among the same pieces of furniture, with the same everyday thoughts and the same everyday mood. But then, suddenly—I don't know what it could have been which was first set into motion, and that of course you never know, for it is so small that you can't see it and so complex that

you can't figure it out. It may quite simply have been a sound from the street, or a nuance in the daylight, or a scent from one of my flowers, or a particular placement of one of the objects in the room, whatever—I don't know what it was; nor could I see clearly into the countless throng of thoughts and images which in a second passed through my soul, or discern where the one took hold of the other, for it passed as quickly as a beam of light falls into a dark room; nor do I know what kind of hazy expanses there were in which I seemed to disappear and be annihilated, for they glided away at the same moment as they expanded immeasurably, endlessly. There was only a feeling of everything, which lingered on and was heightened and deepened, a feeling of something painfully sweet deepest down in my being, which expanded in my whole being until I felt something burning under my eyelids. And in the next moment the thought struck me that I had felt like that so often many years ago, when my mind softened in memories, and that I had not had such a moment during all of these ten years, and that I had believed that those times were past forever. And in the same moment the gray autumn light turned into something other than it had been before, to something mystically atmospherically aching, to what it had been for me previously in my lonely sorrowful hours. To me it was as though ten dim lethargic empty years had been erased from my life and had never existed. And I did then as I used to do before, when my soul became too full for me. I put on my coat and went out.

It was a Saturday late in October, a gray, still day with warm damp air. A light fog rested over the city and had fallen like moisture over the pavement. In a few shops the gas lamps had already been lit, which shone dimly behind the fogged-up windowpanes. I soon left the main streets behind me with their piercing, deafening noise, and the further out I came into the outskirts of the city, which extended before me with its two long rows of houses, small and poor, the more the stillness thickened around me, still deeper and denser through the monotonous muffled rumbling behind me and the rolling of some grain wagon or other on its way into the city. I went past the summer inn. Boards had been nailed across the glass walls. The trees had the yellow and red hues of late autumn or had already shed their leaves onto the withered grass and damp pathways and had braided their bare black branches against the gray background. Inside the cemetery, in the darkness under the brown vault of the trees, the gravestones shone white with damp gray streaks and overgrown in spots by wet green moss, and the ivy crept, with its dark greenery, thickly over the dark earth of the graves. A lone female figure or two could be seen in there, occupied with flowers by a grave or sitting on a bench, unmoving and absorbed, or bent over an iron rail-

ing. And to me it was as though the many thoughts of sorrow expanded in the stillness in there and out into the gray autumn air and saturated it with its mute melancholy. Then the houses became sparser and sparser. The lots around them became larger and larger. The pavement ended, and the country road wound its way along the coast, between the deserted gray sea and the wide gray fields. Some children were sitting outside of a house, rooting in the sand. Out on the fields someone was plowing or occupied with harvesting the root vegetables. In the village before me a steam thresher was buzzing. Still further away a bell was ringing in a church, and over this entire late autumn scenery, over this heavy plains landscape, in this warm damp air and in this melancholy stillness, there was something of the saine expectant peace as in the Sunday mood from my childhood. And I came to think of freshly strewn sand over newly scrubbed floors in my home. One image called forth another; this one merging into a new one as though in a transformation diorama. I saw the roads black with groups of people dressed in Sunday best on their way to church, and saw them assemble in the churchyard up by the church wall. I heard the people mumble after the minister's prayers and heard the hymns from the organ. All of the life in the cottages and on the village streets passed by me in images. Trivial matters appeared in my awareness after having lain hidden deep down under layers of subsequent experiences, episodes, which I hadn't thought about for decades, formed themselves anew in my memory in all of their original clarity, and I caught sight of faces around me which I didn't recognize. It was all that which lay farthest back in my life and deepest down in my subconscious, which was turned up and pressed forward with the Sunday mood from my childhood.

When I came home again, it was already dusk. I closed the door and rolled down the shade, for I felt this so solemnly and fully in my soul that I wanted to be by myself and completely alone, and there was nothing out there among the others which could be attuned to my own mood. I sat in front of the fire, and while that reality which was present and around me ran off into the distance like a sigh in fog, I suddenly found myself in the midst of a new world of memories, which rose up from the dead and came to life anew. Now it was my youth, my pain-filled, anxious, tormented youth, which formed around me, with the same mood as a moonlit evening in September on the plain, which fell over me and pulled and oppressed and turned into the shrinking of a soul in agony, during which I seemed to see myself wandering around on country roads and in desolate areas like a starved beggar, knocking on the door at houses without anyone opening, and standing outside the banquet halls, and, like Lazarus, asking for the crumbs from the rich

man's table, a single, poor morsel of that, which was to me the only necessity. And amidst the exultation of the music and the whirling of the dance and the song of great, rich life, I went out into the night like a kicked dog and like a mangy recluse.

They wandered past me, all those women whom I had met in my life and into whose eyes I had looked, searchingly and beseechingly. They wandered past me, all of them, with indifference or pity in their eyes, and there was not a single one who stopped and was drawn to me. They wandered past me all of them—away, out into life, to others. Here was happiness and there was sorrow. The one erred and the other found the right one, but I stood alone, while all the others walked two by two. And I asked myself, in sudden anguish and pain, what kind of life was this, not a single time, not even for a brief minute, to have been loved by a woman.

Then it was as though I saw two eyes directed at me, anxiously searching, two dark eyes with something burning within their depths, at first far away but then coming nearer and nearer. And around them was gradually formed, one after the other, a face, a figure, and finally an entire interior, and I saw all of it before me as though it had happened at that very moment, and yet it is almost twenty years ago.

I had once as a student rented a room from the widow of a civil servant out in the country. She had lost her husband and her son early and had moved into the city in order to live there on the small capital which her husband had left behind, to her dying day, with her memories and her quiet sorrow, in poverty and reclusion, without concerning herself with the world and the people out there, which no longer had anything to offer her. In the second year of my stay at this place I met, during the visits that I sometimes made to my landlady, a young girl from the country whose parents had sent to the city so that she could learn something or other, I don't recall now what. We met five or six times, but didn't exchange any other words than those which every young man and young woman usually exchange when they meet. And there was nothing between us—in any case I didn't notice anything, as you can understand, since I never talked with you about it—which deviated from the main road on which the fates of human beings wander along. After about half a year I seem to recall that she moved to another place, but came in every now and then to the old widow, from what I saw; but I myself had not encountered her since she left the house. One day along towards winter, at dusk, I received a message from the landlady, asking if I wouldn't like to come in. I had just come home after a happy day. I was in that agreeable state of drowsiness when you so easily get sentimental, and I had sat down to dream in the twilight. And you know how

in such a frame of mind you are caressed by memories, because all the bitterness has been drawn away and only the sweetness remains, and how the castles of the future can rise up in the bewitching, false moonlight of fantasy. When I came in—I can still see it all—it was a little apartment with three rooms, small and crammed full of many pieces of furniture and thick carpets, that kind of warm and hidden nest, where a shy and lonely bird can settle down, a real widow's home, where the same quiet sorrowful thoughts constantly went around on tiptoe, and where the same memories eternally looked out from the dark corners, and where it was so silent, so silent, that you involuntarily put a damper on your voice, and so amiably cozy that you always felt at ease as by the fire on a windy rainy evening in autumn. The old woman sat on the sofa, in the midst of the lamplight shining red through the shade, occupied with her embroidery—and further away, where the light was subdued and dim, I perceived, while I myself was still in the side room, the young girl sitting on an ottoman, silent and with her hands in her lap, in a black dress, with a pale, dispassionate and thoughtful face and dark brown hair, parted and flat-combed over a narrow forehead. But what I now see with strangely heightened clarity is the anxious question in those dark eyes, burning and yet clear, with more thought than emotion in the depths, while we held each other's hands—and I still recall that I kept holding her hand in mine longer than usual, at that time I didn't know why. But now I understand it, and I have this evening felt something lighten and brighten within me—as a sudden light flares up in the darkness for someone lost—with the certainty of having at least for a brief moment been completely loved by a woman, for I knew at that moment, even more certainly than if it had been said to me with words and promises, that this shy prayer and trembling question were the painful expression of love. For words are only sound and promises shiny bubbles, but the look in an eye is the soul's own immediate, silent confession and a person's unresolved feeling made visible.

It came over me like a revelation, and I was blinded like Saul by the light.

And then when the last red spot had blackened in the fireplace, and I had woken up in the darkness and half-dizzy got my lamp lit and saw the examination books and the evening's work which waited for me, then I felt such a loathing for it that I let them lie, for I could not bring myself to tear apart with brutal hands the fine mood-veil over my thoughts. It seemed to me to be something so great, which had happened to me this noteworthy day, and it was also a resurrection from the dead of my better self. When that time came—and for me it came early—when I lost connection with the life around me and when the last vibrating

string of my hopes for the future broke, I had no other world than that of my memories, and in it I relived my entire brief, pitiful youthful life. And every other experience turned here into something overwhelmingly fine and something joyously great, with a richness of colors and an abundance of scent. And later, when even this was over and I stood cold and empty before my old memories, and no new experiences provided new material, then I sank into this empty lethargic life, with the same dusty everyday thoughts and the same bloodless everyday feelings, which I have now lived for ten years and which tomorrow I will again begin living.

This is like a holiday for me, and why shouldn't I enjoy it as well as I can, even though I am forty years old and my face has wrinkles and my hair has started to turn gray and people would call me an old fool if they knew about this. That which has happened to me is of course nothing other than what happens to an occasional bare, old bush, which stands in the sun and one late autumn day shoots forth new buds, which will wither in the next night frost.

Your friend,

* * *

VII

They were out alone one evening in July, when nature had a fever, as it were. Savage cold squalls came in through the stifling heat. High up in the sky storms prevailed. The clouds scurried along like fantastic giant birds and dull flashes of summer lightning flickered down on the southern horizon. The sun had gone down, but the clouds cast metallic reflections out over the dim plains landscape, which spread out before them in a broad view, where they had stopped at the edge of the forest.

He was sitting on a tree stump and staring by turns at the scenery and at her, who stood leaning against a tree trunk. He thought that the former was squinting at him with the look of a madman, as it was lying there half in evening dimness in an illumination like the cold gleam of steel. He felt as though his cranium had been lifted off, and his brain lay exposed and bare, and a fine, cool, sharp piece of steel was plunged into it. Nature's own fever was seething in his blood. There were fire and chills: now hot lust, now an insane dizziness, which cut like an edge of ice. And visions flickered before him, alternately those of the voluptuary and the madman.

And she seemed to him to be the evil spirit of the landscape as she stood there leaning against the tree trunk, looking out over the area. He saw how her form was dissolving, the lines of her face slackening, the skin pale gray, the process of dissolution had begun in the organism. He saw the cold, voracious glow in her small colorless eyes and the cold voracious smile around those thin colorless lips. He seemed to sense the unity of her being, that which was innermost in all of this and farthest beneath it, and he exerted all the powers of his soul to come closer to it and see what it was. As the surgeon submerges his instrument into the body mass in order to make the incision around the diseased substance, he submerged his mind into that smile in order to cut out the mystery of her being and ascertain its strange structure. But the instrument always slipped in his hand at the decisive moment, however anxiously intent he glided with all of his being into hers. At the next moment they were once again separated as completely as before. He sat on the tree stump. She stood leaning against the tree trunk, and he stared once again into the smile around the thin colorless lips, cruelly and insatiably sensual as

though she could see blood running or dreamed in lust of an eternal night of love without measure.

As the hypnotized medium by staring into the prism has concentrated all of his being into one point, paralyzing all the other organs and closing all the channels through which sensations from the actual outside world stream in, and as the entire mechanics of his soul, his brain and all his senses, work without any other connection to the outer world than the somnambulant magnetic connection with the hypnotist, like in dense fogs with flaring and extinguishing will-o'-the-wisps, which distort everything in grotesque and expanded proportions—in the same way he had stared so long and so intensely into this mysterious sphinx-smile that he now clung to it with his soul's gaze, with all of the finest fibers of his being, without consciousness and without will. And all of this world, which previously spread itself round about him in his normal reality, now was in there, down at the bottom of this smile, like a fantastic darkness with intense flickers of light, in whose flickering glow all objects took on strange new proportions, as though they had grown out formlessly or turned on edge or turned upside down. He wanted to enter those secretive areas himself, in which this female soul dwelled, wander on its grounds, see the same sights and be steeped in the same feelings. He longed for that with the chill of a sensual terror.

The summer passed, and autumn, and winter.

One stormy evening in March he found her home alone. She was half-reclining within a deep window seat, and he sat down at her feet. The March winds swept along through the streets. Doors were slamming and signs creaking. Cats were howling. Her reclining face had flickering candlelight over it. He saw her eyes like two phosphorous-gleaming streaks. Suddenly he felt a trembling hand pass over his hair. He threw his arms around her waist and stared, in anguished tension, directly into her smile, which lay frozen and numbed over the thin colorless lips, ghost-like in the lamplight. She shook and shivered in his arms, and at once he saw, as though far away, deepest down in the back of her smile, a picture, a romping orgy, a gruesome dance of death between lanky skeletons of men and Jordænsian naked female bodies.

And this picture which he had seen for the first time as though far away, furthest back in the back of her smile—this was brought closer to him with every day that passed. Soon he saw her smile on every female face that came his way. He found it right next to him in his bed, phosphorous-gleaming in the darkness, every time he woke up at night. And finally to him it was as though he had reached an edge and passed over a threshold and wandered into her smile, further and further in, deeper and deeper down, until it closed in around him and he felt it on his skin

and in his veins like a shivering lust which could not be stilled before his own bones were rattling in this romping orgy, this gruesome dance of death between lanky skeletons of men and Jordænsian naked female figures which whirled around him with panting breathlessness and lechery, with the sweat of warm bodies and the chill of cadavers.

One hot summer day when he was out walking, he suddenly stopped and remained standing in the middle of the street. All the people had started to run as fast as they could, as though it had rained fire and brimstone down from the heavens, and at the same moment it became as silent as if their feet weren't touching the ground or as though there was no longer any sound remaining in the world. They disappeared off in the distance like black smoke and shrank together into small points, one in each of the four directions. Then, suddenly, the whole sky became black as night, but it was at the same time strewn with an endless number of small phosphorous-gleaming points, and around each and every one of these gradually formed a face, a woman's face, her face with its smile. They swarmed forth in myriads, these smiling faces, until they ran together into a single giant face, which filled the entire universe with its cruel and insatiably sensual smile.

He had remained standing in the middle of the street with closed eyes and clenched teeth, striking around himself with his arms. Some passersby took charge of the deranged person.

VIII

A large party of us were sitting one day around noon at the very beginning of summer outside the restaurant in one of the arbors on the sidewalk along the square. The tables and benches and potted plants had just, for the first time that year, been moved outside. Everything chilly and pale in the early summer was about to disappear. The sky already had the warm blue shade of high summer. The sunlight was pouring down over the city in warm abundance. Invisible insects filled the air with their droning. The stones were heating up and the awnings were lowered in front of the shop windows. The conversation wended its way through one "apropos" and then abruptly leaped over into another, only to wend its way in the same manner through that one, or lost itself in isolated words or silence, like a stream in the sand running out into the sea. A gentleman passed by and exchanged a greeting with a member of the company, and the conversation swooped down on him and wove itself around him like a spider spinning its net around a fly. It was a generally known secret that he practiced indecency of the forbidden variety, and thus we were soon in upon this delicate topic in the most general terms. The one person had this to say and the other that. The only thing I still recall is a remark by one member of the company, which went something like this:

"That such a relationship, in all of its sexual crudeness, between two individuals of the same sex is something disgusting and swinish, that is one thing. But what I would like very strongly to emphasize, since we have now got onto this subject, is that one shouldn't judge everything alike as though there were no distinctions, for it is actually the case that a man can grow intimate with another member of his own sex, with an emotion which is not raw physicality, but which is nevertheless something altogether different and something far deeper than friendship. Whether or not this relationship is natural—it may, for that matter, be called by any name at all—the main thing after all is that this is a psychological fact.

Some three four years ago I was living on very intimate terms with a person, who is completely unknown to all of you and whose name I need not mention, and on one occasion he related to me an episode from his own life, which caused me to think very thoroughly and seriously about and to familiarize myself with the matter of which we are now

speaking. And I could not, if I want to be perfectly honest in my thoughts and in my feelings—I couldn't help but view these relationships quite differently than I had previously, the way most others do, since in general they do not particularly reflect on them, but rather let their thoughts run mechanically along the traditional line of reasoning instead of examining them more closely, each one of them, to see if they are shells around nothing or if there is within them a kernel of life and reality. I should mention at once that the person in question is one of the purest characters I have ever encountered. He was one of those people, in the depths of whose being there eternally rests a heavy and melancholy haze of feeling, from which thoughts rise forth, saturated with dim pain, as when on a day in late autumn you see a lone wanderer come forth out of the fog and disappear again into it. He was as sensitive as white satin, and shadows and light played in his soul, as when the wind sweeps over the grain field, or as when the sea, one day early in the year, is like a single bright smile and then suddenly glances toward you like a great melancholy eye, simply because a little cloud passes before the sun. But what lay deepest within this delicate organism was a desolate and hopeless feeling of loneliness. Fate rolled forth over the human race like low thunder squalls on a dark night when the rain pours and flashes of lightning ignite each other and become one. Half in fear and half in hopeless fatigue he sat quietly in life and looked around himself with great frightened, sad eyes for someone he could attach himself to, really closely and warmly. And if he then found someone in whom he could merge completely without a single particle of his sickly sensitive disposition being disgusted or shrinking back, then it was as though abundant springs in the depths of his being suddenly opened and began to flow. And in his innermost soul he kneeled down and leaned his head close to this person's and swooned in a painfully voluptuous security, while he heard life rush past above him.

He was an uncommonly fine and deep character—that is what I especially want to emphasize, before I relate to you what he told me about himself, which touches on this very subject we have come to discuss.

During that period of his life when we knew each other, he was in just such a peculiar relationship with another individual of the same sex—a relationship which naturally no one knew about besides himself and which consisted solely of secret shifts in his emotional life. The other was, quite prosaically, a fourteen-year-old boy who served us at the restaurant where we took our meals and usually met—a delicate but finely built child with a noble head and a face like a young girl's, soft in its lines, pale warm in its skin, a blond countenance with a pair of dark

eyes like dark blue velvet with soft reflections. There was in his facial expression and in his glance something of woman and dove, something sensitive and good and touchingly shy, as I had hardly ever seen it. You felt constantly as though afraid of coming too close to this fragile vessel, and you forced yourself almost anxiously to watch your voice carefully, for at the least harshness in the tone of voice, unknown to yourself, but which this child instinctively sensed, there came something painfully tense, like a dark cloud over this light mimosa face. And you could feel the pain yourself, and felt sorry, and reproached yourself for something that couldn't be helped or for something you had nothing whatsoever to reproach yourself for.

What name should be given to the relationship that my friend had for several months to this child, to the feeling he harbored towards him? I don't know, and he didn't know himself: it was not friendship pure and simple and even less a raw and unnatural sexual urge. Rather his feelings were related to the jealous tenderness with which during adolescence you attach yourself to "your best friend," with the envious need to have him for yourself and the proud awareness of being the one who is on the most intimate terms with him. At the same time, however, it was something else and more. He would walk around consumed by an aching yearning simply to see the other, and if he then by chance caught a glimpse of him at a distance, he would for no good reason turn off into a side street in order to avoid meeting him. He would be writhing in agony inside himself with the desire to say a few friendly words to him, but then when it came to the point, he became speechless and stammered and turned red. He felt his glance being drawn like a magnet toward that point where he instinctively sensed that the other was to be found, but didn't dare, out of the fear of the one in love that his secret would be known and that everything would be noticed and made fun of. He suffered all the torments of jealousy, when he intercepted a smile or a friendly glance toward some unknown person, along with the smarting of this tender bitterness, which you feel when the girl you are fond of seems to favor another. He would seem lighthearted, as though he were bearing some great and secret happiness, if one evening he simply managed to say a few words which he knew had made this child happy and glimpsed in his eyes the attentive devotion, which contained the anxiety of not having fully responded. And he would get nervous from morbid brooding, suspecting that, in one way or another, he had hurt the child's sensitive organism with an expression which he could not recall or with a tone of voice which afterwards he imagined had sounded harsh. And at night after he had come home, he would pace back and forth for hours

in his room without rest or sleep, if he had imagined something of the sort.

To put it briefly: he showed almost all of the first, unconscious symptoms of being in love. But at the same time there was in his feeling the same sad compassion and the same painful voluptuousness, which in an abundant magnetic emanation attracted him to the women he loved. And when he looked into that *sensitiva* countenance and those *sensitiva* eyes, he could be annihilated in a nirvana of sadness, in which he heard nothing but the subdued playing in the distance of that melody which is life—so painfully alarming, as when it is night around you, and silent, and you suddenly hear sobbing and don't know where it is coming from or who is crying."

IX

It was already November, the trees were bare and the leaves were rotting on the ground, wet and dirty. The park was empty of people at this time of year. My friend and I were alone as we walked silently along on the pathways that wound here and there. A wet late autumn mist hung heavily down over the branches. It was as though the gray air had descended and was pressing on the slender network of twigs, and the moisture glided out in drops that grew and grew, loosened and fell. It was along toward evening, in that late afternoon hour before dusk arrives. We stopped every once in awhile. It was wet and silent around us. A locomotive's whistle cut sharply into the stillness far away, immediately thereafter a child's shriek, shrill and lonely, like the streak of a rocket which cleaves its way up through the air, loses speed, stops and goes out, and the silence and the gray space close up again over the wound. And it was as though this silence itself compressed into those drops which were falling, one after another, one here, one there, large and heavy.

We came up onto an embankment, which ran along the outer edge of the park with a wide and desolate view over the fields and the sea. In one corner it swung out in an open circle, and there we suddenly perceived a female figure outlined in soft contours against the gray background, tall and slender, free against the air, immobile and alone in the silent, sad November scenery. She turned around slowly as we went past, and there was in this face, in the line around her mouth, and in the look of her dark blue eyes, something of the same shadowy, painful sorrow as in the late autumn landscape around us. I looked back when the avenue curved. She was still standing there in the same position, immobile, alone, free against the gray air, a melancholy late autumn vision and a twilight-mood personified.

My companion started to relate an episode from his life. He looked before him with an absent smile and spoke in a hushed voice. It was as though he wasn't directing his words to me, but rather as though the late autumn landscape and the memory of summer had filled him with a mood so abundant that it spilled over the edges of his soul and ran out in words, as melancholy and heavy as the lonely, silent splashing of the drops around us.

"I am seeing at this moment a woman's face more clearly than I have ever seen it since the last time I had it before me in reality. I don't know who she was nor what her name was, and we have never exchanged a single word, and yet this being has been, for an entire summer, the content of all my thoughts and all my feelings, the only thing which was life to me. When in my lonely hours—and they are the only ones which I can now enjoy—I rummage in my past life and my bygone experiences, putting things together and sorting them—you must understand what I mean, it is roughly like when you organize your old letters and souvenirs—then these two months form a unity for me. And when I open the envelope which bears this date, there is nothing other than this single portrait of an unknown and nameless woman, who still has been as intimately near to my soul as perhaps not a one of those with whom I have associated every day for years. If she hadn't met me, perhaps those two months would have been as if obliterated and as if they had never existed. And now once again I turn back to this memory, to something which has been profoundly good here in life and which has slipped past and is gone.

The first time I saw her—it is two years ago now—I had settled down in H. to swim and recuperate and be rejuvenated in the summer sunshine and the sea air. It had been a wet day with a humid deep blue sky between high-piled black cloud masses which rolled along in the wind, far over the sound and the city—sunshine and rain showers alternately. Toward evening it had become dead calm and there was a brilliant sunset, when I went out on the pier, a cool silence with steaming scents, which the rain had set loose from the summer greenery and blossoms, and strong colors in the air and water, which the wetness made full—a blinding exultation of color and smell, as you know there can be on such evenings in June. As you no doubt recall there is a ways out on the quay a rounded extension and a stairway leading over the stone wall down to a wide spot paved with stone with piles of rock, which the inhabitants of the town had given the sentimental name "Promontory of Sighs" and where young people who want to dream and be romantic often sit on summer evenings and let their senses be lulled by the lapping of the waves and be cooled by the salt breeze. There were lots of people. I sat down on one of the stones. Everyone was silent. Only now and then was heard a scattered hushed word, which grew out of the mood and neither expected, nor received, any answer. It seemed as though each and every one had his own thoughts and as though the one didn't have the heart to disturb the other with banal everyday conversation. I had already been sitting there a long time when, with a turn of my head, I suddenly saw two eyes resting on me. At first I saw nothing but

those two eyes. It was not only my sight, but my whole being which at once was seized and held fast. It was as though I was pulled and drawn and as though something bent me forward and as though I was living within the depths of those eyes with all of my senses and thoughts without any other independent or actual existence at all. Then, when this was over and I found myself again, and reflection and my scrutiny came back, it was only the eyes in that woman's face before me I was thinking about. They were dark gray, and the pupils were almost unnaturally widened, as though in a helplessly questioning fear. And there was in that expression some indefinable something which I can't identify and which I've never found words for, but which I recognize now when I see these naked trees and the hazy air and the lonely woman up there and hear these large heavy solitary drops falling one after the other. And to the extent that I was able to release my own gaze, I discovered that she had a small head and a slender body, a black outfit and a pale face, to which the lines around the narrow upper lip gave a stamp of melancholy. She was like a fine white flower, which exposes its sickly beauty in the autumn sun and in the midst of a dying nature. I still don't know how long we sat like that, turned towards each other and eye to eye, for at such moments we lose the context of everything around us and time floats away far up over us like a weak sighing. Dusk fell. All the colors were extinguished. It was already night. She had gone. I rose. It was like when you wake up after a long sleep and a good dream still lingers on like a resting lightness deepest down inside you. I walked towards home, and I gradually connected with reality again, and it closed itself together again around me. But with everything that I encountered, heard, and saw, it was as though this outer reality split, dissolved and disappeared like a morning fog. And I knew with an unconscious feeling that I had something to cling to and be happy with out there, something which no one could see and which no one understood more than I did, I alone, and which therefore was mine and mine alone.

This turned into a love relationship, which lasted for three whole months, a love relationship without events, without physical contact, without a single word. Do you believe me and can you really deeply understand it, when I say that I have never lived together with any woman as intimately as with this one, not with a single one of all of those, whose bodies I have possessed and with whom I have whispered in such moments when, if ever, souls are turned inside out. You see, I had wandered around an entire winter and let the days come and go as they pleased, week follow week, month follow month, and let everything pass by me, and taken hold of what seemed to me to be worth looking at more closely and let the rest go away. I had had many sexual rela-

tionships, mostly of the cheap variety, in a couple of cases from pure attraction. And in all of them the goal was the same and the end was the same: when I'd had them as I wanted, the story was over—lust, a brutal act, slackness, usually loathing, at best a weak melancholy with the memory, *voilà tout*. When I came up to the spa, my senses were satiated, and I couldn't see any woman without disrobing her in my mind and being disgusted by the thought of the banal act of copulation, this miserable gluttonous crown of all the blessedness of love. And I saw the sight before me, which stood there with the clarity of hallucination, and I could not be rid of it, and I felt disgust for the woman and disgust for myself. And at the same time I desired more achingly and impatiently than ever those sheer silent tonal vibrations, which only a woman can evoke in the soul of a man.

Every evening, toward sundown and twilight, I went out on the pier. I was almost certain to see her sitting in the same place where I saw her the first time, and I felt quite disappointed if she wasn't there, as happened on some rare occasion. I sat down a short distance from her, the reflection of the sunken sun lay like a resting shimmer high up in the air, while it was misty below. The surface of the sound drew a sharp line toward the evening sky in the north. She was gazing before her, alone and unmoving, in silhouette against the water and the air. Then she would slowly turn towards me, and I suddenly felt, purely instinctually, before I saw it, her eyes fasten on me. And without any of all those who were sitting around us knowing anything at all about it, we possessed each other as completely as two human beings can possess one another. For in reality is physical intercourse between a man and a woman something more intimate than this fusion of the essence of two people, when feelings mingle and fertilize each other and thoughts are filtered together and form fruit?

Night came, one after another got up and disappeared. It became more and more sparse around us and the rocks stood unoccupied. And then when she too was gone and I myself left and went toward home, I bore with me a feeling that I had a secret inside me, which no one knew about other than I and one other, something which, as it were, waited for me and which would be able to carry me through endless hours and far, far forward. It grew within me, and it filled me, as though I'd received new feelings and a new vision. And everything around me acquired an interest for me and changed appearance, all of this which had been as though it didn't exist for me, I found to be as though flesh of my flesh and bone of my bones: the water I swam in, the sun which warmed and blinded, the blue summer sky, the flowers and the greenery, the streets and the houses, the least and the greatest. It was all like new secrets,

which I seemed never to have seen before and which now suddenly were revealed to me. People's words acquired a new ring and a new meaning, and they themselves were like new beings which I hadn't known before. And this new strange thing, which I felt I was carrying around without fully or clearly knowing what it was, would quite suddenly grow and billow forth. I had shivers in my blood of painful voluptuousness. My eyes burned and grew moist, my glance became wide, my thoughts, saturated with moods, shot like a streak in over the secret life of existence and turned into visions. And I trembled and writhed in a violent need to throw myself prostrate on the ground and weep, for everything and nothing or for something, what, I didn't know. When I then asked myself, why I felt this way and whence this had come, this sympathy for everything and everyone, where before there had been only indifference, then I had before me, as the only answer, this sorrowful woman with the melancholy lines of her mouth and the inquisitive pain of her eyes and this strange love, sickly fine as the skin of a convalescent—when it was at its strongest and fullest in its painful sweetness, it became a melancholy longing that we two, she and I, might embrace each other closely, like two frightened animals in a storm, and let life rush past above us, sad, evil, terrible life."

It was getting darker. There was a hazy light over the city. The drops were falling steadily and heavily in the stillness.

"And the days passed, and summer disappeared, and it became autumn. One evening in September, just such an evening as this, when the fog was wet and heavy over the sound and my mind was as misty as the air—as we were sitting there almost alone on our usual stones, we happened to smile at one another, sorrowfully and helplessly sad, as though we both felt, at the same moment, that together we two had enjoyed the best in life and love, and that the one had nothing more left to give to the other, and that now it was over, and that exchanging a single word would have been a sacrilege, and that now each of us had to protect the memory.

The next morning I left.

But there had also been a kind of gratitude in her gaze."

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