Doctor Glas

Hjalmar Söderberg

translated by

Rochelle Wright

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WITS II, Number 8
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Cover photo: View of central Stockholm from Ship's Isle, 1890s. Visible from left to right are Jacob's Church, the Palme house, the Grand Hotel with its terrace, and the National Museum. Photograph by Bengt Orling, reprinted courtesy of the Stockholm Municipal Museum.

INTRODUCTION

Hjalmar Söderberg (1869–1941) was born in Stockholm, Sweden, the city so intimately associated with his literary works. He studied briefly at the University of Uppsala and was employed as a civil servant before turning to journalism and eventually establishing himself as a free-lance writer. After a painful divorce from his first wife, he married a Danish woman and moved to Copenhagen, where he resided for the last twenty-five years of his life.

Söderberg began publishing fiction in the 1890s, but his literary orientation was a cross between the realism or naturalism that had dominated the 1870s and 1880s and a more subjective, lyrical approach that came to the fore in the last decade of the century. Following the famous dictum of Danish critic Georg Brandes, who in the early 1870s initiated the Modern Breakthrough in Scandinavian literature with a series of lectures at the University of Copenhagen, Söderberg took up problems for debate, especially moral and religious ones. In particular he attacked conventional Christian morality when he perceived it as conflicting with human rights and human worth.

Like many writers of the Modern Breakthrough, Söderberg was an agnostic. He did not believe in a God who intervened in human circumstances, but neither did he assert that human beings governed their own destiny. Instead his world view was deterministic and fatalistic. According to Söderberg, events are only marginally subject to our own will and are largely determined by factors outside our control; anything promising comfort to human beings is illusory. The motto from his play *Gertrud* (1906) may serve as a summary of his philosophy: "I believe in the desires of the flesh and the incurable loneliness of the soul."

Söderberg thus lacked the spirit of optimism that had dominated in the 1870s and '80s. He was not convinced that the problems he identified and debated could be solved. Instead a tone of skepticism, pessimism, resignation, and melancholy suffuses his works. This stance, common to many writers at the turn of the previous century, also encompassed an interest in psychology and the thought processes that underlie behavior.

Söderberg's main genre is prose, and he is especially famous for his short stories, little vignettes from Stockholm life, some only a few pages long. Other important works are the autobiographical novel *Mar-*

tin Bircks ungdom (1901; Martin Birck's youth) and *Den allvarsamma leken* (1912; The serious game), a moving narrative of doomed love. Söderberg gradually came to believe that the fictional framework was a barrier preventing him from expressing what he really wanted to say, and in subsequent decades he put it aside entirely, turning instead to speculative, philosophical works about religion and to aphorisms. In his last years, he was a vigorous opponent of Hitler, even after Denmark was occupied by the Nazis. Articles sent from Copenhagen appeared in the sole Swedish newspaper to defy restrictions on freedom of the press.

Many of Söderberg's works, *Doctor Glas* included, may be called 'tankeböcker' ('thought books'), a term the author himself employed. Primary emphasis is on feelings, reflections, and impressions. In Söderberg's narratives, characters tend to converse or ponder rather than act; his strength is psychological insight rather than a carefully constructed story.

The overt subject matter of *Doctor Glas* nevertheless created a scandal when the novel first appeared in 1905. It was thought to be about euthanasia, abortion, infidelity, and marital "rights" and to promote the first three while dismissing the last. Many issues raised in *Doctor Glas* are just as topical today. Euthanasia and the right to die figure prominently in deliberations about medical ethics now that technology can prolong life beyond anything Söderberg's contemporaries could have dreamed of; abortion remains a conflict-ridden and divisive question. Current debate on date rape and physical and psychological abuse, in marriage and in relationships in general, is not very far removed from Söderberg's discussion of marital "rights."

Certainly Söderberg did expect his readers to think about these issues, but they are not the thematic core of the text. The plot, too, is relatively secondary, since the outcome of Glas' interrogation of the two voices within him seems predetermined. More important are the novel's philosophical and psychological dimensions. In the aftermath of the pastor's death, Glas comes to the realization that action ultimately is meaningless because it derives from the law of necessity. He also alludes to the ancient wisdom that one should not try to get to the bottom of things, for "he who sees the face of God must die." Perhaps human beings are not intended to ask, or to understand. At the same time the narrative is a compelling psychological portrait of paralysis, of a failed attempt to escape the confines of the individual ego and establish meaningful relations with others and an equally unsuccessful effort to come to grips with the source of the failure.

Doctor Glas was written nearly a century ago, but Söderberg's fluid, graceful Swedish retains a strikingly modern quality, in part

because it seems casual and effortless—though in fact the author revised and polished extensively. The novel was previously translated in 1963 by Paul Britten Austen. This older version, somewhat British in flavor, is accurate and admirable in many ways, but the present rendition turns anew to the source text, in accordance with the precept that a great work of literature deserves a fresh translation every generation or so. The 1998 translation generally follows Söderberg's syntax and sentence structure; the fragments, the frequent ellipses, and the numerous sentences beginning with "and" or "but" are present in the original. Occasionally a word or two is interpolated to clarify a reference that might otherwise be obscure to the English-language reader. When such additions would have been cumbersome but explanations nevertheless seemed desirable, separate notes are provided at the end of the volume.

Söderberg paints an evocative, impressionistic picture of turn-of-the-century Stockholm; many milestones are familiar to Swedes of today. Without some knowledge of the layout and geography of the city, much of the novel's characteristic atmosphere inevitably is lost. To help the English-language reader visualize the setting, place names have generally been translated. Thus 'Skeppsholmen' (a small island connected to the city center by a narrow bridge) is rendered 'Ship's Isle', 'strömmen' (the current linking the Baltic to the east of the city with Lake Mälaren to the west) becomes 'the Stream', and 'Jacobs torg' is translated 'Jacob's Square.' Sometimes an uneasy compromise seemed the best solution, though inconsistencies result. 'Helgeandsholmen' ('Isle of the Holy Ghost') becomes merely 'Helgeands Isle', but 'Kungsholmen' ('King's Isle') is left untranslated, since it is apparent from context that the name encompasses an entire section of town. The goal throughout has been fidelity to Söderberg's spirit and intent.

Rochelle Wright

Doctor Glas

June 12

I've never seen such a summer. Hot and sultry since mid-May. All day long a thick, inert cloud of dust hovers over the streets and squares.

Only in the evening do people rouse themselves a bit. I took an after-dinner walk just now, as I do almost every day after visiting patients; there aren't many now during the summer. A cool, steady breeze blows in from the east, the cloud lifts, wafts slowly away and becomes a long, red veil off to the west. No noise from the work carts any longer, just an occasional cab and the bell of the streetcar. I walk slowly down the street, meeting an acquaintance now and then and stopping to chat for a while at a corner. But why is it that I keep running into Pastor Gregorius? I can't lay eyes on that man without recalling an anecdote I once heard about Schopenhauer. The dour philosopher was sitting one evening in a corner of his café, alone as usual; the door opens and a disagreeable-looking person steps in. Schopenhauer stares at him, his features twisted with disgust and horror, leaps up and begins beating the man on the head with his walking stick. Solely because of his appearance.

Well, I'm no Schopenhauer, of course. When I saw the pastor approaching me from a distance on Vasa Bridge, I quickly stopped and positioned myself, leaning on the rail, to admire the view: the gray buildings of Helgeand Isle, the old, worn wooden bath house in Viking style, reflected in the rippling current, the ancient willows dipping their leaves in the Stream. I hoped the pastor hadn't seen me and wouldn't recognize me from behind, and I had more or less put him out of my mind when I realized he was standing next to me, leaning on the rail just as I was, his head cocked to the side—in precisely the same posture as the time twenty years ago in Jacob's Church when, sitting beside my late mother in the family pew, I first saw that dreadful physiognomy stick up from the pulpit like a poisonous mushroom and start droning his "Our Father." The same puffy, sallow face, the same dirty yellow sideburns—a bit grayer now, perhaps—the same inscrutable, mean look from behind the glasses. No possibility of escape now—he's one of my many patients, and sometimes he comes to me with his aches and pains.

"Well, good evening, Pastor, how are you?"

"Not well, not well at all. My heart's bad—irregular heartbeat. Sometimes at night it almost seems to stop."

Pleased to hear it, I thought. Go ahead and die, you old scoundrel, and I'll be rid of the sight of you. Besides, you have a beautiful young wife you're probably tormenting to death, and if you die she'll remarry and find a much better husband. But aloud I said, "Oh, I see. Well, perhaps you should stop by my office one of these days and we'll look into the matter." But he had a good deal more to say, important things like this heat is quite extraordinary, and it's stupid to build a big house of parliament on that little island, and as a matter of fact, my wife isn't really well, either.

Finally he left, and I went on my way. I entered Old Town, walking up past the Great Church and into the alleys. Dense twilight in the narrow slits between the buildings and odd shadows along the walls, shadows unlike any in my neighborhood.

—Mrs. Gregorius. What a strange visit she paid me the other day. She came during office hours; I saw exactly when she appeared and noted she'd allowed plenty of time, but she let later arrivals go ahead of her and waited until they'd left. Then finally she came in. She blushed and stammered and eventually blurted out something about having a sore throat, though it was better now anyway. . . "I'll come back tomorrow," she said, "I'm in such a hurry now."

As yet she hasn't returned.

I emerged from the alleys down at the quay. The moon was shining above Ship's Isle, lemon yellow against the blue, but my calm, carefree mood was completely gone; the meeting with the pastor had spoiled it. That people like him should exist! Who could forget the old problem so often debated when a few poor wretches gather around the table at a café: if you could kill a Chinese mandarin merely by pressing a button on the wall, or through an act of sheer will, and then inherit his riches—would you do it? It's not a question I've ever bothered answering, perhaps because I've never truly felt the harsh, bitter misery of poverty. But I think if I could kill that pastor by pushing a button on the wall, I'd do it.

When I walked home in the unnaturally pale twilight, the heat once again felt just as oppressive as during the day, as if heavy with anguish. The red clouds of dust that had accumulated beyond the smokestacks of the factories on Kungsholmen had darkened and seemed threatening in their repose. I walked hurriedly down past Klara Church toward home, hat in hand, the sweat pouring from my brow. Not even under the large trees in the churchyard did the heat let up, but on nearly every bench couples sat whispering, and some were wrapped around each other, kissing with feverish eyes.

❦

Now I'm sitting at my open window writing this—for whom? Not for a friend or a woman, scarcely even for myself, since I don't read today what I wrote yesterday and won't read this tomorrow. I'm writing to keep my hand moving—my thoughts move of their own accord. I'm writing to kill a sleepless hour. Why can't I sleep? After all, I've committed no crime.

❦

What I'm setting down on these pieces of paper isn't a confession; to whom would I confess? I don't tell everything about myself. I tell only what it pleases me to tell, but nothing I say is untrue. No amount of lying could hide the wretchedness of my soul, if it is wretched.

❦

Out there the enormous, blue night is suspended above the trees of the churchyard. The city is quiet now, so quiet that sighs and whispers from the shadows down below make their way up to me, and once a bold laugh cuts through. At this moment I feel that no one in the world could be more alone than I. I, doctor Tyko Gabriel Glas, who sometimes help others but have never been able to help myself, and who at thirty-three years of age have never been near a woman.

JUNE 14

What a profession! How did it come to pass that of all possible ways of earning a living, I chose the one that suits me least? A doctor must either care deeply about people or be ambitious. —Well, true, in those days, I thought both characteristics applied.

Today, once again, a woman was here, weeping, begging and pleading with me to help her. I've known her for quite some time. Married to a minor official, four thousand a year or so, and three children who arrived pell-mell the first three years. Then for five or six years she was spared; she's regained some of her health, strength, and youth, and their household had partly recovered from the strain. They're poor, of course, but they seem to have managed. And then suddenly misfortune is upon them again.

She was sobbing so hard she could scarcely talk.

Of course I answered with the usual prepared speech I always recite on occasions like this: my duty as a doctor, my regard for human life, even the frailest.

I was solemn and implacable. Eventually she had to leave, ashamed, confused, helpless.

I made a note of the incident; it was the eighteenth in my practice, and I'm not a gynecologist.

I'll never forget the first one. It was a girl of twenty-two or so, a dark-haired, buxom, slightly vulgar young beauty. It was quite clear that she was the kind who must have peopled the earth in Luther's day if he was right when he wrote that it's just as impossible for a woman to live without a man as to bite off one's own nose. Conventional, bourgeois background, the father a wealthy wholesaler. I was the family doctor, so she'd come to me. She was frantic, beside herself, but not a bit shy.

"Save me!" she pleaded, "save me!" I responded with duty, etc., but this was apparently beyond her understanding. I explained to her that the law was no joking matter in cases like this.

"The law?" She merely looked puzzled. I advised her to talk to her mother, who would talk to her father, and then there'd be a wedding.

"Oh, no, my fiancé has nothing, and Father would never forgive me!"

They weren't engaged; she said "fiancé" for lack of a better word, since "lover" appears only in novels and sounds indecent when spoken aloud.

"Save me! Have you no pity? I don't know what I'll do—I'll throw myself in the Stream!"

I became somewhat impatient. She didn't inspire much sympathy, either; matters like this can always be settled when there's a little money. It's only pride that suffers a bit. She sobbed and blew her nose and carried on, and finally she threw herself down on the floor, kicking and screaming.

Of course the outcome was just as I'd expected: her father, an ill-mannered brute, slapped her once or twice and then married her off in the bat of an eye to her partner in crime and sent them away on a honeymoon.

Cases like hers have never troubled me. But I felt sorry for the pale little woman who came today. So much misery and pain for such a small pleasure.

Respect for human life—what are these words to me other than base hypocrisy, and what else can they be for anyone who occasionally occupies an idle hour with thought? There are human lives all around us, and no one, with the possible exception of a few extraordinarily foolish philanthropists, has ever paid the slightest attention to strangers, to unknown, unseen human beings. Our actions reveal this; so does every government and parliament in the world.

And Duty—what a splendid smoke screen to hide behind to avoid doing what ought to be done.

But of course it would be foolish to risk everything—position, reputation, the future—to help strangers to whom one is indifferent. Counting on their silence would be naive. A friend finds herself in the same predicament, hears a whisper about where help may be found, and soon the word is out. No, better stick to duty, even if it is a painted screen, like Potemkin's villages. I'm just afraid I'll recite my duty speech so often that I'll end up believing it myself. Potemkin deceived only his empress. How much more contemptible to deceive oneself.

❦

Position, reputation, the future. As if I wouldn't be ready, any day or any hour, to stash this baggage aboard the first ship that came loaded with action.

Meaningful action.

JUNE 15

Once again I'm sitting at the window. Outside in the wakeful blue night I can hear whispering and rustling under the trees.

This evening on my after-dinner walk I saw a married couple. I recognized her right away. Not so many years ago I danced with her at balls, and I haven't forgotten that each time I saw her she gave me a sleepless night. But she knew nothing about this. She wasn't a woman then, she was an innocent girl. She embodied a dream, a man's dream of womanhood.

Now she was plodding down the street on her husband's arm. More expensively dressed than before, but more commonplace, more bourgeois; something empty and burned-out in her gaze and at the same time the expression of a contented wife, as if she were carrying her belly in front of her on a silver-plated platter.

No, I don't understand it. Why is it like this, why will it always be like this? Why is love fool's gold that turns into withered leaves on the second day, or into filth or dissipation? The longing for love has inspired all human culture that rises above the level of basic survival. Our sense of beauty has no other wellspring. All art, all literature, all music has drunk from it. The most crude historical painting as well as Rafael's madonnas and Steinlen's little Parisian working girls, Wallin's psalm "The Angel of Death" as well as the Song of Songs and Heine's *Buch der Lieder*, the chorale and the Viennese waltz, yes, every plaster of Paris ornament on the wretched building where I live, every figure in the wallpaper, the shape of the porcelain vase over there and the pattern of my scarf, everything intended to be decorative or beautiful, whether or

not it succeeds, comes from this, though sometimes in a roundabout way. And this is no nocturnal flight of fancy of mine; it's been proven a hundred times over.

But that wellspring isn't love. Instead it's the dream of love.

And on the other hand, everything connected with the fulfillment of the dream, the satisfaction of the impulse, and what comes afterward: this our deepest instinct finds ugly and indecent. That can't be proven, it's merely a feeling: my own, and I suspect everyone's. People always treat each other's love affairs as something base or comical and don't even make an exception for their own. And the consequences. . . A pregnant woman is frightful. A newborn child is disgusting. A deathbed seldom makes as horrible an impression as childbirth, that dreadful cacophony of screams and filth and blood.

But first and last, the act itself. I'll never forget how, as a child standing under one of the enormous chestnut trees in the schoolyard, I first heard the explanation of "what people do." I didn't want to believe it; even after several other boys came over and confirmed the report, laughing at my stupidity, I was still incredulous and ran away, beside myself with outrage. Had mother and father really done that? And would I myself do it when I grew up? Was there no escape?

I'd always felt great contempt for the nasty boys who wrote dirty words on the walls and fences. But at that moment it was as if God himself had written something filthy in the blue spring sky, and I think it was then that I first began to wonder whether there really was a God.

Even now I haven't completely recovered from the shock. Why is our species preserved and our longing stilled by the same organ we use several times a day as a drain to remove impurities? Why couldn't this be an act that encompassed dignity and beauty as well as intense sensuality? An act that could be performed in church, in front of everyone, as well as in solitary darkness, or in a temple of roses in the full sunlight to a chanting choir and the dancing of the wedding party?

❦

I don't know how long I've been pacing back and forth across the room.

It's growing light outside. The weathercock on the church steeple shines in the east, and the hungry sparrows are chirping loudly.

Strange how the air always trembles just before sunrise.

JUNE 18

It was a bit cooler today. I went riding for the first time in more than a month.

What a morning! I'd gone to bed early the night before and had slept straight through. I never sleep without dreaming, but last night's dreams were airy and blue. I rode out to Haga Park, around the Echo Temple and past the Copper Tents. Dew and cobwebs on all the bushes and thickets, the wind blowing through the trees. Deva was in a lively mood; the ground danced under us, young and fresh as on the first Sunday of creation. I came to a little inn I knew from having stopped there often while out riding last spring. I dismounted, emptied a bottle of beer in a single gulp, and then grabbed the brown-eyed serving girl by the waist and swung her once around, kissed her hair, and rode off.

As the song goes.

JUNE 19

I see, Mrs. Gregorius. So that was it. A bit unusual, true.

She came late this time; office hours were over and she was the last one left in the waiting room.

She stepped in, very pale, greeted me, and stopped in the middle of the room. I gestured toward a chair, but she remained standing.

"I misled you the other day," she said. "I'm not sick. I'm completely healthy. I wanted to talk to you about something entirely different, doctor, but I just couldn't get it out."

A brewery cart rattled past on the street below. I went over and closed the window, and in the sudden silence I could hear her say, quickly and clearly, but with a slight tremor in her voice, as if she were on the verge of tears:

"I've started feeling such a dreadful aversion to my husband."

Standing with my back to the tile stove, I gave a little nod to indicate I was following.

"Not as a human being," she went on. "He's always good to me, kind. He's never spoken a harsh word to me. But I respond to him with such intense disgust."

She took a deep breath.

"I don't know how to put it," she said. "What I wanted to ask of you is rather strange, and it may be completely against your principles. I have no way of knowing how you feel about matters like this. But there's something about you that inspires trust, and I don't know anyone else to confide in, no one else in the world who could help me. Doctor,

couldn't you talk to my husband? Tell him I'm suffering from some illness, something gynecological, and that he has to give up his rights, at least for a while?"

Rights. My hand went to my forehead. I see red when I hear the word in that context. Good God, what goes through people's minds when they turn this into a question of rights and duties!

It was immediately clear to me that I had to help her if I could. But I didn't find anything to say at first—I wanted her to go on talking, and it's also possible that my sympathy was mixed with a dose of plain ordinary curiosity.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Gregorius, how long have you been married?"

"Six years."

"And have what you refer to as your husband's 'rights' always seemed as difficult for you as they do now?"

She blushed a little.

"It's always been difficult," she said. "But recently it's become unbearable. I can't stand it any longer—I don't know what will become of me if this goes on."

"But," I interrupted, "the pastor isn't young any longer. It surprises me that at his age he can cause you so much . . . distress. How old is he, anyway?"

"Fifty-six, I think. No, perhaps he's fifty-seven. Though he looks older, of course."

"But tell me, Mrs. Gregorius, haven't you spoken to him about this yourself? Told him how much it torments you and asked him very sweetly to spare you?"

"Yes, once I did ask him, but he answered by admonishing me. He said we couldn't be sure whether or not God wanted us to have a baby, even though it hadn't happened yet, and so it would be a very great sin to stop doing what God wants us to do in order to produce a baby. . . And perhaps he's right. But it's so hard for me."

I couldn't repress a smile. What an inveterate old fraud!

She saw my smile, and I think she misunderstood it. She was quiet a minute, as if reconsidering, and then she started talking again in a soft, quavering voice while the blush deepened and rose higher.

"No, I have to tell you everything," she said. "You may already have guessed—you see right through me. I'm asking you to lie for my sake, so the least I can do is be honest with you. Judge me as you like: I'm an unfaithful wife. I belong to another man, and that's why this is so terribly difficult for me now."

She avoided meeting my eyes while she spoke. As for me, only now did I truly see her. Only now did I see that there was a woman in

my room whose heart was overflowing with misery and desire, a young flower of a woman who radiated love all around her, blushing shyly because love's fragrance was so heady and strong.

I could feel myself turn pale.

Finally she looked up and met my eyes. I don't know what she read into my gaze, but she collapsed and sank onto a chair, shaking with sobs. Perhaps she thought I regarded the entire matter frivolously, or perhaps she found me indifferent and unmoved and regretted having bared her soul to a stranger, to no avail.

I went up to her and took her hand, patting it softly:

"Now, now, don't cry any more. I want to help you; I promise I will."

"Thank you, thank you. . . "

She kissed my hand until it grew damp. Just one more violent sob, and then a smile lit up her face through the tears.

I had to smile.

"But it was foolish of you to tell me the last part," I said. "Not that you need be afraid I'll abuse your trust, but matters like that should remain a secret. Always, without exception, for as long as you can. And of course I would have helped you anyway."

She answered, "I *wanted* to tell you. I wanted someone I look up to and respect to know about it and still not treat me with contempt."

Then came a long story. Once, about a year ago, she'd overheard a conversation between her husband and me—he was ill and I was paying a call. We happened to be talking about prostitution. She remembered everything I'd said and repeated it to me. It was quite straightforward and ordinary: these poor girls are human beings, too, and should be treated accordingly, etc. But she'd never heard anything like it before. Ever since then she'd looked up to me, and that was why she'd mustered up the courage to confide in me.

I had no memory whatsoever of any of this. . . The past comes back to haunt us.

I promised to talk to her husband that same day, and she left, but she forgot her gloves and parasol and came back to fetch them before disappearing again. She was beaming, radiant, dizzily happy, like a child who's gotten her way and is looking forward to something wonderful.

❦

I went there in the afternoon. As agreed, she'd warned him in advance. I spoke to him privately. His face was even more gray than usual.

"Well," he said, "my wife has already explained the situation to me. I can't begin to say how sorry I am for her sake. We had so hoped

and prayed to have a baby. But I won't agree to separate bedrooms—that's out of the question. It's so unusual in our circle that it would give rise to gossip. And I'm an old man, anyway."

He gave a hollow cough.

"Well," I said, "of course I don't doubt that you value your wife's health above all other concerns. Besides, it's quite likely we'll soon get her well again."

"I pray to God for her recovery," he replied. "But how long do you think it might take, doctor?"

"That's hard to say, but six months of complete abstinence will certainly be necessary. Then we'll just have to see. . . "

He has a couple of liver spots on his face which now grew darker and more visible against his ashen complexion, and his eyes seemed to shrivel up.

He's been married once before; too bad the first wife died! In his study there's a large charcoal sketch of her: a common, bony, sensuous-yet-pious serving-girl type, not too different from the worthy Katarina von Bora.

No doubt she suited him. Too bad she died!

JUNE 21

Who's the lucky man? I've been asking myself the question since the day before yesterday.

How strange that I should find out so soon and that it should turn out to be someone I know, if only in passing. It's Klas Recke.

Yes indeed, he's a far cry from Pastor Gregorius.

I just ran into them on my after-dinner walk. I was wandering at random down the streets in the warm, rosy twilight, thinking about her, the young woman. I think about her often. I turned off on an empty side street—and there all of a sudden I saw them approaching. They had just stepped out of a building. I quickly pulled out my handkerchief and blew my nose to hide my face. This was quite unnecessary; he scarcely knows who I am, and she, blinded by happiness, didn't see me at all.

JUNE 22

I sit reading the page I wrote last night, reading it over and over again, and I ask myself: So, old friend, you've become a pimp?

Nonsense. I've saved her from something terrible. I felt it had to be done.

Beyond that, what she does with herself is her own business.

JUNE 23

Midsummer Eve, bright, blue night. I remember you from my childhood and youth as the lightest, most carefree, weightless night of the year. Why are you so oppressive and foreboding now?

I'm sitting at the window thinking over my life, trying to come to grips with why it followed such a different path from everyone else's, so far off the beaten track.

Let me think.

Just now as I crossed through the churchyard on my way home I once again witnessed one of those scenes that guardians of morality who write letters to the newspaper always call "beyond description." Clearly an instinct that makes these poor people flaunt public outrage in a churchyard must be overwhelmingly powerful. It drives frivolous men to all sorts of insane behavior and makes honest, sensible men submit to great deprivation and hardship. And it drives women to overcome the sense of modesty that their upbringing, generation after generation, has been designed to promote and strengthen, to endure terrible physical suffering, and often to plunge headfirst into the deepest misery.

Only I remain untouched by it. How is this possible?

My senses awakened late, at a time when my strength of will was already that of a man. I was very ambitious as a child. I learned to control myself early, to distinguish between my innermost, constant will and a momentary impulse, a fleeting desire, to listen to the one voice and disregard the other. Since then I've noticed that this ability is quite uncommon, perhaps more uncommon than talent or genius, and for that reason it sometimes seems to me that I should have become something unusual and great. After all, I was a brilliant student: finished secondary school at fifteen, earned my medical degree by twenty-three. But then I stopped. No specialized training, no doctorate. People were willing to lend me the money, however much I needed, but I was tired. I felt no desire to specialize, and I wanted to earn my own living. My schoolboy ambition for high grades, once satisfied, faded away, and oddly enough no adult ambition took its place. I think it was because by then I had started to think. I hadn't had time before.

But all this time my instinctive drives were half asleep, aroused enough to awaken vague dreams and desires, like those of a young girl, but not powerful and tempting like other young men's. And though I did

occasionally lie awake at night with hot fantasies, it was still unthinkable to me that I would be able to find satisfaction with the women my friends visited, women they sometimes pointed out to me on the street, who seemed repulsive. No doubt the fact that my imagination evolved entirely on its own, completely independent from the influence of others, also played a role. I was always so much younger than my peers that at first I didn't understand a thing when they talked about these matters, and since I didn't understand, I grew accustomed to not listening. So I remained "pure." I didn't even practice the sins of youth—I barely knew they existed. I had no religious faith to hold me back, but I had my dreams of love, such beautiful dreams, and I was convinced that one day they would be reality. I didn't want to sully my student honors, sell my birthright for a pittance.

My dreams of love—once it seemed to me that they were so close, so close to coming true. Midsummer Eve, strange, pale night, you always awaken that memory, the memory that is really the only one I have, the only one that remains when everything else recedes, turns to dust, and disappears. And yet what happened was so insignificant. I was out at my uncle's country place for the Midsummer weekend. There were young people and dancing and games. In the crowd of young people was a girl I'd met a few times at family gatherings. I hadn't thought much about her before, but as I looked at her now a friend's remark at a party suddenly came to mind: that girl certainly has an eye for you—she's been sitting there watching you all evening. I remembered this now, and though I didn't really believe it, it did make me look at her more than I might have otherwise, and I noticed that she sometimes looked at me, too. She may not have been prettier than many others, but she was in the full bloom of her twenty years and she was wearing a thin white blouse over her young breasts. We danced together a few times around the Maypole. As midnight approached we all climbed up a hill to admire the view and light a Midsummer bonfire, and the plan was to stay there until sunrise. The way up was through the woods between tall, straight pines; we walked in couples, and I walked with her. When she tripped on a tree root in the dim forest light I reached out my hand; a tremor of happiness went through me when I felt her soft, warm, firm little hand in mine, and I kept hold of it even when the path became straight and smooth. What did we talk about? I don't know. Not a word remains in my memory, I only recall that it was as if there was a hidden current of quiet, resolute devotion in her voice and in every word she spoke, as if walking in the woods with me hand in hand was something she'd long been dreaming about and hoping for. We reached the top; other young people were already there and had lit the bonfire, and we

settled down in scattered groups or two by two. From other heights and hilltops other fires flared up. Above us the sky was huge and light and blue, below the icy inlets and straits and the wide bay were shiny and deep. I was still holding her hand, and I think I even caressed it softly. I looked at her shyly and saw that her complexion was glowing in the pale night and her eyes were full of tears, but she wasn't crying; her breathing was calm and even. We sat quietly, but inside me a song arose, an old folk song that came to me from nowhere in particular:

> A fire burns, it burns so bright, its flames like a thousand suns,
> Shall I now step into the fire and dance with my dearest one?

We sat that way a long time. Some of the others got up and left for home, and I heard someone say, "There are big clouds in the east—we won't see any sunrise." The group on the hilltop dwindled until finally we were alone. I kept on looking at her and she met my gaze steadily. Then I took her face between my hands and kissed her, a light, innocent kiss. At that moment someone called her; she gave a start, freed herself and ran off, ran on light feet down through the forest.

When I caught up with her she was already with the others; I could only press her hand in silence, and she pressed mine back. Down in the meadow people were still dancing around the Maypole, serving maids and farm hands and young people from well-to-do homes all mixing with each other, as is the custom on this one night of the year. I led her into the dance again, and a wild, dizzy dance it was; it was already full daylight, but the bewitchment of the Midsummer night was still in the air. The whole earth danced under us and the other couples whirled past, first above us, then below; everything went up and down and spun around. Then finally we pulled ourselves out of the vortex of the dance. We didn't dare look at each other but stole away together, without a word, behind a lilac hedge. There I kissed her again. But now it was different—her head rested leaning back on my arm, she closed her eyes, and her mouth came alive as I kissed her. I pressed my hand against her breast and I felt her hand over mine. Perhaps she meant to ward me off, to push my hand away, but in fact she merely pressed it harder against her breast. All the while her face was growing radiant, first faintly, then more strongly, and finally like a violent flame. She opened her eyes but had to close them again, blinded, and when finally our long kiss was over, we stood cheek to cheek, dazed, and stared directly into the sun, which had broken through the patches of clouds in the east.

I never saw her again. This was ten years ago, ten years ago tonight, and even today I feel crazed and sick when I think about it.

We made no plans to meet the next day; it didn't occur to us. Her parents lived nearby, and we took it for granted that we would meet and be together the next day, every day, the rest of our lives. But the next day was rainy; it went by without my seeing her, and that evening I had to go into town. A few days later I read in the newspaper that she was dead. Drowned while swimming, she and another young girl. — Yes, ten years have passed since then.

At first I was crushed. But deep inside, I must be strong. I kept on working and passed my exam in the fall. But I suffered, too. Every night I saw her before me, constantly. I could see her white body lying in the slime and seaweed, bobbing up and down in the waves. Her eyes were wide open, and so was the mouth I had kissed. Then along came people in a boat. They had a grapnel with a hook that fastened in her breast, in the same young girlish breast my hand had just caressed.

After this it was a long time before I once again noticed I was a man and that there were women in the world. But now I was hardened. Now that I had felt a spark of the great flame I was less inclined than ever to make do with the dregs. Others may be less particular about this; that's their business, and I'm not sure the issue really matters very much. But I felt it mattered to me. And it would certainly be naive to think that a man's will couldn't control these insignificant urges, if only the will is there. Dear old Martin Luther, worthy spiritual ancestor of Pastor Gregorius, what a sinner in the flesh you must have been to have uttered so much nonsense when you got onto that topic! But at least you were more honest than your successors, and for that you should be praised.

And so the years went, and life passed me by. I saw many women who awakened my longing again, but those particular women never noticed me—for them it was as if I didn't exist. Why was that? I think I understand now. A woman in love has a special enchantment about her walk, her complexion, her entire being that captivates me. It was always these women who aroused my desire. But since they were already in love with other men they were unable to see me. Others saw me instead; after all, I was a young physician establishing a good practice, and consequently I was considered an excellent match and attracted a certain amount of attention. But it was always a wasted effort.

Yes, the years went, and life passed me by. I practice my profession. People come to me with all kinds of illnesses, and I cure them as best I can. Some get well, others die, most of them drag on with their aches and pains. I work no miracles; occasionally someone I haven't been able to help has turned to a lay healer or a notorious charlatan and recovered. But I think I'm generally regarded as a careful and conscientious physician. Soon, no doubt, I'll be the typical family doctor, a fellow with great experience and a calm, reassuring gaze. People might have less confidence in me if they knew how poorly I slept.

Midsummer Eve, bright, blue night, once you were so airy, light, and carefree. Why do you weigh on me like anguish now?

JUNE 28

This evening when I went past the Grand Hotel on my after-dinner walk Klas Recke was sitting there at a table by the sidewalk, alone with his whisky. I took a few more steps, then turned around and settled down at a nearby table to observe him. He didn't see me, or didn't want to. Naturally she has told him about her visit to me and the happy outcome—presumably he's grateful for the latter, but it may make him slightly uncomfortable to know that someone else is in on their secret. He sat there motionless, looking out across the Stream, smoking a very long, thin cigar.

A newsboy came by, and I bought an *Evening News* to hide behind while peering at him over the edge. And once again the thought struck me, just as it did when I first saw him many years ago: why does that man have precisely the face I should have had? That's just what I would look like if I could remake myself. Back then I suffered bitterly because I was ugly as sin. Now I don't care.

I've scarcely seen a more handsome man. Cold, light-gray eyes, but set so they look deep and dreamy. Absolutely straight, horizontal eyebrows that extend toward his temples, a marble-white forehead, thick, dark hair. But in the lower half of his face only the shape of the mouth is beautiful; otherwise there are minor flaws, an uneven nose, a swarthy, singed complexion—in other words, just what's needed to save him from the sort of perfection that mostly arouses ridicule.

What does the man look like inside? I know virtually nothing about that. All I know is that he's said to have a good head on his shoulders with regard to his career, and it seems to me I've seen him more often in the company of his superiors in the department where he works than with companions his own age.

A hundred thoughts went through my head as I watched him sitting there motionless, gazing out into the distance—he didn't touch his glass, and the cigar nearly went out. A hundred old dreams and fantasies reawakened when I thought about his life and compared it with my own. I've often said to myself that desire is the most blissful feeling in the world, the only thing that can brighten up this miserable life, but its satisfaction can't be much to boast about, judging by all these successful, well-off men who deny themselves nothing along those lines but whom

I've never envied in the slightest. When I see a man like him, however, I feel bitter envy deep inside. The problem that poisoned my youth and still weighs me down well into adulthood solved itself for him. I suppose that's true for most people, but their solution arouses disgust, not envy—otherwise I would have resolved the problem long ago as well. But women's love has always come to him as a God-given right; he has never been forced to choose between starvation and rancid meat. Nor do I think he's ever taken time to think very much; he has never had the leisure to let the poison of reflection drip into his wine. He's happy, and I envy him.

And with a shiver I also thought about her, Helga Gregorius, I saw her shining eyes through the twilight. Yes, the two of them belong together—it's natural selection. Gregorius—why should she drag that name and that man with her through life? It's pointless.

It began to grow dark; a red evening glow settled over the soot-stained façade of the Royal Palace. People walked past on the sidewalk. I listened to their voices: there were thin Yankees with their careless slang, small, fat Jewish shopkeepers with their nasal tones, and ordinary middle-class people with contented Saturday-evening cadences. Occasionally someone nodded to me and I nodded back, or somebody tipped a hat and I tipped mine. Some friends sat down at the next table; it was Martin Birck and Markel and a third man I've met once or twice but whose name I've forgotten, or perhaps never known—he's very bald and our previous encounters had been indoors, so I didn't recognize him until he raised his hat to greet me. Recke nodded to Markel, whom he knows, and shortly thereafter got up to leave. When he passed my table he suddenly seemed to recognize me and gave a scrupulously polite, though somewhat distant greeting. We were on a first name basis as students at Uppsala, but he's forgotten that.

As soon as he was out of earshot the group at the next table started talking about him, and I heard the bald man turn to Markel and ask, "Ah, so you know that Recke fellow—he's supposed to have a bright future ahead of him. Is he as ambitious as they say?"

Markel: "Well, ambitious. . . If I were to call him ambitious it would be for the sake of our close friendship. Otherwise it would probably be more accurate to say that he wants to get ahead. Ambition is quite unusual. We're used to saying that someone is ambitious if he wants to be a government minister. A minister—what's that? The income of a small businessman and barely enough power to be able to help his own relatives, let alone push through his ideas, should he happen to have any. Which doesn't stop me from wanting to be a minister myself, of course—it's a more advantageous position than my current one—but this shouldn't be called ambition. It's something quite different. Back when I was

ambitious I came up with a plan, a very carefully thought-out one, incidentally, to conquer the entire world and arrange things so that everything was as it should be, and finally, when it was so perfect that it almost began to be dull, then I'd help myself to as much money as I wanted and sneak off, disappear in an enormous city and sit in the corner of a café drinking absinthe, rejoicing about how badly everything was going since I'd withdrawn from the fray. . . But I like Klas Recke anyway, because he's very handsome, and because he has an unusual talent for arranging things comfortably and pleasantly for himself in this vale of tears."

Ah, Markel, he's always the same. He's a political columnist in a big newspaper these days; often, in a state of high dudgeon, he writes articles that are intended to be taken seriously and sometimes even deserve to be. Somewhat unshaven and unkempt in the morning, but always elegant in the evening and with a humor that lights up when the street lamps go on. Next to him sat Birck with an absent gaze, wearing a large raincoat even in this heat. He wrapped it around himself as if he were freezing.

Markel turned toward me and inquired amiably if I'd like to join this select group of old alcoholics. I said no thanks, I was on my way home. That was my intention, but I really didn't feel any longing for my solitary rooms, so I stayed a little while longer listening to the music from the Stream Terrace, which cut loud and clear through the evening silence, and watching the reflection of the blind, staring windows of the palace in the Stream–for right now it's no stream, it's smooth as a forest lake. I could see a tiny blue star twinkling above Rosenbad, the ministry building. I could hear the conversation at the next table, too. They were talking about women and love, debating what the most important condition was for really enjoying yourself with a woman.

The bald man said, "That she's sixteen, dark-haired and slim, and hot-blooded."

Markel, with a dreaming expression: "That she's plump and cuddly."

Birck: "That she cares about me."

JULY 2

No, this is taking a terrible turn. This morning at ten o'clock Mrs. Gregorius was standing in my room once again. She looked pale and ravaged and stared at me with enormous eyes.

"What's the matter?" I asked immediately. "What's happened? Has something happened?"

"Last night he took me by force. In essence raped me."

I sat down on the chair by the desk, my hand playing with a pen and piece of paper as if I intended to write a prescription. She sat down

in the corner of the sofa. Poor thing, I said to myself. I couldn't think of anything to say aloud.

She said, "I'm destined to be trampled on."

We were silent for a moment; then she told the story. He'd awakened her in the middle of the night. He hadn't been able to sleep. He begged and pleaded; he wept. He claimed his eternal soul was at stake—he didn't know what terrible sins he might commit if she didn't do his bidding. It was her duty, and duty came before health. God would help them—God would make her healthy regardless.

I was speechless with shock.

"Is he a hypocrite?" I asked.

"I don't know. No, I don't think so. But he's grown accustomed to using God for whatever suits his purposes. They always do—I know so many ministers. I hate them. But he's no hypocrite, quite the contrary. He's always considered it self-evident that his religion is the right one, and it's more likely he thinks those who reject it are evil, deceitful people who deliberately lie to lead others to perdition."

She spoke calmly, with only a slight tremor in her voice, and what she said in one sense startled me: I hadn't realized that this young woman could think, that she could judge a man, as she did the one of whom she spoke, so clearly and objectively even though she must feel a deadly hatred for him, a deep revulsion. I could feel the revulsion and hatred in the tremor of her voice and in her every word, and it rubbed off on me as she finished the story: she'd wanted to get up, get dressed, go out, walk the streets all night till morning, but he held her back, and he was strong, he wouldn't let her go—

I felt myself grow warm; my temples were pulsating. I could hear a voice inside me so clearly that I almost grew afraid I was thinking out loud, a voice whispering between its teeth: Watch out, pastor! I've promised this young woman, this fair flower of womanhood with the lovely, silken hair, that I will protect her against you. Watch out—your life is in my hands, and I could, I will send you to meet your maker long before you wish. Watch out, pastor—you don't know me. My conscience doesn't bear the slightest resemblance to yours. I am my own judge; I'm a kind of person you've never suspected exists.

Was she really sitting there listening to my secret thoughts? A little shiver went through me when I heard her say, "I could murder that man."

"Dear Mrs. Gregorius," I responded with a smile, "that's a figure of speech, of course, but even so it shouldn't be used." I nearly said: "Especially not as a figure of speech."

"But," I continued in almost the same breath, "changing the subject a little, tell me how it came about that you married Pastor Gregorius. Pressure from your parents, or perhaps a minor infatuation at confirmation time?"

She gave a little shudder.

"No, nothing like that," she said. "It was so strange. It was nothing you'd be able to guess or understand on your own. Of course I was never in love with him, never in the slightest. Not even the usual girlish fascination with the confirmation minister—nothing at all. But I'll try to tell you the whole story, explain it to you."

She withdrew farther into the corner of the sofa and sat there all curled up like a little girl. And with a gaze that looked past me out into the distance she began talking.

"I was so happy as a child and young girl. That time seems like a fairy tale to me when I look back on it. Everyone liked me, and I loved everyone and believed the best of them. Then I reached a certain age—you know. But at first it made no difference; I was still happy, even happier than before—until I reached twenty. A young girl also has physical desires, I'm sure you know that, but at first, early on, this too makes her happy. At least that's how it was for me. My blood was singing in my ears, and I myself sang, too—sang constantly as I did my chores at home and hummed to myself when I walked down the street. . . And I was always in love. I'd grown up in a very religious home, but I still didn't think there was anything so terribly sinful about a kiss. When I was in love with a young man and he kissed me, I let it happen. Of course I knew there was something else, too, something you had to watch out for that was a terrible sin, but to me it seemed so vague and distant that it didn't tempt me. No, not at all—I didn't even understand that it could be tempting, I just thought it was something you had to submit to when you were married and wanted children, but nothing that could be significant in and for itself. But when I was twenty I fell deeply in love with a man. He was good-looking and good and kind—at least I thought so then, and I still do when I think about him. Yes, he must be—later he married a childhood friend of mine, and he's made her very happy. We met in the summer, in the country. We kissed each other. One day he took me deep into the woods. There he tried to seduce me, and he nearly succeeded. Oh, if only he had succeeded, if only I hadn't run off—how different everything would be now! Perhaps I'd have married him then—at least I'd never have married the man who's now my husband. I might have had children and a home, a real home—I'd never have been forced to be unfaithful. —But modesty and terror made me panic; I tore myself out of his arms and ran away, ran as if my life depended on it.

"The period after that was horrible. I didn't want to see him again, didn't dare see him. He sent me flowers, he wrote letter after letter begging me to forgive him. But I thought he was a scoundrel; I didn't answer the letters, and I threw the flowers out the window. But I thought about him constantly. And now it wasn't just kisses I thought about—now I knew what temptation was. I felt as if something about me had changed even though nothing had happened. I imagined people could tell by looking at me. No one can understand how I suffered. That fall, when we'd moved back to town, I was out for a walk one afternoon by myself. The wind was whistling between the buildings and a drop of rain fell now and then. I turned down the street where I knew he lived and passed the house. I stopped and saw that the light was shining in his window; I could see his head in the lamplight bent over a book. It drew me like magnet—I felt it would be so good to be inside there with him. I slipped in the door and went halfway up the stairs. There I turned around.

"If he'd written to me then I would have answered. But he'd grown tired of writing and getting no answer, and after that we never met again—not until many years later, and by then everything was completely different.

"I think I told you before that I had a strict religious upbringing. Now I fell back entirely on religion; I started studying nursing, but had to give it up when my health began to fail. After that I went home again, went about my household tasks as before, dreaming and longing and praying God to spare me these dreams and this longing. I felt the situation was unbearable and that something had to change. Then one day my father told me that Pastor Gregorius had asked for me in marriage. I was totally taken aback—his behavior toward me had never led me to imagine anything like that. He'd been a friend of the family for a long time; Mother admired him, and Father was a bit afraid of him, I think. I went into my room and wept. There had always been something about him that I found particularly unappealing, and I think that was exactly what made me decide to say yes. No one forced me, no one talked me around. But I believed it was God's will. After all, I'd been taught that God's will was always whatever we wanted the least. Just the night before I'd been lying awake praying to God for release and peace of mind, and now I thought He'd heard my prayers—in His own way. It seemed to me I could see His will quite clearly before my eyes. At that man's side, I thought, my longing would vanish and my desire die away, and this was what God had ordained for me. And I was sure he was a kind and good man—after all, he was a minister.

"That's not what happened. He couldn't kill my dreams, he could only sully them. Instead he eventually killed my faith. That's the only

thing I have to thank him for, since I don't want it back again. When I think about all of this now it just seems strange to me. Everything I longed for, everything that was wonderful to think about, was sinful. A man's embrace was sinful if I longed for it and desired it—but if I found it distasteful and disgusting, a scourge, agonizing and repulsive—then it was sinful *not* to want it. Tell me, Dr. Glas, isn't that strange?"

She'd worked herself up while talking. I nodded to her over my glasses:

"Yes, indeed it is strange."

"But tell me, do you think the love I feel now is sinful? It's not just happiness I feel, perhaps even more it's anxiety, but do you think it's sinful? If that's sinful, then everything about me is sinful, since I don't know of anything about me that's better or more precious than my love. —But I suppose it seems odd to you that I'm sitting here talking to you about this. After all, there's someone else I could talk to. But when we meet we have so little time, and he doesn't talk to me very much"—she blushed suddenly—"he doesn't talk to me very much about what's always on my mind."

I sat calmly and quietly, my hand on my forehead, watching her through half-closed eyes as she sat there in the corner of my sofa, her face flushed beneath the lush, blonde hair. Maiden Silken-Cheek. And I thought: if only she felt this way about me, that there wasn't time enough to talk. When she begins speaking again, I thought, I'll go over to her and silence her with a kiss. But now she sat there quietly. The door to the large waiting room was half-open, and I could hear my housekeeper's steps in the hallway.

I broke the silence: "But tell me, Mrs. Gregorius, haven't you ever considered divorce? You're not bound to your husband out of economic necessity—your father left a considerable sum, you're an only child, and your mother's still alive and well taken care of, isn't that so?"

"Oh, Dr. Glas, you don't know him. Divorce—a minister? He'd never agree to it, never, no matter what I did, no matter what were to happen. He'd rather 'forgive' me seven times seventy times over, then raise me up again—who knows what he'd do. He's perfectly capable of praying publicly for my soul in church. —No, I'm destined to be trampled on."

I got up.

"Well, my dear Mrs. Gregorius, what else do you want me to do? I no longer can see a way out."

She shook her head, at a loss.

"I don't know. I don't know what else. But I think he's coming to see you today about his heart—he mentioned it yesterday. Couldn't you

speak to him one more time? But of course without letting him suspect that I've been here today and have talked to you about this?"

"Well, we'll have to see."

She left.

After she was gone, I took out an issue of a medical journal to distract myself, but it didn't help—I could still see her before me, see her sitting there curled up in the corner of the sofa telling me her life's story and how it had come about that everything had gone wrong. Whose fault was it? The man who tried to seduce her in the woods one summer day? Dear me, what other function does a man have toward a woman than to seduce her, be it in the woods or in the bridal bed, and then help and support her in everything that follows? Then whose fault was it? The pastor? He had merely desired her, as myriads of men have desired myriads of women, had even desired her in honor and good faith, as his strange vocabulary would have it—and she had agreed, without knowing or understanding, merely in desperation and under the influence of the strange, confusing system of belief she'd grown up with. She wasn't awake when she married that man, she acted in her sleep. In our dreams the strangest things happen all the time and seem perfectly natural and ordinary—in our dreams. But when we awaken and remember what we've dreamed, we're taken aback and laugh aloud or shudder. Now she's awakened. And her parents, who certainly should have known what marriage is but nevertheless agreed to this, and perhaps were even pleased and flattered—were they awake? And the pastor himself: didn't he have the slightest inkling that his behavior was unnatural, grossly indecent?

Never have I felt with greater force that morality is a spinning merry-go-round. I knew this before, of course, but I'd always imagined that the revolutions must be measured in centuries or eons. Now they seemed like minutes or seconds. I grew dizzy, and the only guidepost through the madness was the voice I heard inside me, the voice whispering between its teeth: watch out, pastor!

❦

Yes, indeed, he came during my office hours. I was seized by a sudden, secret mirth when I opened the door and saw him sitting there in the waiting room. There was only one patient ahead of him, an old woman who needed a prescription renewed, and then it was his turn. He spread out the tails of his coat in a slow, dignified manner and settled into the same place on the sofa where his wife had been curled up a few hours earlier.

Of course he started off by talking a lot of nonsense, as usual. It was the issue of holy communion he chose for my amusement. His heart problem was mentioned only in passing, in a subordinate clause, and I had the impression he'd really come to hear my opinion, as a physician, about the health risks of communion, currently the topic of debate in all the newspapers as a diversion from the monster in the Great Lake in Jämtland. I hadn't been following this discussion; I suppose I've occasionally seen an article about the matter and given it a cursory glance, but I was hardly well-versed in the subject, and so the pastor had to explicate it for me. What can be done to prevent the spread of communicable disease when taking communion? That was the question. The pastor deeply regretted that such a question had ever been raised, but now that it had been, it had to be answered. Various possible solutions could be considered. The simplest might be if every church acquired a number of small chalices that the sexton could wipe off at the altar after each use—but that would be expensive. Perhaps it would even be impossible for impoverished country congregations to acquire a sufficient number of chalices.

I remarked in passing that in times like ours, when interest in religious matters is steadily on the rise, and when there are enough silver chalices to go around at every bicycle race, it surely shouldn't be impossible to acquire multiple chalices for religious purposes. For that matter I can't recall that the Biblical passage about holy communion says a single word about silver, but I kept that reflection to myself. Another possibility, the pastor went on, would be if every communicant could bring along his own chalice or glass. But how would it look if a rich man came with an artistically designed silver chalice and the poor man only a liquor glass?

For my part I thought it would look quite picturesque, but I said nothing and let him ramble on. Yet another suggestion, from a modern, liberally-inclined minister, had been to partake of the blood of Our Lord in capsules. At first I thought I hadn't heard right—in capsules, like medicine? In short—yes, in capsules. And finally, a minister at court had constructed an entirely new kind of communion vessel, taken out a patent on it and set up a business. The pastor described it for me in detail—it seemed to be constructed along more or less the same lines as a magician's equipment. Well, Pastor Gregorius himself is orthodox and not the slightest bit liberal, and consequently he finds all these ideas dreadfully alarming, but germs are alarming, too, and what's to be done?

Germs—I suddenly had an idea when I heard the way he pronounced the word. I recognized his tone of voice quite clearly and remembered I'd heard him talk about germs on some previous occasion;

all of a sudden I realized he was suffering from a kind of phobia. In his eyes, germs in some mysterious way are impervious both to religion and to the moral order of the world. That's because they're so new. His religion is ancient, nearly nineteen hundred years old, and the moral order of the world can be dated back at least to the beginning of the century, to German philosophy and the fall of Napoleon. But germs have descended on him in his old age, completely without warning. He imagines they've started going about their nasty business only in these uttermost days, and it's never occurred to him that there presumably were plenty of germs in the simple clay bowl that was passed around the table at the Last Supper in Gethsemane.

It's hard to say whether he's more sheep than fox.

I turned my back on him and let him keep on talking while I arranged something in my instrument cabinet. In passing I asked him to take off his coat and vest, and concerning the communion question I decided without further deliberation to lend my support to the capsule method.

"I admit," I said, "that at first glance this idea seems somewhat offensive even to me, despite the fact that I can't boast of any particularly warm religious sentiments. But on further consideration, one's reservations don't hold. The essential aspect of communion, after all, isn't the bread and the wine, but faith, and true faith surely won't be influenced by such superficial things as silver chalices and gelatin capsules. . ."

During these last words I put the stethoscope to his chest, asked him to be quiet for a moment, and listened. There was nothing especially remarkable about what I heard, just the slightly irregular heartbeat that's so common in older men who've grown accustomed to eating a bit more for dinner than they need and then curling up on the sofa for a nap. Some day it may lead to a stroke, you never know—but not necessarily, nor is the threat even very likely.

But I'd decided to turn this consultation into a real show. I listened much longer than I actually needed to, moved the stethoscope, tapped and listened some more. I noticed how it pained him to sit quietly and passively during all this—after all, he's used to talking constantly, at church, in society, in his home; he has a definite talent for talking, and presumably it was precisely this minor talent that first drew him to his profession. The examination made him somewhat uneasy; he'd probably have preferred to go on for a while longer about communion germs and then suddenly glance at his watch and dash off. But now I had him there in the corner of the sofa, and I didn't let him go. I listened and said nothing. The longer I listened, the worse his heart sounded.

"Is it serious?" he finally asked.

I didn't answer right away. I paced the floor a bit. A plan was starting to bubble up inside me, a fairly simple little plan, actually, but I'm not used to pretense and so I hesitated. I also hesitated because the plan depended entirely on his stupidity and ignorance—and was he really that stupid? Did I dare? Or was it too obvious—wouldn't he see right through me?

I stopped pacing and for several seconds turned my sternest doctor look on him. The pasty, grayish, jowly face had settled into an expression of simple-minded piety, but I couldn't catch his eye—only the way his glasses reflected my window with the curtains and potted plant. No matter whether he's a sheep or a fox, I thought, even a fox is considerably more stupid than a human being. It was perfectly clear that I could put something over on him without difficulty—I could tell he liked it when I acted the great expert. My pacing, deep in thought, and my long silence had already impressed him and softened him up.

"Strange," I finally murmured, as if to myself.

And I approached him again with the stethoscope.

"Excuse me," I added, "I need to listen just one more time to be sure I'm not mistaken."

"Well," I said afterwards, "judging by what I can hear today, your heart is not in very good shape, Pastor. But I don't think it's ordinarily this bad. I think there's a particular reason it's causing you problems today."

He hastily tried to put on a puzzled expression but didn't really succeed. I could tell immediately that his bad conscience picked up on my reference. He opened his mouth to say something, perhaps to ask what I meant, but he didn't get it out, just coughed. He probably wanted to avoid a detailed explanation, but that was just what I had in mind.

"Let's be honest with each other, Pastor Gregorius," I began. He gave a start, alarmed at these words. "I'm sure you haven't forgotten the conversation we had a few weeks ago concerning your wife's health. I don't wish to ask any tactless questions about whether you've kept the agreement we reached then. But I would like to say that if I'd known about the condition of your heart, I'd have been able to offer an even more compelling argument for the advice I gave you. Your wife's health is at stake, for a longer or shorter period of time; for you yourself, pastor, what's at stake is your life."

He looked dreadful while I was speaking. His face changed color, but he didn't blush, just turned green and purple. He was so hideously ugly to look at that I had to turn away. I went to the open window to catch a breath of fresh air, but it was almost as oppressive outside as within.

I went on: "My prescription is simple and straightforward: separate bedrooms. I recall that you don't like that, but it can't be helped. It's not

just the ultimate satisfaction that is a grave danger in this case; it's also important to avoid everything that can stir up and excite desire. —Yes, yes, I know what you're going to say—you're an old man and a minister to boot—but I'm a physician and have the right to speak openly with a patient, and I don't think I'm entirely out of order if I point out that the continual proximity of a young woman at night must have more or less the same effect on a minister as on any other man. I've studied at Uppsala; I knew many theologians there, and I didn't get the impression that the study of theology provided any special insurance against that sort of fire. And with regard to age—yes, how old are you, Pastor? Fifty-seven? That's a critical age: desire is the same as before, but satisfaction has its price. Well, it's true there are many different ways of looking at life, many different ways of valuing it. If I were talking to an old roué, of course I'd be prepared for an answer that from his point of view would be quite logical: I don't care—there's no point in living if you have to give up what makes life meaningful. But naturally I know that this line of reasoning is utterly foreign to your philosophy of life. My duty as a physician in this case is to inform and to warn—that's all I can do, and I'm certain, now that you know how serious the matter is, that nothing else is needed. I can't imagine you would choose to drop dead in the same manner as the late King Frederik I, or more recently, Felix Faure. . ."

I avoided looking at him while I spoke. But when I was through, I could see that he was sitting with his hand over his eyes and that his lips were moving, and I surmised rather than heard, "Our father, Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. . . Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. . ."

I sat down at the desk and wrote out a prescription for digitalis. As I handed it to him, I added, "It's not a good idea to stay in town all summer in this heat. A six-week sojourn at Porla or Ronneby to take the waters would do you a world of good, Pastor. And naturally you should travel alone."

JULY 5

Summer Sunday. Dust and grime everywhere, and only poor people out and about. And poor people, unfortunately, are quite unpleasant.

Around four o'clock I boarded a small steamer and went out to Djurgården Park for dinner. My housekeeper was attending a funeral and afterward there would be coffee served outdoors. It wasn't a close relative or friend who had died, but a funeral is, after all, a great pleasure for a woman of her class, and I didn't have the heart to deny her. In other words I couldn't eat dinner at home today. Actually I had also been invited

out, to visit acquaintances who have a house in the archipelago, but I wasn't in the mood. I'm not particularly fond of acquaintances or houses or the archipelago. Especially not the archipelago. A landscape chopped up into pieces. Little islands, little inlets, little rocky cliffs and little twisted trees. An impoverished landscape with chilly colors, mostly gray and blue, but not impoverished enough to have the desolate grandeur of the wilderness. When I hear people praise the natural beauty of the archipelago I always suspect they have something quite different in mind, and a closer investigation almost always confirms my suspicion. One person is thinking about fresh air and pleasant swimming places, another about a sailboat, and a third about perch fishing, and for them this all falls under the rubric "natural beauty." The other day I was talking to a young girl who was enamored of the archipelago, but during the course of the conversation it came out that she actually was thinking of sunsets, and perhaps of a student. She forgot that the sun goes down everywhere and the student is mobile. I don't think I'm completely indifferent to natural beauty, but then I have to travel farther away, to Lake Vättern or to Skåne, or to the ocean. I rarely have time for that, and within a radius of twenty or twenty-five miles of Stockholm I've never encountered a landscape that can be compared with Stockholm itself—with Djurgården and Haga Park and the sidewalk by the Stream in front of the Grand Hotel. So I generally stay in town both summer and winter. I prefer this, since I have the solitary person's constant need to see people around me—strangers, please note, people I don't know and don't have to speak to.

I came to Djurgårdsbrunn Inn and found a table by the glass wall in the low pavilion. The waiter hurried over with the menu and discretely spread a clean tablecloth over the remains of veal gravy and Batty's mustard that a previous dinner party had left behind. By immediately handing me the wine list and tossing out the quick, brief question, "Chablis?" he revealed that his memory contained a vast store of detailed knowledge to rival that of many a professor. I'm not a frequent restaurant guest, but it's true that chablis is almost always the wine I drink when I do eat out. And he was an old pro who knew his clientele. He'd worn down his initial youthful enthusiasm balancing trays of liquor at Bern's Lounge; at a more serious, mature age he'd fulfilled more complicated duties as a dining room waiter at Rydberg's Restaurant and Hamburger Börs, and who knows what temporary ill turn of fate had brought him now, with thinning hair and stained jacket, to a somewhat simpler place. Over the years he'd acquired an aura of belonging anywhere that food is served and bottles are uncorked. I was pleased to see him, and we exchanged a glance of secret understanding.

I looked around at the other dinner guests. At the next table the pleasant young man from whom I buy cigars sat gorging himself with his girlfriend, a pretty little shopgirl with sharp, darting eyes. A little farther away was an actor with his wife and children, wiping his mouth, proper and dignified as a minister. And off in a corner was a solitary old eccentric I've seen in cafés and on the street for the past twenty years or so, sharing his meal with his old dog, whose coat, like his, was turning gray.

I'd been served my chablis and was enjoying the play of the sunbeams in the pale, light liquid in my glass when, quite nearby, I heard a female voice I thought I recognized. I looked up. A party had just come in: husband, wife, and a little boy of four or five, a very handsome child, but dressed up in a silly, ridiculous-looking light-blue velvet blouse with a lace collar. It was the wife who was talking, and her voice seemed familiar: "That's where we'll sit—no, not there, the sun's shining there—no, there's no view there—where's the maitre 'd?"

Suddenly I recognized her. It was the same young woman who once had writhed in tears on the floor of my room, begging and pleading me to help her—to free her of the child she was carrying. So she married the sales clerk she'd set her heart on and had the baby—a little too soon, but that doesn't matter now—and here we have the corpus delecti in velvet blouse and lace collar. Well, my dear woman, what do you say now? Wasn't I right? The scandal passed, but you have your little boy who brings you joy. . .

But I wonder if it can be that child after all. No, it can't be. The boy is four, at most five, and that little episode was at least seven or eight years ago, just as I was starting my practice. What can have happened to the first child, then? Perhaps it died somehow. Oh, well, it hardly matters—they seem to have made up for it later.

I don't like the couple very much, actually, once I've had a good look at them. The wife is young and still quite pretty, but she's put on some weight and her color is a bit too high. I suspect she spends her mornings in pastry shops, drinking porter with her sweet roll and gossiping with her friends. And the husband is a small-time Don Juan. Judging by his appearance and behavior, I'm inclined to think he's unfaithful as a rooster. Both of them, furthermore, have the habit of scolding the waiter because they expect him to be negligent, a habit that makes me ill. Cheap, in a word.

I swallowed my mixed impressions with a big sip of the light, bracing wine and looked out through the large, open window. Outside the landscape was rich and calm and warm in the afternoon sunlight. The canal reflected the green shore and blue sky. A couple of canoes with paddlers in striped jerseys disappeared silently and effortlessly under the

bridge, cyclists pedaled over the bridge and scattered onto the roads, and groups of people were sitting in the grass under the enormous trees, enjoying the shade and the lovely day. And above my table two yellow butterflies were fluttering.

And while I was sitting like that, letting my gaze sink into repose in the verdant summer outside, my thoughts slipped into a fantasy I sometimes amuse myself with. I have some money saved up, ten thousand crowns or a little more, in secure stocks. In five or six years I may have saved enough to be able to build a house in the country. But where should I build it? It must be by the ocean. It must be on an open coast, without islands and skerries. I want an open horizon, and I want to hear the ocean. And I want the ocean in the west so the sun will set into it.

But there's another thing, too, that's just as important as the ocean: I want rich vegetation and enormous, swaying trees. No pines or spruces. Well, pines are all right if they're tall and straight and strong and have managed to become what they were intended to be, but the jagged contour of a spruce forest against the sky pains me in a way I can't explain. Furthermore, it rains in the country as well as in town, and a spruce forest in the rain makes me miserable and ill. No, it should be an Arcadian meadow sloping gently down to the shore with stands of large, leafy trees that make green arches over my head.

But unfortunately nature isn't like that at the coast; it's bleak and raw, and the wind from the ocean make the trees gnarled and stunted and small. The coast where I want to build and dwell I shall never see.

And then, building a house—that's a chapter in itself. First it takes a couple of years before it's finished, and you probably die in the meanwhile; then it takes another few years before everything is in order, and after that it's at least fifty more years before the place really seems comfortable.

I suppose a wife really ought to be part of the arrangement. But that creates problems, too. I have such a hard time enduring the thought of someone watching me sleep. The sleep of a child is lovely, a young woman's as well, but hardly a man's. It's said that a hero's slumber by the bonfire, his knapsack under his head, is lovely to see, and that may be, for he's tired and sleeping well. But what can my face look like when my thoughts lie dormant? I'd scarcely want to see it myself if I could; still less should anyone else see it.

No, there's no dream of happiness that in the end doesn't bite its own tail.

I often wonder, too, what sort of nature I would prefer if I'd never read a book and never seen a work of art. Perhaps I'd never even think in terms of preference—perhaps the archipelago with its rocks would be

good enough for me. All my thoughts and dreams about nature presumably derive from impressions from literature and art. From art I've acquired my longing to ramble across the flowery meadows of ancient Florence and sail on Homer's sea and kneel in Böcklin's holy glade. Dear me, how would my own poor eyes see the world if left to themselves without all these hundreds or thousands of teachers and friends among those who have written and thought and seen for the rest of us? When I was young I often thought: if only I were part of this, if only I *could* be part of this. If only I could give something for once, not continually receive. It's so depressing to be alone with a barren soul, at a loss to find a sense of self, of purpose, to feel a little self-respect. It's probably quite fortunate that most people have so few expectations along those lines. I did, and for a long time I suffered because of them, though I think the worst is over now. I couldn't become a poet. I see nothing that others haven't already seen and given shape and form. I know a number of writers and artists—strange creatures, in my opinion. They have no will of their own, or if they do, their actions contradict it. They're merely eyes and ears and hands. But I envy them. Not that I would give up my will in exchange for their visions, but I might wish I had their eyes and ears in addition. Sometimes when I see one of them sitting quietly, absently, staring out into space, I think to myself: perhaps at this very moment he sees something no one has seen before, something he soon will compel a thousand others to see, among them me. I don't understand what the youngest of them produce—not yet—but I know and predict that once they are acknowledged and famous, I, too, will understand and admire them. It's the same with new, modern clothes, furniture, and everything else: it's only those who are frozen and sterile, long since set in their ways, who can resist. And the poets themselves—do they really dictate the laws of time? Lord knows, though I hardly think they seem capable of it. Instead it seems more likely they are instruments that time plays on, eolean harps in which the wind sings. And what am I? Not even that. I have no eyes of my own. I can't even look at the spread on the table over there with my own eyes, I see it with Strindberg's and think about a party at Stallmästaregården Inn he attended in his youth. And when the canoers in their striped jerseys glided by just now on the canal, it seemed to me for a moment that Maupassant's shadow glided ahead of them.

And now, as I sit at my open window writing this by the fluttering candlelight—for I dislike handling kerosene lamps, and my housekeeper is sleeping so soundly, after the funeral followed by coffee and cakes, that I don't have the heart to wake her—now, when the flame of the candle flickers in the draft and my shadow on the green wallpaper flutters

and trembles like the flame, trying to come to life—now I think of Hans Christian Andersen and his tale of the shadow, and it seems to me that I myself am the shadow who wished to become a man.

JULY 6, MORNING

I must write down the dream I had last night.

I was standing by the bed of Pastor Gregorius; he was ill. His upper body was bare, and I was listening to his heart. The bed was in his study. A cabinet organ stood in the corner, and someone was playing it. Not a chorale, barely a melody, just indistinct fugue-like tones, around and around. A door was open; this made me uneasy, but I couldn't rouse myself to close it.

"Is it serious?" asked the pastor.

"No," I answered, "not serious, but dangerous."

I meant that what I was thinking about was dangerous for me. And it seemed to me in the dream that the words were profound and well-chosen.

"But just to be sure," I added, "we'll send to the pharmacy for some communion capsules."

"Will you operate?" asked the pastor.

I nodded.

"There's no choice. Your heart is bad; it's too old. We'll have to remove it. The operation is completely safe, by the way; it can be performed with an ordinary paper knife."

This seemed like a quite elementary scientific truth, and I happened to be holding a paper knife.

"Let's just put a handkerchief over your face."

The pastor groaned aloud under the handkerchief. But instead of operating, I quickly pressed a button on the wall.

I removed the handkerchief. He was dead. I felt his hand; it was icy cold. I looked at my watch.

"He's been dead at least two hours," I said to myself.

Mrs. Gregorius got up from playing the organ and came over to me. Her expression seemed worried and sorrowful, and she handed me a bouquet of dark flowers. Only then did I see that she was smiling provocatively and that she was naked.

I reached out my arms toward her and wanted to pull her toward me, but she slipped away, and all of a sudden Klas Recke was standing in the open door.

"Dr. Glas," he said, "in my capacity as acting assistant chancellery secretary, I declare you under arrest!"

"It's too late now," I replied. "Can't you see?"

I pointed at the window. A red flame lit up both windows of the room; it was suddenly bright as day, and a woman's voice that seemed to come from another room whimpered and wailed, "The world is burning, the world is burning!"

And I woke up.

The morning sun was pouring into the room; I hadn't pulled the curtain the night before when I came home.

Strange. I haven't given a thought to the ugly pastor and his beautiful wife for the past few days. Haven't *wanted* to think about them.

And Gregorius has gone to Porla.

❦

I don't write down all my thoughts here.

I rarely write down a thought the first time it occurs to me. I wait to see if it returns.

JULY 7

It's raining, and I'm sitting thinking about unpleasant matters.

Why did I say no that time last fall when Hans Fahlén came to me asking to borrow fifty crowns? It's true I scarcely knew him, but a week later he slit his throat.

And why didn't I learn Greek when I was in school? It annoys me to distraction. I studied it for four years, after all. Could it be that I decided not to learn anything because my father forced me to take Greek instead of English? How can someone be so monumentally stupid? I learned everything else, even the nonsense called logic. But I studied Greek for four years, and I don't know any.

It can hardly be my teacher's fault, since he later became a government minister.

I feel like unearthing my school books again to see if I can learn something now—perhaps it's not yet too late.

❦

I wonder what it must feel like to have a crime on one's conscience.

❦

I wonder whether Kristin won't have dinner ready soon. . .

❦

The wind is shaking the trees in the churchyard and the rain gushes down the drainpipe. A poor wretch with a bottle in his pocket has taken refuge under the church roof in a corner near a buttress. He's leaning against the red church wall, and his gaze wanders back and forth among the scuttling clouds. Rain drips down from the two sparse trees by Bellman's grave. Across the churchyard, by the opposite corner, is a house of ill repute; a girl in her chemise pads over to a window and lets down the curtain.

But down among the graves the minister of the congregation treads cautiously through the dirt with umbrella and galoshes, and now he slips inside through the little door to the sacristy.

❦

Which prompts me to wonder why a minister always enters the church through a back door.

JULY 9

It's still raining. Days like this seem to bring out all the secret poison in my soul.

Just now, as I was on my way home from my sick calls, I exchanged a quick greeting on a street corner with a man I don't like meeting. He once insulted me—deeply, in a refined manner, and under such circumstances that I can see no way to return the insult.

I don't like this sort of thing. It affects my health.

❦

I'm sitting at the secretary pulling out one drawer after another and looking at old papers and odds and ends. I happen to run across a yellowed newspaper clipping.

Is There Life after Death? By H. Cremer, Doctor of Divinity. Price: 50 öre.

John Bunyan's Revelations. A Presentation of the Hereafter, the Glories of Heaven and Terrors of Hell. Price: 75 öre.

THE POWERS WITHIN. The Correct Path to Fame and Fortune, by S. Smiles. Price: 3:50 cr., eleg. bound in gilded leather, 4:25 cr.

❦

Why have I saved this old advertisement? I remember cutting it out when I was fourteen, the same year my father's fortune went up in smoke. I saved part of my modest allowance and eventually bought Mr.

Smiles' book, though not with the gilded binding. Once I'd read it I immediately sold it to a used bookstore; it was excessively stupid.

But I've saved the advertisement, which is actually more valuable.

And here's an old photograph: the country house we had for a few years. It was called Marie's Place, for my mother.

The photo has faded and turned yellow; it's as if there were a haze over the white house and the pine forest behind it. Well, that's what it looked like on gray, rainy days.

I never really enjoyed myself there. In the summers my father beat me so often. During periods when I wasn't busy with homework and school I was considered a difficult child.

Once I was beaten without cause. This is practically one of my brightest childhood memories. It hurt physically, of course, but it did my soul good. I went down to the lake afterward; it was blowing up a storm and the foam splashed in my face. I don't know if I've ever, later in life, experienced such a pleasurable flood of noble feelings. I forgave my father; he had such a short temper, and he'd been worried about business matters as well.

It was harder to forgive him all the times he beat me with cause; I don't know if I really have even yet. For instance the time when, despite the strictest orders, I'd bitten my nails again. How he beat me! And for hours afterward I wandered around the pine forest in the pouring rain, cursing and weeping.

My father never really seemed at peace. He was rarely happy, and since he wasn't happy himself he couldn't stand it when others were. But he liked parties; he was one of the cheerless spendthrifts. He started rich and died poor. I'm not sure his dealings were completely above-board; after all, he cut a wide swath. How often I wondered as a child about a joking comment I once heard him make to a business acquaintance: "Yes, my dear Gustav, it isn't easy to be honest when one earns as much money as we do. . ." But he was strict and implacable and had absolutely clear and firm notions about duty when it came to others. For oneself there are always special circumstances that justify an exception.

But the worst of it was that I always felt such a strong physical repulsion for him. How I suffered as a little boy when I had to go bathing with him and he wanted to teach me to swim! I slithered out of his hands like an eel; time after time I thought I was drowning, and I was almost as terrified of death as of contact with his naked body. He probably didn't suspect how this purely physical repulsion intensified my suffering when he beat me. And later on it was agony when travel or some temporary arrangement forced me to sleep in the same room with him.

But I did love him, mostly, perhaps, because he was so proud of my sharp mind, and also because he was always so elegantly dressed. For a while I hated him, too, because he wasn't kind to my mother. But when she became ill and died I noticed that he mourned her more than I myself could manage at age fifteen, and then I couldn't hate him any longer.

Now they're both gone. All of them are gone—all the people who were part of my childhood home. Well, not all, but the ones I cared about. My brother Ernst, who was so strong and so stupid and so kind, my supporter and protector in all the difficulties a schoolboy encounters—gone. He went to Australia, and no one knows if he's dead or alive. And my beautiful cousin Alice, who stood so pale and erect at the piano and sang with the eyes of a sleepwalker and with a voice that shimmered and burned, sang so I got the shivers when I sat curled up in a corner of the large glass veranda, sang as I'll never again hear anyone sing—what happened to her? Married to poverty, to a small-town teacher, already old, ill, and worn. I suddenly got all choked up when I met her last Christmas at her mother's; my emotion affected her, and we both wept . . . And her sister Anna with the hot cheeks, who was just as carried away by dancing as her sister was by music—she left her scoundrel of a husband for another scoundrel and was abandoned. Now people say she walks the streets in Chicago. And their father, my kind, handsome, witty Uncle Ulrik, whom they all said I resembled, though in an ugly way—he was sucked into the same crash that brought down my father and like him died in genteel poverty. . . What plague was it that tore them all away in just a few years, to the grave or to a shadow life in misery, everyone, everyone, who once filled our rooms in the days of high living?

God knows what it was. But they're gone, all of them.

And Marie's Place is now called Sophie's Grove.

JULY 10

At the secretary.

On an impulse, I pressed the spring that opens the tiny secret compartment. I already know what's there: just a small round box with some pills. I don't want them in my medicine cabinet; confusion might arise, and that would not be good. I made them myself a few years ago; they contain potassium cyanide. I wasn't feeling suicidal at the time, but I felt that a wise man is always prepared.

A little potassium cyanide in a glass of wine or the like causes immediate death; the glass falls to the floor, and it's clear to any observer that this is a suicide. That isn't always desirable. However, a glass of water

after one of my pills causes a delay of a minute or so before the pill dissolves and takes effect. There's plenty of time to put the glass back on the tray and settle into a comfortable armchair by the fire, light a cigar, and open the *Evening News*. Suddenly you collapse. The doctor diagnoses a stroke or heart attack. If there's an autopsy, naturally the poison is discovered, but if the circumstances aren't suspicious or of any particular medical interest, there is no autopsy. And there's nothing very remarkable about a stroke while smoking a cigar and reading the *Evening News*.

There is still something comforting about knowing that these small, coated capsules that look like buckshot are lying there waiting for the day they might be needed. In them resides a power, evil and despicable in itself, since time immemorial the prime enemy of human beings and all living creatures, that one releases only when it is the sole possible deliverance, passionately desired, from a worse evil.

What did I really have in mind when I made myself these black pills? I've never been able to imagine suicide because of unrequited love. More likely because of poverty. Poverty is dreadful. Of all kinds of so-called external misfortune no doubt this has the deepest inner effect. But it doesn't seem to be threatening me; I consider myself relatively well off, and statistically I'm among the rich. What I probably was thinking of was illness. Long, incurable, hideous illness. I've seen so much. . . Cancer, disfigurement, blindness, paralysis. . . How many unfortunates haven't I seen to whom I would have given one of these pills without the slightest hesitation, if only I, like other good people, didn't find self-interest and fear of the police more compelling that compassion. And instead, how many unfit, hopelessly damaged human lives haven't I helped preserve in the practice of my profession, without even shying away from accepting payment.

But such is the custom. It's always wisest to follow custom, and in matters that don't affect us deeply and personally, perhaps it's also the ethical choice. And why should I martyr myself for the sake of a belief that sooner or later will be held by all civilized people, but which today is still a crime?

The day shall and must come when the right to die is recognized as a far more important and inalienable human right than the right to vote. And when that time comes, everyone who is incurably ill—and all "criminals" as well—will have the right to a doctor's assistance if they choose deliverance.

There is something beautiful and great about the cup of poison the ancient Athenians let the doctor hand Socrates once they'd established to their own satisfaction that his life was a danger to the state. Today,

assuming he were judged the same way, he'd have been dragged to a shabby executioner's block and slaughtered with an ax.

❦

Good night, you evil power. Sleep well in your small round box. Sleep until I need you; if it's up to me I won't awaken you unnecessarily. It's raining today, but tomorrow perhaps the sun will shine. And only if the day comes when sunshine itself seems contaminated and diseased will I awaken you so that I myself may sleep.

JULY 11

At the secretary on a gray day.

In one of the smaller drawers I just found a scrap of paper on which there were a few words in my own handwriting of a few years ago—for our handwriting changes continually, a tiny bit each year, perhaps imperceptibly to ourselves, but just as surely and inevitably as our face, posture, movements, and soul.

It read, "Nothing diminishes and degrades a human being more than the knowledge of being unloved."

When did I write that? Is it my own reflection, or is it a quotation I've copied?

Don't remember.

❦

I understand people who are ambitious. All I have to do is sit in a corner at the Opera and listen to the Coronation March from Meyerbeer's *Le Profète* to feel a burning, if temporary desire to rule over others and be crowned in an ancient cathedral.

But it has to be while I'm alive; the rest can be silence, for all I care. I've never understood those who strive for immortal glory. Humanity's memory is faulty and unjust, and our oldest and greatest benefactors have been forgotten. Who invented the cart? Pascal invented the wheelbarrow and Fulton the locomotive, but who invented the cart? Who invented the wheel? No one knows. Instead history has preserved the name of King Xerxes' coachman: Patiramfes, son of Otanes. He drove the great king's chariot. And the scoundrel who set fire to the Temple of Diana in Ephesus so that people would never forget his name got his wish and is now mentioned in Brockhaus.

❦

People want to be loved; barring that, admired; barring that, feared; barring that, detested and despised. People want to elicit some sort of reaction. A vacuum makes the soul tremble—it wants contact, no matter what the price.

JULY 13

I have gray days and difficult moments. I'm unhappy. Still, there's no one I'd like to change lives with; my heart shrivels up at the thought that I could be this person or that among my acquaintances. No, I don't want to be anyone else.

In my early youth I suffered a great deal because I wasn't handsome, and in my burning desire to be handsome I thought I was a monster of ugliness. Now I know I look more or less like everyone else. That doesn't make me happy, either.

I don't like myself very much, neither the shell nor the interior. But I wouldn't want to be anyone else.

JULY 14

Blessed sun that manages to find its way down to us, all the way down to the graves under the trees.

Well, that was a while ago; now it's dark. I've returned from my after-dinner walk. The city was bathed in a pink light, and above the southern heights a rosy haze was suspended.

I sat for a while by myself at a table along the sidewalk outside the Grand Hotel and drank a glass of lemonade; just then Miss Mertens came by. I stood up and greeted her, and to my surprise she stopped, gave me her hand and said a few words before continuing, something about her mother's illness and the lovely evening. While she was speaking she blushed slightly, as if she felt her behavior was unusual and might be misconstrued.

I, at least, didn't misconstrue it. I've noticed many times how gentle and kind and untouched by formality her manner is toward almost everyone, and this has always appealed to me.

But still—how she was beaming! Is she in love?

Her family was among the many who suffered from my father's fall. In recent years the old colonel's wife has been sickly and often turns to me. I've never wanted to accept any payment, and they understand why.

She rides, too; I've seen her several times lately on my morning excursions, most recently yesterday. With a cheerful "Good morning" she passed me at a gallop; then, at a far-off curve in the road, I saw her slow down. She let the horse fall into a trot and rode for quite some distance with slack reins, as if she were dreaming. . . But I kept a steady pace, and so it came about that we rode past each other a couple of times within a short while.

❦

She's not really beautiful, but something about her is intimately connected to the image that for many years, until very recently, was my dream of woman. Matters like this can't be explained. Once—it must be about two or three years ago—I went to considerable lengths to get myself invited to a home where I knew she often went, solely to meet her. And indeed, she came, but on that occasion she barely noticed me, and we didn't say much to each other.

And now: I recognize her—she's the same as she was then. It's myself I no longer recognize.

JULY 17

No, sometimes life reveals an aspect that is truly abominable.

I just came home from a nocturnal sick call. The telephone awakened me; I was given a name and a nearby address and an indication of the problem: a child suddenly taken ill, presumably the croup, the home of merchant So-and-So. I hurried through the streets past throngs of late-night revelers and whores who tugged at my coat. The family lived four flights up in a building on a side street. The name I'd heard over the phone and now saw on the door seemed familiar, though I wasn't sure in what context. I was met at the door by the wife in her night robe and chemise—it was the woman from Djurgårdsbrunn Inn, the one I'd recognized from that incident many years before. So, it must be the handsome little boy, I thought. Through a narrow dining room and an idiotic parlor, currently lit by a greasy kitchen lamp in the corner of a whatnot, I was led into a bedroom, clearly shared by the entire family. I didn't see the husband, however; he wasn't home. "It's our oldest boy who's ill," explained the wife. She took me to a small bed. In it lay, not the handsome little boy, but another child, a monster. Enormous ape-like jaws, compressed cranium, tiny, nasty, dull eyes. An idiot, it was apparent at a glance.

So—this was the firstborn, then. This was what she was carrying in her womb that time. This was the germ of life she begged me on her

knees to free her from, and I responded with duty. Life, I don't understand you!

And now death finally wants to take pity on him, and on them, and end the life that should never have begun. But death won't get his way. There is nothing they want more than to be rid of the boy—any other reaction is inconceivable—but in their deep-seated cowardice they nevertheless send for me, the physician, to ward off kind, compassionate death and keep the monster alive. And in my cowardice, just as deep-seated as theirs, I do my "duty"—do it now as I did then.

All these thoughts didn't occur to me right away as I was standing there, still groggy, in a strange room at a sickbed. I merely performed my professional responsibilities without thinking—stayed as long as I was needed, did what needed to be done, and left. In the entry I meet the husband and father, a bit tipsy, just as he came home.

And the ape boy will live, perhaps for many more years.

The hideous, animal-like face with its tiny, nasty, dull eyes has pursued me back to my room, and as I sit here I can read the entire story in them.

He has the eyes with which the whole world looked at his mother while she was pregnant with him. And the world convinced her to see herself and what she'd done with the same eyes.

Here is the fruit, and a lovely one it is.

The brutish father who beat her, the mother with her thoughts full of what relatives and acquaintances would say, the servants who stole glances at her and snickered, secretly pleased at this incontestable proof that their "betters" weren't better after all, aunts and uncles whose faces stiffened in righteous moral indignation, the minister who gave a terse, dry sermon at the hasty wedding, perhaps rightfully embarrassed at exhorting the couple to set about doing what they quite obviously already had done—they all made their contribution, they're all partly responsible for what happened. Not even a doctor was missing, and I was the doctor.

I could have helped her that time in her deepest misery and despair when, in this very room, she begged me on her knees. Instead I responded with duty, in which I didn't believe.

But of course I had no way of knowing or imagining. . .

Still, her case was one of those I was sure about. Even though I didn't believe in duty, didn't believe it was the overriding law, above all others, that it claimed to be, it was still completely clear to me that the correct and wise course in this case was to do what others called my duty. And I did it without hesitation.

Life, I don't understand you.

❦

"If a child is born misshapen, it is drowned." (Seneca.)

❦

Every idiot at the Eugenia Home costs more each year than the annual income of a healthy young manual laborer.

JULY 24

The tropical heat is back. All afternoon it hovers over the city like a heavy gilded cloud in the still air, and only twilight brings refreshment and relief.

Nearly every evening I sit for a while at the sidewalk tables outside the Grand Hotel, drinking lemonade through a straw. I'm fond of the moment when the street lamps begin to shimmer along the bend by the edge of the Stream; for me it's the best hour of the day. Mostly I sit by myself, but yesterday I was there with Birck and Markel.

"The Lord be praised," said Markel. "They've finally started lighting the street lamps again. I've barely been able to see my own hand all this time, groping around in these dark, unlit summer nights. Even though I know the policy was only to save money—an entirely admirable motive, in other words—I still have a nasty suspicion it's being arranged to suit the tourists. 'Land of the Midnight Sun.' Spare me."

"Yes," said Birck, "if only they were content to leave the lamps off for a few nights around Midsummer, when it really is nearly light. In the country the summer twilight has a special charm, but it doesn't belong here. Artificial light is part of the city. I've never felt more proud and happy to live in a city than I did as a child when I came in from the country on a fall evening and saw the lights shining along the quays. Now, I thought, now those poor souls out in the country have to stay in their cottages or stumble around in darkness and filth.

"But it's true," he added, "in the country you can see the stars in a completely different way. Here they lose out in the competition with the gas lights, and that's a pity."

"The stars," said Markel, "can no longer manage to light our way in the night. The degree to which they've lost all practical importance is lamentable. Once they ruled our lives, and if you look in an ordinary Farmer's Almanac you might think they still do. It would be difficult to find a more striking example of the persistence of tradition than this—that the most widely-circulated popular publication in existence is full of detailed information about matters no human being pays attention to any

longer. All these astronomical signs that two hundred years ago any poor farmer more or less understood and studied tirelessly and with zeal, since he believed his well-being depended on them—today they're unknown and incomprehensible to most educated people. If the Academy of Science had a sense of humor it could amuse itself by randomly mixing up Cancer, Leo, and Virgo in the almanac—the public wouldn't notice a thing. The constellations have been degraded to a purely decorative role."

He took a swallow of his toddy and continued:

"No, the stars can't pride themselves on the same popularity they once had. As long as people believed their fate depended on them they were feared, but also loved and worshipped. And as children we all liked them because we believed they were little candles God lit in the evenings for our own personal pleasure, and we thought they were twinkling for us. Now that we know a little more about them they're merely a constant, painful, impertinent reminder of our own insignificance. Here you are, for instance, walking down a city street thinking magnificent, wonderful, even epoch-making thoughts, thoughts you're certain no other human being in the world could or would dare to have. Let's leave aside the fact that deep down in your subconscious, a voice based on many years of experience whispers that tomorrow morning, without the slightest doubt, you'll have forgotten these thoughts or no longer see their magnificent and epoch-making qualities—that doesn't matter, it doesn't diminish the exhilaration and euphoria while it lasts. But all you have to do is look up and catch sight of a tiny star shining there all alone between a couple of metal chimneys, and you realize you might as well forget these thoughts right away. Or you look down into the gutter and wonder if it's really such a good idea to drink yourself to death or whether you might be able to find some better way of passing the time. Then you suddenly stop—as I did the other night—and stare at a tiny, shining point in the gutter. After a moment's consideration you realize it's the reflection of a star—as a matter of fact it was Deneb in Cygnus, the Swan. And all of a sudden it's clear to you just how absurdly trivial everything is."

"Well," I permitted myself to interject, "I suppose we might see that as regarding drunkenness from the perspective of eternity. But when we're sober, it's hardly a very natural perspective and certainly not suited for daily use. If Deneb were to come up with the idea of regarding itself *sub specie aeternis*, it might find itself too insignificant to make it worth the trouble to keep on shining. But instead it has stayed faithfully at its post for quite some time, shining very nicely, reflected in the oceans of the unknown planets whose sun it is as well as occasionally in a gutter on this small, dark earth. Follow this example, my dear friend! Well, I mean in general and more or less, not just with regard to the gutter."

"Markel," Birck put in, "greatly exaggerates the reach of his thoughts if he thinks he can regard even the smallest and weakest of his toddies from the perspective of eternity. It's not within his power, and he wouldn't survive the attempt. I seem to remember having read somewhere that this perspective is the exclusive prerogative of Our Lord. And perhaps that's why he has ceased to exist—the formula was too strong even for him."

Markel was silent. He looked somber and dejected. At least that's how he seemed to me, judging by what I could see of his face in the shadow under the red striped awning, and when he struck a match to relight his cigar before it went out I realized he had grown old. He'll die between forty and fifty, I thought to myself. And he must already be well past forty.

Suddenly Birck, who sat facing the sidewalk and could see the city beyond, said, "There's Mrs. Gregorius, who's married to that hideous minister. God knows what could ever have made her attach herself to him. When I see the two of them together I have to turn away; the simplest human decency requires it."

"Is the pastor with her?" I asked.

"No, she's alone."

That's right, the pastor was still in Porla.

"I think she looks like a blonde Delilah," Birck said.

Markel: "Let's hope she understands her purpose in life correctly and places enormous horns on the servant of the Lord."

Birck: "I doubt it. She's religious, of course—otherwise that marriage would be unfathomable."

Markel: "According to my unsophisticated understanding, it would, quite the contrary, be unfathomable if she had the slightest hint of religious sentiment left after a suitable period of marriage to Pastor Gregorius—and for that matter she couldn't possibly be more religious than Madame de Maintenon. The true faith is of immeasurable help in all circumstances of life and has never slowed down the traffic."

Our conversation died down when she walked by, headed toward the museum and Ship's Isle. She was wearing a simple black dress. She walked neither slowly nor fast, and she looked neither to the left nor the right.

Yes, her walk. . . I had to close my eyes as she passed. She was walking like someone going to meet her fate. Her head was slightly lowered, so part of her white neck showed beneath her fair hair. Was she smiling? I don't know. But I suddenly remembered my dream from the

other night. The kind of smile she had in that horrible dream I've never seen in reality, and I don't ever want to see it.

When I looked up again I saw Klas Recke walking by in the same direction. He nodded in passing toward Birck and Markel, perhaps toward me, too—it was somewhat vague. Markel gestured to him to sit down with us, but he pretended not to notice and walked on. He was following in her footsteps. And I thought I could see a strong hand guiding both of them by the same invisible thread, pulling them in the same direction. And I asked myself: where are the two of them headed? —Oh, what difference is it to me? The way she is headed she would have gone even without my help. I've merely removed some of the more repellent obstacles in her path. But her way is difficult anyway, it must be. The world isn't kind to those who love. And into the darkness they'll go in the end, they and the rest of us.

"Recke's been hard to find recently," said Markel. "I'm sure the rascal has something up his sleeve. I've heard he's after a young woman with money. Well, well, that's the way it had to end—he has the debts of a crown prince. He's at the mercy of moneylenders."

"How do you know?" I asked, perhaps a little too testily.

"I don't know at all," he answered impertinently. "But that's what I think. Base natures judge a man by his business dealings. I take the opposite tack and judge the business dealings by the man. It's more logical, and I know Recke."

"That's enough whisky, now, Markel," said Birck.

Markel poured himself another whisky as well as one for Birck, who sat staring out into space and didn't react. My toddy was virtually untouched, and Markel looked at it with an expression of concern and alarm.

Birck suddenly turned to me:

"Tell me something," he said, "are you looking for happiness?"

"I suppose so," I answered. "The only definition of happiness I know is that it's the sum of what each individual believes is worth searching for. So I suppose it's self-evident that we want to find happiness."

Birck: "Of course. In that sense it's self-evident. And your answer reminds me for the hundredth time that all philosophy derives from and is sustained by verbal sophistry. Instead of some vulgar notion of happiness, one person cites religion, the other his 'life's work,' and both of them deny that they are ever, in any way, looking for happiness. It's an enviable talent to be able to delude yourself with words that way. We all have the desire to see ourselves and our aspirations in an idealistic light. And perhaps in the end the deepest happiness is the illusion that we're not looking for happiness."

Markel: "People don't seek happiness, but pleasure. 'It's possible,' said the Cyranaics, 'that people may exist who don't seek pleasure, but the reason is that their understanding is twisted and their judgment beyond repair.

"When philosophers claim," he went on, "that human beings aspire to happiness, or 'salvation,' or to fulfill their 'life's work,' they're only thinking of themselves, or in any case of adults with a certain amount of education. In one of his short stories, Per Hallström tells how, as a little boy, each night in his prayers he would recite, 'Nasty mess comes, nasty mess goes.' At that tender age he clearly didn't understand the meaning of the word 'happiness,' so without thinking he substituted a straightforward, familiar expression for one that was unknown and confusing. But the cells in our body know just as little about 'happiness' or 'salvation' or 'life's work' as a child does. And our cells are what determine our aspirations. All organic life on earth flees pain and seeks pleasure. Philosophers are thinking only of their own conscious effort, their willed effort—in other words, an effort that is illusory. But the unconscious part of our being is thousands of times greater and stronger than the conscious part, and that's what makes the difference."

Birck: "Everything you say merely persuades me I was right just now and that language must be remade from the core for us to be able to discuss philosophy and get anywhere."

Markel: "Good heavens—keep your happiness, I'll take pleasure. Skål! But even if I agree with you about use of language, that doesn't make it true that everyone aspires to happiness. There are people who have no talent for happiness and who know this with painful, implacable clarity. Such people don't seek happiness, merely to bring some sort of form and style to their unhappiness."

And he added suddenly, unexpectedly, "Glas is one of them."

His last comment was so startling that I was speechless. Until the moment I heard him say my name I thought he was talking about himself. I still do think that, and that it was to disguise this that he pounced on me. There was an oppressive silence. I looked at the lights reflected in the Stream. In the cloud banks above Rosenbad the moon broke through, and its pale silver light illuminated the colonnade of the Bonde family's ancient palace. Out above Lake Mälaren a purple cloud sailed slowly by itself, separated from the others.

JULY 25

Helga Gregorius: I see her continually before me, see her as she was in the dream: naked, handing me a bouquet of dark flowers. Perhaps red, but very dark. Well, red always seems dark in the twilight.

Never do I go to bed at night without wishing she would come to me in my dreams.

But my imagination has gradually erased the provocative smile, and I don't see it any longer.

❦

I wish the pastor were back. Then she'd be sure to return here. I want to see her and hear her voice. I want to have her with me.

JULY 26

The pastor: his face pursues me, too, pursues me with just the expression it had during our last meeting when I brought the conversation around to sexual matters. How can I describe this expression? It was the expression of someone who smells something rotten and secretly finds the smell pleasing.

AUGUST 2

The moon is out. All my windows are open. In my study the lamp is burning; I've put it on the leaf of the secretary out of reach of the night wind that gently fills the curtain like a sail. I pace back and forth in the room, stopping now and then at the secretary to set down a line. I stood for a long time at one of the windows in the parlor, looking out and listening for all the strange sounds of the night. But tonight it's quiet down there under the dark trees. Only a solitary woman is sitting on a bench, and she's been there a long time. And the moon shines.

❦

When I came home at noon there was a book on my desk, and when I opened it a visiting card fell out: Eva Mertens.

I remember she mentioned this book the other day and I said, without really thinking, that I'd like to read it. I said this out of politeness, so I wouldn't be guilty of dismissing something that interested her. Since then I haven't given it a thought.

But clearly she has.

Am I being terribly foolish if I draw the conclusion that she's a bit taken by me? I can tell she's in love. But if she loves someone else, then why does she have so much interest left for me?

Her eyes are clear and honest and she has rich brown hair. Her nose is slightly crooked. Her mouth—her mouth I can't recall. Well, yes, it's red and somewhat large, but I can't quite conjure it up. And one really knows only a mouth one has kissed, or very much wanted to kiss. — I know such a mouth.

I sit looking at the small, simple, correct visiting card with the name printed in pale letters. But I see more than the name. There's a certain kind of writing that becomes visible only when exposed to strong heat. I don't know if I have this heat, but I can read the invisible writing anyway: "Kiss me, be my husband, give me children, let me love. I long to be able to love."

"Here there are many virgins, as yet untouched by any man, who do not thrive on sleeping alone. Therefore shall they have good men for husbands."

Thus, more or less, spoke Zarathustra, the real Zarathustra, the old one, not the one with the whip.

Am I a "good man"? Would I be able to become her good husband?

I wonder what sort of image she has of me. She doesn't know me. In her untroubled heart, which contains merely a few kind, tender thoughts about her nearest and dearest, and perhaps a little nonsense as well, an image has been created that has some of my external characteristics, but which isn't me, and that image is pleasing to her, apparently—God knows why, perhaps primarily because I'm unmarried. But if she knew me—if, for instance, by chance she should happen to read what I write on these pieces of paper in the evening—then I think her instinct would caution her to shy away from me. I think the chasm between our souls is too wide. Or who knows: when it comes to marriage, perhaps it's actually an advantage if the chasm is wide—if it were smaller, I might be tempted to try to bridge it, and that could never end well. The woman I could reveal myself to doesn't exist. But still: to live by her side and never give her access to my true self, my real concerns—could I treat a woman that way? Let her embrace a stranger believing it's me—could I do that?

Yes, I suppose I could. That's probably what always happens. We know so little about each other. We embrace a shadow and love a dream. For that matter, what do I know about her?

But I'm alone, the moon is shining, and I long for a woman. I almost feel like going over to the window and inviting her up, the

woman sitting alone on the bench down there, waiting for someone who doesn't come. I have port wine and schnapps and beer and good food and a comfortable bed. It would be heaven for her.

❦

I sit here thinking about Markel's words the other night about me and happiness. I feel a strong urge to get married and be happy as can be, just to provoke him.

AUGUST 3

Yes, the moon. It's back again. I remember so many moons. The earliest one was behind the windowpane on winter evenings when I was a little boy. It was always over a white roof. Once my mother read Viktor Rydberg's poem, "The Christmas Elf," aloud to us children, and I recognized it right away. But it didn't yet have any of the qualities it later acquired—it was neither mild and sentimental nor cold and horrible. It was just huge and bright. It belonged with the window, and the window belonged with the room. It lived with us.

Later, when people noticed I was musical and let me take piano lessons and I could pick out a little Chopin, then the moon took on new meaning for me. I remember one night when I was about twelve I lay awake and couldn't sleep because Chopin's twelfth nocturne kept running through my head, and because the moon was shining. This was in the country; we'd just moved out there, and as yet there was no shade in my bedroom. The moonlight flowed like a huge white river into the room and across the bed and the headboard. I sat upright in bed and sang. I had to sing this wonderful melody without words, I couldn't escape it. It became part of the moonlight and in both was a promise of something extraordinary that one day would come my way, I don't know what, a restless happiness or a misfortune that was worth more than all the happiness in the world, something burning and blissful and enormous that awaited me. And I sang until my father appeared in the door and bellowed at me to sleep.

That was Chopin's moon. And it was the same moon that later shimmered and shone above the water on August evenings when Alice sang. I loved her.

I remember my Uppsala moon, too. Never have I seen a moon with such a cold, distant face. Uppsala has a completely different climate than Stockholm; it's in the interior, with drier, clearer air. One winter night I was walking with an older friend along the white, snow-covered streets with their gray buildings and black shadows. We were discussing

philosophy. At seventeen, I scarcely believed in God, but I refused to accept Darwinism: to me it made everything seem meaningless, stupid, insignificant. We went under a black arch and up a few steps and were standing next to the walls of the cathedral. Because of the scaffolding it looked like the skeleton of a giant prehistoric animal. My friend was explaining the way we were related to our fellow creatures, the animals; he bombarded me with proofs and shouted in a shrill and uncultured voice that echoed between the walls, and he had a provincial accent. I didn't say much in response, but I thought to myself: you're wrong, but I haven't yet read and thought enough to be able to disprove you. But wait—wait just a year, and I'll be walking with you at this very place, in the moonlight, just as now, and I'll show you how wrong, how stupid you were. For what you're saying cannot, must not under any circumstances be true; if it is, then I don't want to be part of it any longer—I want nothing to do with such a world. But my friend went on talking, waving a little German pamphlet that had provided him with his arguments. Suddenly he stopped right there in the moonlight, opened the book to some illustrations in the text, and handed it to me. The moon was shining so brightly that I could see what they represented and read the captions as well. There were pictures of three quite similar craniums: the skull of an orangutan, an Australian aborigine, and Immanuel Kant. In disgust I flung away the book. My friend was infuriated and threw himself on top of me. We scuffled and fought in the moonlight, but he was stronger and held me to the ground and like a schoolboy "washed" my face with snow.

A year passed, and several more, but I never felt ready to disprove him; I found I had to let the matter drop. And although I didn't understand my true purpose in the world, I went on living in it anyway.

And I've seen many moons since then. A mild, sentimental moon between the birches at the side of a lake. . . The moon scuttling through broken autumn clouds. . . The moon of love that shone on Gretchen's garden window and Juliet's balcony. . . A girl, no longer young, who wanted to get married once told me that she wept when she saw the moon shine over a small cottage in the woods. . . The moon is lewd and lascivious, says a poet. Another tries to attribute an ethical-religious significance to the moonbeams and compares them to threads spun by our dearly departed into a net to capture a lost soul. . . To young people, the moon represents the promise of everything wonderful that lies ahead, for their elders it's a sign of promises broken, a reminder of everything that ruptured and fell apart.

And what is moonlight?

Secondhand sunshine. Feeble, counterfeit.

❦

The moon that now comes out from behind the steeple has an unhappy face. It seems to me that the features are distorted, dissolved, corroded by a nameless suffering. Poor man, why do you sit there? Are you condemned as a counterfeiter—have you counterfeited the sunshine?

In truth, that's no small crime. If only one could be certain of never committing it.

AUGUST 7

Light!

. . . I sat up in bed and lit the lamp on the night table. I was drenched in sweat, my hair stuck to my forehead. . . What had I dreamt?

Once again the same thing. That I killed the pastor. That he had to die because he already stank like a corpse, and that it was my duty as a doctor to do it. . . I found it difficult and unpleasant; it was something that had never before occurred in my practice, so I wanted to consult a colleague, didn't want to bear sole responsibility in such a serious matter. . . But Mrs. Gregorius was standing naked far away in a corner in the semi-darkness, trying to cover herself with a small black veil. And when she heard me say "colleague" such a terrified and desperate expression came into her eyes that I realized it had to happen right away, that otherwise she was lost in some way I couldn't figure out, and that I had to do it alone so no one else would ever know. So I did it, with my head turned away. How did it happen? I don't know. All I know is that I held my nose and turned away, saying to myself, "There now, now it's over. Now he doesn't smell any longer." And I wanted to explain to Mrs. Gregorius that this was a very strange and unusual case: most people start to smell only after they're dead, and then you bury them, but if someone smells while still alive, then he has to be killed—given the present state of our scientific knowledge, there's no alternative. But Mrs. Gregorius was gone; there was only a great emptiness around me in which everything seemed to pull back and flee from me. . . The darkness gradually let up and turned into an ashen moonlight. . . And I was sitting up in bed completely awake, listening to my own voice.

I got up, put on some clothes, lit lamps in all the rooms. I paced back and forth, regular as clockwork, for I don't know how long. Finally I stopped in front of the mirror in the parlor and stared at my pale, contorted face as if it were a stranger's. But fearing I'd give in to the impulse to break the old mirror that has seen my childhood and nearly

my entire life and much of what happened before I was born, I went over and stood by an open window. The moon was no longer out; it was raining, and the rain blew straight into my face. It felt good.

"Dreams flow like streams. . ." I remember the old saying. And it's true, most of what we dream is actually not worth a second thought—loose fragments of our experiences, often the most indifferent and silly ones, that our conscious minds haven't bothered to preserve but which still lead a shadow life of their own off in some junk room of the brain. But there are other dreams, too. I remember how once, as a boy, I sat for an entire afternoon puzzling over a geometry problem and had to go to bed without solving it. While I was asleep my brain kept working on its own and gave me the answer in a dream. And it was correct. There are also dreams that are bubbles from the deep. And when I think it over, many times a dream has taught me something about myself. Many times a dream has revealed wishes I didn't want to acknowledge, desires I wanted to deny in the daylight. Those wishes and desires I've later weighed and tested in full sun. But they could seldom stand the light, and usually I forced them back into the dim recesses where they belonged. In my nocturnal dreams they might return, but I recognized them and smiled scornfully at them even in the dream until they gave up all claim of emerging and living in the light of reality.

But this is something different. And I want to know what it is; I want to weigh and test it. It's one of my primary instincts not to tolerate something half-conscious and half-clear about myself if it's in my power to take it out, hold it up in the light, and see what it is.

All right, then, let's consider:

A woman came to me in her need, and I promised to help her. Help her, well—what that meant or might come to mean was something neither of us had thought through then. What she asked of me was so simple and straightforward. It cost me neither effort nor a bad conscience, it was more a pleasure: I could do this beautiful young woman a favor of a delicate nature and at the same time play a nasty trick on the despicable pastor, and in my deep-seated, gray ennui this episode seemed like a bright spark from a world that was closed to me. . . And for her it meant happiness and life—as she saw it, and as she made me see it. So I promised to help her and did so, did what then needed to be done.

But since then the whole matter has taken on another aspect, and this time I must manage to get to the bottom of the affair before continuing.

I promised to help her, but I don't like doing things by half measures. And now I realize, and have for a long time, that she's not really helped unless she's set free.

In a few days the pastor will be back—then it will be the same story all over again. I know him now. But that's not all; that she would eventually have to get over on her own, no matter how difficult it might be and though it might tear her to pieces and ruin her life. But something tells me with great certainty, as if it had already happened, that soon she will carry a child under her heart. The way she loves now she's not likely to be spared, and perhaps doesn't even want to be. And then, if this happens—*when* this happens—what then? Then the pastor must go. Completely.

True, if this happens, it's possible she might come to me and ask me to "help" her in the same way so many others have begged for in vain, and if she does—well, then I suppose I'll do as she asks, for I don't know how I could oppose her wishes in anything. But then I'd be weary of the whole business and my part in the story would be over.

But I sense, I feel certain this isn't what will happen. She isn't like the others, she'll never ask me for *that* kind of help.

So the pastor must go.

No matter how I ponder I can see no other solution. Bring him to his senses? Make him see that he no longer has any right to sully her life, that he must set her free? Nonsense. She's his wife; he's her husband. Everything—the world, God, his own conscience—supports him against her. To him, of course, love is what it was for Luther, a natural urge that God has given him permission to satisfy, once and for all, with this particular woman. That she responds to his desire coldly, with aversion, could never for an instant make him doubt his "right." For that matter he may imagine that at those moments she secretly feels just as he does, but he finds it entirely fitting that a Christian woman, a minister's wife, doesn't admit this, even to herself. Even on his own behalf he doesn't really like calling this a pleasure, he'd rather refer to it as "duty" and "God's will". . . No, away with such a person, away with him, away!

How was it, now? I longed for an action, I begged for one. Is this the action, then, my action? Something that must be done, that I alone see must be done and that no one can or dares do but me?

One might say it seems a bit strange. But that's no argument, either for or against. The greatness or beauty in an action is the reflection of its effect on the public, but since naturally it's my humble intention to keep the general public ignorant of the matter, that point of view doesn't apply. It's entirely up to me. I want to examine my deed up close; I want to see what it looks like from within.

First and foremost: do I seriously will the pastor's death?

"Will"—now what does that mean? Human will isn't a unified whole; it's a synthesis of a hundred conflicting impulses. But we need

fictions, and no fiction is more necessary to us than the notion of will. So: do you will this?

I do, and I don't.

I hear conflicting voices. I must interrogate them; I must find out why one says I do and the other I don't.

You first, the one who says I do. Why? Answer!

"I want to act. Life is action. When I see something that distresses me I want to intervene. I don't intervene every time I see a fly in a spider web, since the world of flies and spiders isn't my own world, and I know one can't respond to everything, and I don't like flies. But if I see a lovely little insect with shimmering golden wings caught in the web, then I tear the web apart and if need be kill the spider, for I don't believe it's wrong to kill spiders. I'm walking in the woods and I hear cries for help; I run in the direction of the cries and find a man about to rape a woman. Naturally I do what I can to rescue her, and if necessary I kill the man. The law doesn't grant me this right—it only gives me the right to kill in self-defense, by which the law means only if my own life is at stake. The law doesn't allow me to kill someone to save my father or my son or my best friend, or to protect my beloved from assault or rape. The law is absurd, in other words, and no decent person chooses a course of action because of it."

"But unwritten law? Morality?"

"My dear friend, morality, as you know just as well as I, is in a state of flux. It's undergone significant change even in the brief blink of an eye the two of us have been around. Morality is like a circle of chalk drawn to hypnotize a hen—it's binding if you believe in it. Morality is what other people consider right. But here it's a question of what I think! True, in many, perhaps most cases, run-of-the-mill ones, my belief about what is right corresponds more or less with what others believe, with 'morality,' and in a number of other cases I don't find the discrepancy between my beliefs and morality worth the risk a divergence would entail, and act accordingly. Thus, to me morality is consciously what in practice it is for everyone, though not everyone acknowledges this: not a fixed, binding law above all else, but a *modus vivendi* that can be applied in daily life in the continual warfare between the self and the world. I recognize and acknowledge that our generally accepted moral standards as well as our secular laws express a perception of right and wrong that is the product of an inherited, slowly augmented and evolving awareness, passed on from generation to generation since time immemorial, of the conditions necessary for human beings to coexist with each other. I know that by and large these laws must be respected by everyone if life on earth is to be lived at all by creatures like us, crea-

tures who cannot exist without an organized society and everything that entails: libraries, museums, police, water pipes, street lights, garbage collection, changings of the guard, sermons, ballet, and so forth. But I also know that anyone who is anyone has refused to interpret these laws pedantically. Morality is part of the furniture, not a household god. It should be used, it shouldn't rule, and it should be used with a grain of salt. It's wise to follow local custom; it's foolish to do so with conviction. On my way through the world, I see the customs of human beings and borrow what I need. And 'morality' comes from 'mores,' custom. It rests entirely on custom and habit; it has no other source. And that I, by killing the pastor, commit an act that is contrary to custom is nothing you need to remind me of. Morality—surely you jest!"

"I admit I posed the question mostly pro forma. I think we understand each other when it comes to morality. But I won't let you off the hook so easily. When we began, the essential question wasn't how you would dare commit this deed even though it repudiated custom and morality, but why you wanted to. You responded with the analogy of a rapist attacking a woman in the woods. What a comparison! On the one hand a brutal criminal, on the other a harmless, respected old pastor!"

"Yes, the comparison does limp a bit. It concerns a man and a woman who are strangers to me and whose exact relationship is unclear. It's not certain the unknown woman is worth killing a man for, nor is it certain that the unknown man who meets a young woman in the woods and suddenly is possessed and overpowered by Pan should die for it. Furthermore, it's not certain the danger is so imminent that intervention is necessary! The girl cries out because she's afraid and in pain, but it's not clear that the injury should be measured by the scream. It may be that the two of them will come to an agreement before they go their separate ways. In the countryside many a marriage began as rape, and kidnapping a woman was once the usual form of engagement and wedding. If, in the example I chose, I kill the man to free the woman—an action that I think most moral, thinking people, lawyers excepted, would approve, and which would win me a splendid acquittal from an American or French jury, not to mention public applause —I'm acting impulsively, without reflection, and possibly very stupidly. But this matter is entirely different. This isn't a question of a single instance of rape, but of a life-threatening relationship that in essence consists of ongoing, repeated rape. Here it doesn't concern an unknown man of unknown worth, but one you know well: Pastor Gregorius. And here it's a question of helping, not an unknown woman, but the one you secretly love. . ."

"No, quiet, that's enough, be quiet!"

"Can a man allow the woman he loves to be violated, sullied, and trampled before his very eyes?"

"Be quiet! She loves another. That's his affair, not mine."

"You know you love her, so it is your affair."

"Be quiet! I'm a doctor! And you want me to surreptitiously do in an old man who comes to me seeking my help!"

"You're a doctor. How often haven't you spoken that phrase: 'my duty as a doctor'! Here, now, is your duty—I think it's quite clear. Your duty as a doctor is to help the one who can and should be helped by cutting away the rotten flesh that infects the healthy tissue. Admittedly there's no honor to be won: you can't let anyone find out, or otherwise you'd end up in Långholmen Prison or the asylum at Konradsberg."

I recall now, after the fact, that a gust of wind suddenly seized the curtain and blew it into the lamp so the hem caught fire, but I put out the small blue flame with my hand and shut the window. I did these things automatically, almost without noticing. The rain beat against the windowpane. The lamps burned, unwavering and silent. On one of them a little gray-speckled moth was resting.

I sat staring at the unwavering flame of the lamp, mesmerized. I think I fell into some sort of trance. Perhaps I nodded off for a moment. But suddenly I came to with a jolt, as if I'd been prodded, and remembered everything: the question that had to be resolved, the decision that must be made before I could rest.

So, then, you who do not will it: why not?

"I'm afraid. First and foremost afraid of discovery and 'punishment.' I don't underestimate your discretion and foresight, and I believe you'll manage to arrange matters so everything goes as planned. I think it likely. But nevertheless there's a risk. . . Chance plays in. . . The outcome is never certain."

"Risk-taking is part of life. You sought an action. Have you forgotten what you wrote here in your diary not so many weeks ago, before we could have any sense of what was in store: position, reputation, the future· all that you were willing to stow aboard the first ship to come loaded with action. . . Have you forgotten that? Shall I show you the page?"

"No, I haven't forgotten. But it wasn't true. I was boasting. I feel different now that I see the ship coming. Surely you must realize I hadn't imagined this sort of satanic, ghostly ship! I was boasting! I was lying! No one can hear us now; I can be honest. My life is empty and miserable and I find no meaning in it, but I cling to it anyway. I like to

walk around in the sunshine and observe people, and I don't want to have anything to hide, to be afraid of. Leave me in peace!"

"Peace, no—that won't bring peace. Do you want me to witness the one I love drowning in a cesspool when I can help her up with a single bold, quick act? Would there be peace, could I ever find peace if I turned my back on her and went out into the sunshine to observe people? What kind of peace would that be?"

"I'm afraid. Not so much of discovery—I always have my pills and can withdraw from the fray if the going gets rough. But I'm afraid of myself. What do I know about myself? I'm afraid to get caught up in something that will trap me and bind me and never let me go. What you ask of me doesn't contradict my beliefs; it's an action I would endorse for someone else, assuming I knew what I do, but it doesn't suit me. I goes against my inclinations, habits, instincts, against my very essence. I'm not made for things like this. There are thousands of stalwart, bold men who could kill a human being as easily as a fly—why can't one of them do it? I'm afraid of a bad conscience; you get one if you try to crawl out of your own skin. To 'keep a lid on' means to know your own limitations; I want to keep a lid on. People act against their deepest and most fervently held beliefs with the greatest of ease on a daily basis, and their consciences are clear as can be, but if you try to act against your innermost nature, then you'll hear the voice of your conscience! Then there'll be a hue and cry! You say I've begged and pleaded for an action—that's impossible, that's not true! There must be some misunderstanding! It's inconceivable that I could have had such an insane desire—I'm a born observer, I want to sit comfortably in a theater box and watch people murder each other on stage, but I myself have no business there. I want to keep out of it—leave me in peace!"

"Coward! You're a coward!"

"I'm afraid. This is a nightmare! What do I have to do with these people and their filthy affairs? I find the pastor so repulsive that I'm afraid of him. . . I don't want my fate mixed up with his. And what do I know about him? What I find repulsive isn't the man himself, but the impression he makes on me. The image he has imprinted on my soul won't be erased if he vanishes, especially not if he vanishes because of me. He's already possessed me more than I like while he's alive—who knows what he might come up with when he's dead? I know about all that, I've read *Crime and Punishment* and *Thérese Raquin*. I don't believe in ghosts, but I don't want to put myself in a position where I might start believing in them. What do I have to do with all this? I want to travel far away, to see forests and mountains and rivers. I want to walk under enormous green trees with a lovely little leather volume in my

pocket, thinking beautiful, elevated, kind, calm thoughts, thoughts one can speak aloud and be praised for. Let me go, let me leave tomorrow!"

"Coward!"

The lamps burned with dirty red flames in the gray dawn light. The moth was lying on the desk with singed wings.

I threw myself on the bed.

AUGUST 8

I've been riding and taken a bath, I've held my office hours and made my sick calls as usual. And once again evening comes. I'm tired.

The brick steeple of the church is very red in the evening light. The crowns of the trees are a dense, dark green right now, and the blue behind them is deep. It's Saturday night; ragged little children are playing hopscotch on the gravel path. In an open window a man is sitting in his shirtsleeves, playing the flute. It's strange how certain melodies can catch on. Barely ten years ago, this melody arose from the chaos and sneaked up on an impoverished Italian musician, perhaps one evening in the twilight, perhaps on an evening like this. It bore fruit in his soul, giving birth to other melodies and other rhythms, and all of a sudden, with their help, he became world famous, bringing him a new life with new joys and new sorrows and a fortune to gamble away in Monte Carlo. And the melody, like an epidemic, catches on throughout the world and has its fateful effect, both good and bad—makes cheeks blush and eyes shine, is admired and loved by countless people and arouses boredom and disgust in others, often the same people who initially loved it; rings insistently and mercilessly in the ears of the insomniac at night, annoys the businessman who lies fretting because the stocks he sold last week have risen, disturbs and pains the thinker trying to gather his thoughts to formulate a new law, or dances around in the vacuum of an idiot's brain. And while the man who "created" it may be more pained and tired of it than anyone else, audiences in places of entertainment all over the world continue to applaud it wildly, and the man over there plays it with feeling on his flute.

AUGUST 9

To will something is to make a choice. Oh, that it should be so difficult to choose!

To make a choice is to give something up. Oh, that it should be so difficult to give something up!

A little prince was going on an excursion, and he was asked whether he wanted to go by land or by sea. And he answered that he wanted to go by land *and* by sea.

We want everything, we want to be everything. We want to experience all the joys of good fortune and the full depths of suffering. We want the excitement of action and the calm of observation. We want the silence of the desert as well as the noise of the forum. Simultaneously we want to be the hermit's thought and the voice of the people; we want to be both melody and harmony. Simultaneously! How could this be possible?

"I want to go by land and by sea."

AUGUST 10

A watch without hands has something rubbed out and empty that's reminiscent of a dead person's features. Right now I'm sitting here looking at such a watch. Actually it's not a watch at all, just an empty case with a beautiful exterior. I saw it in the window of the hunchbacked old watchmaker's shop in the alley as I was walking home in the hot yellow twilight—an odd twilight, the way I imagine the end of a day in the desert. . . I went in and asked the watchmaker, who once repaired my watch, what sort of watch it was that had no hands. He smiled his coy hunchback smile and showed me the beautiful old silver case, a fine piece of workmanship; he'd purchased the watch at an auction, but the works were worn out and beyond repair, and he intended to put in a new mechanism. I bought the case as is.

I plan to put a few of my pills in it and carry it in my right vest pocket along with my watch. It's just a variant of Demosthenes' idea of poison in the pen. There's nothing new under the sun!

Now night is falling; a star is already twinkling through the branches of the large chestnut tree. I can sense that I'll sleep well tonight; inside my head it's cool and calm. Still, it's hard to tear myself away from the tree and the star.

Night. Such a lovely word. The night is older than the day, according to the ancient Gauls. They believed the short, transient day was born of the endless night.

The enormous, endless night.

Well, of course it's just a manner of speaking. . . What is the night, that which we call the night? It's the narrow, conical shadow of our little planet. A small sliver of darkness in the midst of an ocean of light.

And this ocean of light, what is that? A spark in space. The small circle of light around a small star: the sun.

Oh, what sort of pestilence has seized human beings to make them ask what everything is? What sort of scourge has whipped them out of the circle of fellow creatures on earth—everything crawling and walking and running and climbing and flying—to regard their world and their lives from above, from outside, with cold, distant eyes, and find it petty and without value? Where is this headed, how will it end? I'm forced to think of the moaning female voice I heard in my dream—I can hear it still—the voice of an old, weeping woman: the world's on fire, the world's on fire!

You should regard your world from your own point of view and not from some imagined point out in space; you should modestly gauge it according to your own measure, according to your rank and condition, that of a human being living on earth. Then the earth is big enough, and the night endless and deep.

AUGUST 12

How brightly the sun shines on the weathercock this evening!

I'm fond of this beautiful, sensible bird that always blows as the wind blows. It's a constant reminder of the cock that on a certain occasion crowed three times, and an ingenious symbol of the holy church that lives by denying its master.

In the churchyard the shepherd of the congregation is walking back and forth in the lovely summer evening, leaning on the arm of a younger colleague. My window is open, and it's so quiet that fragments of their conversation carry all the way up here. They're discussing the upcoming election for pastor primarius, and I heard the minister mention Gregorius' name. He uttered it without enthusiasm and not very wholeheartedly. Gregorius is one of those preachers who always wins over the congregation and consequently is opposed by colleagues. I could tell by the tone of voice that the minister mentioned his name more or less in passing and didn't believe his prospects were serious.

That's my opinion, too. I don't think he has any prospects. I'd be greatly surprised if he became pastor primarius. . .

It's August 12 today; he left for Porla on July 4th or 5th and was planning to stay six weeks. In other words it won't be many more days before he's back again, in the peak of health after his stay at the baths.

AUGUST 13

How will it happen? I've known for a long time. By coincidence, the solution to the problem is plain as can be: my potassium cyanide pills, which I originally prepared without a thought of anyone other than myself, will naturally come to use now.

One matter is quite obvious: I can't let him take them at home. It must happen here. This won't be pleasant, but I see no other way out, and I want to have an end to all this. If he takes a pill at home, following my instructions, and keels over on the spot, there's a possibility the police will construe a connection. Furthermore, the person I want to save could easily be suspected, entangled, covered with filth for life, perhaps found guilty of murder. . .

Of course nothing must happen that might arouse the suspicions of the police. No one must know that the pastor has any pills; he must die a completely natural death from a heart attack. Nor may *she* suspect anything. That he dies here, in my office, is naturally quite a blow to my professional reputation and will give my friends material for bad jokes, but there's nothing to be done about it.

He'll come up one day to talk about his heart or some other nonsense, hoping I'll tell him he's better after the cure. No one can hear what we talk about; a large, empty parlor is situated between the waiting room and my examination room. I'll listen and tap, commenting that he's remarkably restored, but there's still something that bothers me a bit. . . I'll bring out my pills, explain that this is a new medication for certain heart ailments (I'll have to make up a name, too), and advise him to take one right away. I'll offer him a glass of port to wash it down. Does he drink wine? Of course, I've heard him justify it with the wedding at Canaan. . . He shall have a fine little wine. Grönstedt's Gray Label. I can see him before me: first he takes a small sip of the wine, then he places the pill on his tongue, empties the glass and washes it down. His spectacles reflect the window and the potted plant and hide his gaze. . . I turn away, walk over to the window and look out at the churchyard, stand there drumming on the pane. . . He says something, for instance that it's a good wine, but gets only half the sentence out. . . I hear a thud. . . He's lying on the floor. . .

But what if he won't take the pill? No, he'll take it like candy—he loves medicine. . . But what if? Well, then there's nothing I can do, I'll have to drop the matter; I can't go after him with an ax.

. . . He's lying on the floor. I put away the box of bills and the bottle of wine and the glass. I ring for Kristin: the pastor is ill, a fainting spell, it will soon pass. . . I take his pulse, feel his heart:

"It's a heart attack," I finally say. "He's dead."

I phone a colleague. Hmm—whom? Let me think. *That* one won't do; seven years ago I reviewed his dissertation somewhat skeptically in a professional journal. . . *That* one: too smart. That one, that one, and that one: out of town. *That* one, yes, we'll take him. Or possibly that one, or in a pinch that one.

I appear at the door of the waiting room, no doubt suitably pale, and explain in a low-key, controlled manner that something has happened that forces me to close my practice for the rest of the day.

The colleague arrives; I explain what has happened: the pastor has suffered from severe heart problems for some time. He commiserates with me—it was a dirty trick of fate that the death occurred here, of all places—and at my request writes out the death certificate. . . No, I won't give the pastor any wine; he might spill some, or his breath might reveal that he'd been imbibing, and it could be complicated to explain. . . He'll have to make do with a glass of water. Anyway, in my opinion wine is harmful.

But if there's an autopsy? Well, then I'll have to take a pill myself. It's an illusion to think one can take on an enterprise of this sort without assuming some risk; I've known that all along. I have to be prepared to face the consequences.

Actually the circumstances demand that I myself request an autopsy. No one else is likely to—well, that's not necessarily true. . . I tell my colleague that I intend to request one; he presumably answers that from a medical point of view it's quite unnecessary, since the cause of death is clear, but it could be the right thing to do for the sake of appearances . . . Then I let the matter drop. Be that as it may, here's a flaw in the plan. I'll have to think it over some more.

For that matter, it's impossible to plan every detail in advance; chance will play a role no matter what. To some extent I'll have to count on my talent for improvisation.

One more thing—hell and damnation, what an idiot I am! It's not just myself I have to consider. Assuming there's an autopsy and I take a pill and vanish through the trap door and accompany Gregorius across the Styx, what kind of motive will people come up with to explain this strange crime? People are so inquisitive. And when the dead have taken their secrets with them, won't a motive be sought among the living—from her? That she has a lover will soon be sniffed out; that she must have willed the pastor's death, longed for it, is the obvious conclusion. She might not even bother denying it. It makes me dizzy. . . And I would have done this to you, you fairest flower of womanhood!

This will drive me to distraction.

But perhaps—perhaps I do have an idea. If I see that an autopsy will be necessary, I'll have to show obvious signs of insanity well before I take my pill. Even better—well, the one doesn't preclude the other—I'll write a letter and leave it open on the desk in the room where I die, a letter filled with ravings that suggest persecution mania, religious obsession, and so forth: the pastor has pursued me for years; he's poisoned my soul; I've acted in self-defense, etc. I can weave in some Bible quotations as well—there are always some that fit. This way the matter will be clear: the murderer was insane. That's motive enough—no other need be sought. I'll have a Christian burial and Kristin will have her silent suspicions—well, not always so silent—confirmed. She's told me a hundred times I'm crazy. She could witness on my behalf if needed.

AUGUST 14

I wish I had a friend to confide in. A friend I could consult with. But I have none, and even if I did, there are limits to the demands one can make on friends.

I've always been somewhat isolated. I've borne my isolation with me through the crowd as the snail bears its house. For some people isolation isn't a circumstance in which they find themselves, it's an innate characteristic. And through this act my isolation is likely to increase; no matter how it ends, whether badly or well, for me the "punishment" will be solitary confinement for life.

AUGUST 17

Fool! Coward! Idiot!

Oh, what's the point of invective—one has no control over nerves and stomach in any case.

My office hours were over; the last patient had just left. I was standing at the window in the parlor, thinking of nothing in particular. Suddenly I could see Gregorius coming diagonally across the churchyard, headed for my door. Everything went blurry and gray before my eyes. I wasn't expecting him, I didn't know he'd returned. I felt faint, dizzy, nauseous—all the symptoms of seasickness. There was only one thought in my head: not now, not now! Another time, not now! He's coming up the stairs, he's standing outside the door—what should I do? Out to Kristin: if someone comes looking for me now, say I've gone out . . . I could tell by her staring eyes and gaping mouth that I must have looked strange. I bolted into the bedroom and barred the door. And I barely made it to the sink before vomiting.

My fears were justified, then—I'm not up to it.

For now is when it should have happened. Someone who wants to act must be able to seize the moment. Who knows if it will return? I'm not up to it!

AUGUST 21

Today I've seen and spoken with her.

I took a walk on Ship's Isle this afternoon. Just after crossing the bridge I met Recke; he'd come down from the hilltop where the church is. He was walking slowly, staring at the ground, his lower lip protruding, poking aside the gravel with his stick, and he didn't seem very content with the world. I didn't think he would notice me, but just as we passed each other he looked up and, instantly transforming his entire expression, gave a slightly forced, hearty, cheerful nod. I went on, but stopped after a few paces: she's sure to be nearby, I thought. Maybe she's still up there on top of the hill. They'd had something to discuss and had agreed to meet up there, where people seldom go, and to avoid being seen with him she'd let him walk down first. I sat down on the bench that encloses the trunk of the enormous poplar tree, waiting. It must be the largest tree in Stockholm. As a child I often sat under it on spring evenings with my mother. My father was never along; he didn't like going on walks with us.

. . . No, she didn't come. I thought I'd meet her coming down the hill, but perhaps she'd taken another route, or never been there.

I went up the hill anyway, a roundabout path, past the church—and then I caught sight of her, sitting curled up on one of the steps outside the church gate, bent forward, her chin in her hand. She sat staring straight into the setting sun, so at first she didn't see me.

Even the first time I saw her it struck me how different she is from all others. She isn't like a lady of the world or a bourgeois wife or a woman of the people, though perhaps that's what she most resembles, especially now, sitting on the church steps, her blonde hair uncovered and exposed to the sun, for she'd taken off her hat and placed it beside her. But a woman from an indigenous people or one that has never existed, a society where classes haven't been formed, where "the people" haven't yet become the lower class. A daughter of a free tribe.

Suddenly I noticed she was sitting there weeping—not sobbing out loud, but silently, weeping like one who has wept so much that she scarcely notices the tears.

I wanted to turn around and leave, but at that moment I realized she'd seen me. I greeted her somewhat stiffly, intending to keep on walking. But she immediately arose from the low step as easily and gracefully as if it had been a chair and came over to me, giving me her hand. She quickly wiped away the tears, put on her hat and pulled a dark veil over her face.

We stood there a while in silence.

"It's lovely up here this evening," I finally said.

"Yes," she said, "it's a lovely evening. And it's been a lovely summer. Now it will soon be over. The leaves are already turning yellow. Look, a swallow!"

A solitary swallow swooped past, so close by that I could feel a cool breeze across my eyelids, made a quick turn that to the eye looked like a sharp angle, and disappeared into the distance.

"It turned warm so early this year," she said. "Then fall usually comes early."

"How is the pastor doing?" I asked.

"Oh, well enough," she answered. "He returned from Porla a few days ago."

"And has he improved?"

She turned her head a bit away and squinted toward the sun.

"Not from my point of view," she answered softly.

I understood. In other words it was just as I'd expected. Well, that wasn't hard to predict. . .

An old woman came along, sweeping fallen leaves. She came closer and closer, and we walked slowly away, farther out on the hillside. I was thinking of the pastor. First I frightened him with his wife's health, and that helped for barely two weeks; then I frightened him with his own health and with death itself, and that helped for six. And it helped for that long only because he was separated from her. I'm beginning to think Markel and his Cyrenaics are right: people don't care about happiness, they seek pleasure. They seek pleasure even against their own best interests, contrary to their convictions and beliefs, contrary to their happiness. . . And the young woman walking at my side with such a straight, proud back, though her head with the mass of light, silken hair was deeply bowed by her troubles—she had done just the same: sought pleasure without caring about happiness. And now, for the first time, it struck me that precisely the same principle determined the actions of the old pastor who filled me with such disgust and the young woman who aroused my infinite tenderness, a muted reverence, as if I were in a divine presence.

The sun was shining more dully now through the thick haze above the city.

"Tell me, Mrs. Gregorius—may I ask you a question?"

"Yes, of course."

"The man you love—I don't even know who he is—what does he say about this, about the whole situation? What does he want to do? How does he want things to be? He can hardly be satisfied with matters as they are—?"

She was silent for a long time. I started to think I'd asked a foolish question she was reluctant to answer.

"He wants us to leave," she finally said.

I gave a start.

"Can he do that?" I asked. "I mean, is he a free man, wealthy, who needs no position or profession, a man who can do as he pleases?"

"No. Otherwise we would have left long ago. His entire future is here. But he wants to make a new way for himself in a foreign country, far away. Perhaps in America."

I had to smile inside. Klas Recke and America! But I grew rigid when I thought of her. I thought: precisely the same characteristics that keep him afloat here will make him sink to the bottom over there. And then what will become of her. . .

She shook her head, her eyes full of tears.

"Most of all I want to die," she said.

The sun gradually drowned in the gray haze. A chilly breeze blew through the trees.

"I don't want to ruin his life, become a burden to him. Why should he leave? It would only be for my sake. His entire life is here, his position, his future, his friends, everything."

There was nothing I could say to this, since she was quite right. And I thought of Recke. To me the suggestion seemed quite strange, coming from him. I would never have expected such a thing from him.

"Tell me, Mrs. Gregorius—you'll allow me to be your friend, you regard me as one, don't you? You don't mind my speaking to you about these matters?"

She smiled at me through the tears and the veil—yes, she smiled!

"I'm very fond of you," she said. "You've done things for me that no one else could or would have done. You may speak to me about whatever you please. I like it so much when you speak."

"Your friend—has leaving together been on his mind for a long time? Has he suggested it before?"

"Not until this evening. We met up here shortly before you came. He's never suggested it to me before. I don't think he'd even considered it."

I was beginning to understand. . . I asked, "Has something in particular happened just now. . . to make him come up with that idea? Something disturbing. . . ?"

She bowed her head.

"Perhaps."

The old woman with the broom once again came quite close to us as she swept the leaves. We walked back toward the church, slowly, in silence. We stopped at the steps where we'd met a while ago. She was tired: she sat down on the step again, resting her chin on her hand, gazing into the deepening twilight.

For a long time we said nothing. It was quiet all around us, but above us the wind through the treetops was more insistent, and the air was no longer warm.

She shivered from the cold.

"I want to die," she said. "I really would like to die. I feel I've been given everything I had coming to me in life. I could never again be as happy as I've been during these weeks. Rarely has a day gone by when I didn't weep, but I've been happy. I regret nothing, but I want to die. But it's still so difficult. I think suicide is repulsive, especially for a woman. I despise anything that does violence to nature. And I don't want to bring him sorrow, either."

I kept silent and let her speak. She squinted as she looked off.

"Yes, suicide is repulsive. But it can be even more repulsive to go on living. It's terrible that sometimes the only choice is between what's more or less repulsive. If only I could die!

"I'm not afraid of dying. I wouldn't be afraid even if I believed there was something after death. Nothing good and nothing bad that I have done could have been different; I've acted as I had to, in matters great and small. Do you remember I once told you about my youthful love and that I regretted I hadn't given myself to him? I don't regret it any longer. I regret nothing, not even my marriage. Nothing could have happened any differently than it did.

"But I don't think there is anything after death. When I was a child I always thought of the soul as a little bird. In an illustrated history of the world my father owned I could see that the Egyptians represented it as a bird, too. But a bird can only fly as high as the atmosphere extends, and that's not very high. The atmosphere belongs to earth as well. In school we had a science teacher who explained that nothing here on earth can ever escape it."

"I'm afraid he didn't get that quite right," I inserted.

"That may be. But in any case I gave up my bird image, and the soul became more vague to me. A few years back I read everything I could find about religion and such, both for and against. This helped me sort out how I felt about many things, but I still didn't find out what I wanted. There are people who can write so well that I think they can prove whatever they want. I always thought the one who wrote best and most beautifully was right. I worshipped Viktor Rydberg. But I sensed, I realized that I still knew nothing about life and death.

"But"—and a high, warm color rose in her cheeks there in the darkness—"but in the last few weeks I've learned more about myself than in my entire previous life. I've gotten to know my body. I've come to the realization that my body is me. There is no joy and no sorrow, no life at all except through it. And my body knows it has to die. It can sense this, just as an animal can. And so now I know that nothing awaits me after death."

It had grown dark. The noise of the city carried up to us more noticeably now in the darkness, and the lamps began to be lit down there along the quays and bridges.

"Yes," I said, "your body knows that it will die sometime. But it doesn't *want* to die; it wants to live. It doesn't want to die until it is worn out and weighed down by the years, consumed by suffering and burned up by desire. Only then does it want to die. You think you want this now because everything looks so bleak. But you don't really; I know you can't possibly want this. Let time pass. Take each day as it comes. Everything can be transformed sooner than you think. You yourself can be transformed, too. You're strong and healthy; you can become even stronger; you are among those who can grow and be renewed."

A shiver went through her body. She got up.

"It's late; I have to go home. We can't walk down from here together—it would be awkward if someone saw us. You go that way, and I'll go the other direction. Good night!"

She gave me her hand. I said, "I'd so much like to kiss your cheek. May I?"

She lifted her veil and turned her cheek toward me. I kissed it.

She said, "I'd like to kiss your forehead. It's beautiful."

The wind caught my thinning hair when I bared my head. And she took it between her warm, soft hands and kissed my forehead, solemnly, ceremoniously.

AUGUST 22

What a morning! A slight touch of fall in the crisp, clear air. And no wind.

Met Miss Mertens on my morning ride and exchanged a few cheerful words with her in passing. I like her eyes. I think there's more depth to them than is first apparent. And her hair. . . But beyond that there's not much to add to her list of merits. Oh, I'm sure she has a good little character, too.

As I rode around Djurgården Park, I thought the whole time of her, sitting on the steps up there by the church, staring into the sun and weeping, longing to die. And indeed: if no help arrives, if nothing happens—if what I'm thinking about doesn't happen—then every attempt to comfort her with words is empty and meaningless; I could sense this myself while speaking to her. Then she's right a hundred times over to seek death. She can neither leave nor stay. Leave—with Klas Recke? Become a burden, tie him down? I bless her for not wanting that. They would both founder. His prospects here are bright, people say; he has one foot in his department and the other in the world of finance. I've heard him called a man of the future, and if he has debts, they're probably no worse than those of other "men of the future" before they've established themselves. He has precisely the degree of talent needed for success—within the right environment, of course; he's no force of nature. "Make a new way for himself" . . . no, that's not for him. And she can't continue living her old life, either. A prisoner in enemy territory. Give birth to her child under that man's roof and be forced to pretend, lie to him and see his disgusting paternal joy—perhaps tempered by suspicions he doesn't dare admit to but which he'll use to poison her life even more. . . No, she simply cannot do that—if she tries it will end in catastrophe. She must be set free. She should make decisions about herself and her child on her own. Then everything will take care of itself; her life will seem full of possibilities and good to live. I've sworn an oath, by my soul: she shall be free.

I was in a state of terrible nervous tension just now, during my office hours. I thought he would come today; it seemed to me I could feel it in my bones. . . He didn't come, but no matter; whenever he does, he won't find me unprepared. What happened last Thursday will not be repeated.

Now I'm going out to dinner. If only I were to run into Markel I could invite him to dinner at Hasselbacken. I want to talk and drink wine and observe people.

Kristin already has dinner ready and will be furious, but I don't care.

(LATER)

It's over; it's done. I've done it.

How strangely it came about. How peculiar the way fate arranged it for me. I'm almost tempted to believe in providence.

I feel empty and light, like a blown-out egg. Just now, when I came through the parlor door and caught sight of myself in the mirror, the expression made me start: something empty, rubbed out, something indefinable that made me think of the watch without hands in my pocket. And I have to ask myself: what you did today—is that all there was inside you? Isn't there anything left now?

Nonsense. The feeling will pass. My head is a bit tired. I have a right to be tired.

It's seven-thirty; the sun has just set. It was a quarter past four when I left. Three hours, in other words. . . Three hours and a few minutes.

. . . Well, I went out for dinner. I walked across the churchyard and through the gate; I stopped for a moment outside the watchmaker's window, got a smiling, hunchbacked greeting from the man inside and greeted him back. I recall making the following observation: every time I see a hunchback, I commiserate and feel a little hunchbacked myself. It's probably a residual effect of the empathy with misfortune drilled into me since childhood. . . Emerging on Drottning Street, I went into the Havana shop and bought a couple of good-sized Upmann cigars, then turned off to the left. When I came to Gustav Adolf's Square I glanced in the window of Rydberg's Restaurant, thinking Markel might be sitting there with an absinthe, as he often does, but I only saw Birck with a lemonade. He's a sobersides, no one I wanted to have dinner with tete-à-tete. . . Outside the newspaper office I bought an *Evening News* and stuffed it in my pocket. There might be something new about the Dreyfus affair, I thought. . . But the whole time I was wondering how to find Markel. Calling his paper would do no good; he's never there at this time of day; and while thinking this I went into a cigar shop and phoned. He had just left. . . At Jacob's Square I could see Pastor Gregorius approaching me from far away. I was just pulling myself together to greet him when I realized it was someone else. There wasn't even a passing resemblance.

Ah, I thought, then I'll meet him soon.

For according to a widely accepted folk belief, which I dimly recalled my experience having confirmed on some occasion, mistaking a person this way is a sort of premonition. I even remembered that in a pseudo-scientific journal for "psychic investigation" I'd read a story

about a man who after such a "sign" abruptly turned off on a side street to avoid an unpleasant encounter—and ran right into the person he was trying to avoid. . . But I didn't believe that nonsense, and the whole time my thoughts were preoccupied by the chase for Markel. It occurred to me that once or twice at this time of day I'd met him by the water stand on the square; I went there. Naturally he wasn't to be found, but I sat down anyway on one of the benches under the large trees by the church wall to drink a glass of Vichy while glancing through my *Evening News*. I'd scarcely opened it and turned my eyes to the usual bold-face headline—"The Dreyfus Affair"—before I heard heavy, crunching steps on the gravel, and Pastor Gregorius was standing before me.

"Oh, good day, Doctor, good day! Do you mind if I join you? I thought I'd drink a small glass of Vichy before dinner. That can't be bad for the heart, can it?"

"Well, carbonation isn't the best thing for you," I replied, "but a small glass now and then can't do much harm. How are you after your stay at the baths?"

"Just fine. I think it has done me a world of good. I stopped by your office a few days ago, Doctor—I believe it was last Thursday—but I was too late. You'd already left."

I replied that I'm generally available half an hour or so after the end of office hours, but that day, unfortunately, I'd had to leave a bit earlier than usual. I told him to come tomorrow. He didn't know if he had time, but he'd try.

"Porla is a beautiful place," he said.

(Porla is very ugly. But as a city-dweller, Gregorius is accustomed to finding "the countryside" beautiful no matter what it looks like. Moreover, he'd paid good money and wanted to get the most possible for it, and so the place was beautiful.)

"Yes," I replied, "Porla is quite beautiful, though less so than many other places."

"Perhaps Ronneby is more beautiful," he admitted. "But that's such a long, expensive journey."

A half-grown girl served the water, two small quarter-liter bottles.

Suddenly I had an inspiration. Since it had to happen anyway—why not here? Why not now? I looked around. No one was nearby at the moment. At a table far away three old gentlemen were sitting, one of whom, a retired captain, I knew, but they were conversing in loud voices, telling stories and laughing, and couldn't hear what we said or see what we did. A little girl, dirty and barefoot, padded over to us selling flowers; we shook our heads and she vanished just as quietly. In front of us the expanse of gravel of the square was nearly empty at this late-

afternoon hour. Every now and then, from the corner by the church, a pedestrian would cut across toward the avenue of trees to the east. A warm, late-summer sun made the old yellow façade of the Royal Dramatic Theater seem golden through the lindens. The chief administrator of the theater was standing on the sidewalk talking to the director. In the distance they seemed like miniatures whose movements could be discerned and deciphered only if one knew who they were. The director was distinguished by his red fez, the administrator by his subtle hand gestures, which seemed to convey, "Good heavens, every matter has two sides!" I was convinced he was saying something like that: I could see the slight shrug of the shoulders, I thought I could hear the tone of voice. And I applied the words to myself and the present situation. Yes, every matter has two sides. But no matter how much a person is open to both possibilities, in the end only one can be chosen. And I'd made my choice long ago.

I took the empty watch case with the pills out of my vest pocket, grasped a pill between thumb and forefinger, turned a bit to the side and pretended to swallow it. Then I took a sip from the glass of water as if to wash it down. Right away the pastor was interested:

"You're taking medicine, Doctor?"

"Yes," I replied. "You're not the only one with a bad heart. Mine isn't as good as it should be, either. That's because I smoke too much. If only I could quit smoking I wouldn't need this stuff. It's a quite new preparation, highly recommended by German professional journals, but I wanted to try it out myself before prescribing it to patients. I've been taking it for over a month now with excellent results. A pill just before dinner reduces heartburn, anxiety, and heart palpitations after the meal. May I offer you one?"

I held out the container with the lid open and turned so he couldn't see it was a watch case; that might have led to unnecessary questions and chatter.

"Thanks," he said.

"I can give you a prescription for them tomorrow," I added.

He took a pill without further ado and swallowed it with a sip of water. I could feel my heart stand still. I stared straight ahead. The square was empty and dry as a desert. An imposing policeman strolled by, stopped, flicked a speck of dust from his well-brushed uniform and continued on his rounds. The sun, warm and golden, was still shining on the walls of the theater. The director now made a gesture he seldom uses, the Jewish gesture with upturned palms, the businessman's gesture that means "I'm turning it inside out, I'm hiding nothing, my cards are on the table." And the red fez bobbed twice.

"This water stand is old," said the pastor. "It's probably the oldest of its kind in Stockholm."

"Yes," I replied without turning my head. "It's old."

The bell of Jacob's Church struck a quarter to five.

I automatically took out my watch to check whether it kept proper time, but my hand was unsteady and trembling. I dropped the watch to the ground and the glass broke. When I bent over to pick it up, I could see a pill lying on the ground, the one I'd just pretended to take. I crushed it under my foot. At that moment I could hear the pastor's glass of water topple over on the tray. I didn't want to look that way, but I could see his arm fall down limply and his head drop onto his chest and his unseeing eyes open wide. . .

It's ridiculous, this is now the third time since I've returned that I've gotten up to check that my door is properly locked. What do I have to fear? Nothing. Not a thing. The matter was handled neatly and delicately, whatever else could be said about it. Chance came to my aid, too. It was a good thing I saw the pill on the ground and crushed it. If I hadn't dropped my watch I probably wouldn't have seen it, so it was a good thing I dropped my watch.

The minister died of a heart attack; I wrote the certificate myself. He was overheated and out of breath from a walk in the hot summer weather; then he drank a large glass of Vichy far too quickly and without letting it go flat. I explained this to the imposing policeman, who had turned around and come back, and to the terrified serving girl and a few curious bystanders who'd gathered around. I'd advised the pastor to let the water stand for a few minutes and go flat before he drank it, but he was thirsty and wouldn't listen. "Yes," said the constable, "when I walked by a moment ago I could see how quickly the old gentleman gulped down the water, and I thought to myself that it couldn't be good for him. . ." Among the passers-by who stopped was a young minister who knew the deceased. He offered to inform Mrs. Gregorius as gently as possible.

I have nothing to fear. Then why do I keep checking the door? Because I can sense the incredible atmospheric pressure of others' opinions—the living, the dead, the as yet unborn—that have accumulated out there, threatening to blow open the door and crush me, pulverize me. That's why I check the lock.

. . . When I finally could get away from there, I climbed onto a streetcar, the first one that came by. It took me far out on Kungsholmen. I continued on foot all the way to the Traneberg bridge. We lived there

once for a summer when I was four or five. That's where I caught my first tiny perch, using a bent pin. I remembered the exact spot where I'd stood. I stood there for a long time now, breathing in the familiar smell of stagnant water and sun-dried tar. Now, too, swift little perch darted back and forth in the water. I remembered how greedily I'd looked at them back then and how fervently I wanted to catch them. And when I finally succeeded and a minuscule perch, barely three inches long, was wiggling on the hook, I let out a scream of delight and ran straight home to Mother with the little fish jerking and trembling in my clenched fist. . . I wanted us to eat it for dinner, but Mother gave it to the cat. And that was fun, too, watching him play with it and then hearing the bones crunch between his sharp teeth. . .

On the way home I stopped off at Piperska Muren for dinner. I didn't think I'd run into any acquaintances there, but two physicians sitting inside gestured for me to join them. I only drank a glass of beer and left.

What should I do with these scraps of paper? Until now I've been putting them in the secret compartment of the chiffonier, but that's not a good idea. Even a fairly unpracticed eye, looking at an old piece of furniture like this one, can tell a glance that it must have a secret compartment and easily figure out where it is. And if something should happen after all, something unforeseen, and the house were searched, they'd be found there right away. But what should I do with them? I know: I have a lot of cartons on the bookcase, dummies shaped like books, filled with notes on scientific matters and other old papers, carefully organized with labels on the spines. I can put them in among the notes on gynecology. And I can mix them up with my older diary entries; I've kept a diary before, never regularly or for a long time, but periodically. . . Actually, for now it doesn't really matter. I'll always have time to burn them if need be.

❦

It's done, I'm free. Now I want to shake this off, want to think about other matters.

Well—about what, then?

I'm tired and empty. I feel completely empty. Like a blister I've popped with a pin.

I'm hungry, that's all. Kristin will have to warm up dinner and bring it in.

AUGUST 23

It's been raining and windy all night. The first autumn storm. I lay awake listening as two branches of the large chestnut rubbed against each other outside my window. I remember that I got up and sat by the window for a while watching the ragged clouds chase each other. The glow from the gas lights gave them a dirty, brick-red, fiery hue. It seemed as if the church spire bowed in the storm. The clouds formed figures, turning into a wild hunt of filthy red devils, blowing horns and whistling and howling and tearing the rags from each others' bodies in wanton perversity. And as I sat there I suddenly burst out laughing: I laughed at the storm. I was reacting like the Jew when lightning struck just as he was eating a pork chop: he thought it was because of the pork. I was thinking of myself and my situation and assumed the storm did the same. Finally I fell asleep on my chair. I awoke with a shiver; once in bed I couldn't fall asleep again. And then finally a new day came.

Now it's a gray morning and the wind has died down, but it keeps on raining. And I have a terrible cold and have already used up three handkerchiefs.

When I opened a newspaper while drinking my morning coffee I saw that Pastor Gregorius had died. Quite suddenly, of a heart attack, at the water stand in Kungsträdgården. . . One of our better-known physicians, who happened to be nearby, could only confirm that death had occurred. . . The deceased was one of the capital city's most favored and popular preachers. . . A warm personality with an expansive heart. . . Fifty-eight years old. . . Mourned by his wife, née Waller, and his aged mother.

Dear me, we all must die eventually. And his heart had been bad for some time.

But to think his old mother was still alive. That I didn't know. She must be ancient.

. . . There's something dismal and unpleasant about this room, at least on rainy days like this. Everything here is so old and dark and somewhat moth-eaten. But I'm not comfortable with new furniture. Still, I think I'll have to get new curtains for the window—these are dark and heavy and keep out the light. One of them is also a bit singed at the hem from that night last summer when the lamp flared up and it caught fire.

"That night last summer". . . Let me think—how long ago can that be? —Two weeks. And to me it seems like an eternity.

Who would have thought his old mother was still alive. . .

How old would my mother be if she were still living? Oh, not very old, barely sixty.

She would have white hair. Maybe she'd have a little trouble climbing hills and stairs. Her blue eyes, paler than anyone else's, would be even paler now from age, and they would beam from under her white hair. She'd be pleased that things have gone so well for me, but even more she'd be sad that my brother Ernst in Australia never writes. Ernst never brought her anything but worry and sorrow, so she liked him best. But who knows—perhaps he'd have turned out differently if she had lived.

She died too young, my mother.

But it's a good thing she's dead.

(LATER)

Just now, when I came home at dusk, I stopped at the parlor entrance as if frozen to the spot. On the table in front of the mirror was a bouquet of dark flowers in a vase. It was twilight. Their heavy fragrance filled the room.

They were roses, dark red roses. A couple of them nearly black.

I stood there completely still in the silent room that seemed to expand in the twilight, scarcely daring to move or breathe. It felt like a dream. The flowers by the mirror—they were the dark flowers from my dream.

For an instant I was frightened. I thought: this is a hallucination—I'm falling apart, the end is near. I didn't dare go over and touch the flowers for fear of reaching out to grasp thin air. I went into my study. On the desk was a letter. I opened it with trembling hands, thinking there might be some connection to the flowers, but it was a dinner invitation. I read it and in reply wrote the word "Coming" on a visiting card. Then I went out into the parlor again. The flowers were still there. I rang for Kristin, but no one came—Kristin had gone out. There was no one in the apartment but me.

My life is beginning to merge with my dreams. I no longer can tell life and dream apart. I know about that, I've read all about it in thick books: it's the beginning of the end. But the end has to come sometime, and I'm not afraid of anything. More and more my life is turning into a dream. And perhaps it's never been anything else. Perhaps I've been dreaming the whole time, dreaming that I'm a physician whose name is Glas and that there was a pastor called Gregorius. And at any moment I may awaken as a street sweeper or a bishop or a school boy or a dog—who knows. . .

Oh, what foolishness! When dreams and premonitions begin to come true, and not just for serving girls and old women but for more sophisticated individuals, psychiatry claims it's a sign of beginning mental deterioration. But how can the phenomenon be explained? The explanation is that in the vast majority of cases, what "comes true" never was dreamed in the first place, it just *seems* to have been a dream, or a previous experience, absolutely identical to the last detail. But I've written down my dream about the dark flowers! And the flowers themselves—they're no hallucination, they're standing over there, fragrant and blooming, and someone brought them here.

But who? There's only one possibility. Could she possibly have understood? Understood and approved, and sent these flowers as a sign of this, in thanks? That's insane, that's impossible. Things like that don't happen, must not happen. It would be too horrible. It shouldn't be permitted! There are limits to what a woman may understand! If this is so, then I don't understand anything any more, then I no longer want to play this game.

Still, the flowers are beautiful. Should I put them on my desk? No. They'll have to stay where they are. I don't want to touch them. I'm afraid of them. I'm afraid!

AUGUST 24

My cold has turned into a bad case of the flu. I've closed the door to my patients to avoid infecting them and am staying indoors. I sent word to the Rubins that I couldn't come to dinner after all. I can't do a thing, not even read. I just played a game of solitaire with an old deck of cards my father left me. There must be a dozen decks of cards in the drawer of the lovely mahogany card table—that piece of furniture alone would send me to perdition if I felt the slightest urge to gamble. Opened up, the leaf is covered in green cloth; it has long grooves at the edges for the counters and delicate inlaid patterns.

Well, he didn't leave me much else, my dear father.

More rain. . . And what comes down isn't moisture, but dirt. The sky isn't gray any longer, it's brown. When the rain lets up for a moment it lightens to a dirty yellow.

Rose petals are scattered over the hand of solitaire on the table. I don't know why I sat pulling them off. Perhaps because I recalled how, long ago, we children used to crush rose petals in a mortar and roll them into hard beads, thread them on a string to make a necklace and give it to Mother on her birthday. They smelled so nice, those beads. But after a few days they dried up like raisins and were thrown away.

The roses—yes, that was quite a tale, too. The first thing I saw this morning when I came out into the parlor was a visiting card lying on the table by the vase: Eva Mertens. I still don't understand how I could have missed seeing it yesterday. And how in all the darkest recesses of hell could that sweet, considerate girl have come up with the idea of sending me flowers, unworthy sinner that I am? With a little intellectual effort and by overcoming my diffidence I can guess the underlying motivation, but the reason? The excuse? No matter how I ponder I can't come up with any other explanation that this: She had read or heard that I happened to be present at the tragic death; she assumes I'm deeply shaken and so wanted to send me this token of her concern. She acted quickly, on impulse, in a way that seemed natural to her. That girl has a good heart. . .

If I were to let her love me? I'm so alone. Last winter I had a gray striped cat, but he ran away when spring came. I remember him now when the glow of the first autumn fire dances on the red pattern of the rug: right there, in front of the tile stove, is where he used to lie purring. I tried unsuccessfully to win his affection. He lapped up my milk and warmed himself at my fire, but his heart remained cold. What happened to you, Murre? You were a poor sort. I'm afraid you may have come down in the world, assuming you're still alive. Last night I heard a cat howl in the churchyard, and I thought I recognized your voice.

❦

Who was it who said, "Life is short, but the hours are long"? It should have been a mathematician like Pascal, but I think it was Fénélon. Too bad it wasn't me.

❦

Why did I long for an action? Perhaps mostly as a cure for boredom. "L'ennui commun à toute créature bien née," as Queen Margot of Navarra put it. But it's been quite some time since ennui was a privilege of "creatures of high birth." Judging by myself and people I know, it seems that, with more education and increased prosperity, it's in the process of spreading to the populace.

Action came to me like a strange, enormous cloud, shot down a bolt of lightning, and passed. And boredom remained.

But this flu weather is truly damnable. On days like this it seems to me that the smell of corpses rises from the churchyard, forcing its way in through walls and windows. The rain drips on the windowpane. It feels as if it's dripping into my brain, hollowing it out. There's something the matter with my brain. I don't know if it's too dull or too sharp,

but it's not quite right. On the other hand I'm secure in the knowledge that my heart is in the right place. Drip—drip—drip. Why are the two little trees by Bellman's grave so miserable and sparse? I think they're diseased. Perhaps poisoned by gas. He should be sleeping under enormous, swaying trees, dear old Carl Michael. Sleep, well—will we sleep? Really? If only one knew. . . A couple of lines from a well-known poem pop into my head:

> L'ombre d'un vieux poète erre dans la gouttière
> avec la triste voix d'un fantôme frileux.

"The shadow of an old poet wanders in the gutter with the sorrowful voice of a frozen ghost." It's a good thing Baudelaire never heard what it sounds like in Swedish. By and large ours is a wretched language. The words step on each other's toes and push each other into the ditch. And everything becomes so tangible and crude. No half-tones, no subtle hints and gentle transitions. A language that seems to be created to support the rabble's insatiable habit of blurting out the truth, come what may.

Darkness falls more and more: December gloom in August. The black rose petals have already withered. But the piercing, strident colors of the cards on my table gleam in all the grayness as if to remind me that long ago they were invented to dispel the melancholy of an ailing, demented prince. But I dread the mere thought of the effort it would take to gather them and turn them right side up and shuffle them for another game of solitaire; I can only sit looking at them, listening to the way "the Jack of Hearts and Queen of Spades whisper dismally about their buried love," as it says in the same sonnet:

> Le beau valet de coeur et la dame de pique
> causent sinistrement de leur amour défunts.

I'm tempted to walk across to the squalid, ramshackle building over there and drink porter upstairs with the girls. Smoke a tangy pipe and play a hand with the madam and give her good advice about her rheumatism. She was here last week, complaining about her problems, fat and flourishing. She wore a heavy gold brooch under her double chin and paid five crowns in cash. She'd be flattered by a return visit.

The doorbell rang. Now Kristin is answering it. . . What could it be? I've said I'm not seeing anyone today. . . A detective? . . . Pretending to be ill, appearing as a patient. . . Come on in, old fellow, I'll certainly take care of you. . .

Kristin opened the door a crack and tossed a letter with black borders onto the table. An invitation to attend the funeral. . .

❦

My action, well. . . "If you'd like the story in heroic verse, Sir, it will cost eight shillings. . ."

AUGUST 25

In a dream I saw figures from my youth. I saw the girl I kissed one Midsummer night long ago, when I was young and hadn't killed anyone. I saw other young girls, too, who belonged to our circle back then; one who was confirmed the same year I finished secondary school and always wanted to discuss religion; another, older than I, who liked to stand whispering with me in the twilight behind a jasmine hedge in our garden. And another who always made fun of me but became nasty and furious and sobbed uncontrollably once when I made fun of her. . . They were pale in the pale twilight, and they made signs to each other when I drew near. I wanted to talk to them, but they turned away and didn't answer. In my dream I thought: that's completely natural—they don't recognize me, I've changed so much. But simultaneously I realized I was fooling myself and that they recognized me perfectly well.

When I awakened I burst into tears.

AUGUST 26

The funeral was today, in Jacob's Church.

I went there: I wanted to see her. I wanted to see if I could catch a glimpse of her shining eyes through the veil. But she sat deeply bowed under the black head covering and didn't raise her eyes.

The officiator drew on Syrak's words: "From morning until evening the time changeth, and all things are speedy before the Lord." He's considered a man of the world, and it's true I've often seen his gleaming pate in the best seats of the theater, his white hands discretely lifted in applause. But he's a celebrated preacher, known for his eloquence, and clearly he himself was deeply moved by the ancient words that through untold generations have been uttered at untimely deaths and hastily opened graves and that are such a harrowing expression of human beings' dread of the unknown hand that casts a shadow over their world and enigmatically brings them day and night and life and death. "Inertia and immutability are not granted unto us," said the minister. "That would not serve us well; it would not be possible, not even

endurable. The law of change is not merely that of death: it is first and foremost the law of life. And nevertheless each time we are faced by change, we are just as taken aback and shudder just as deeply when we see it so suddenly manifest and so at odds with what we had imagined . . . It should not be so, my brothers. We should think: The Lord knew that the fruit was ripe, though it did not appear so to us, and let it fall into His hand. . ." I felt my eyes grow moist and buried my face in my hat to conceal my emotion. At that moment I nearly forgot what I knew about why the fruit had so hastily ripened and fallen. . . Or more precisely: I felt that deep down, I knew no more about this than anyone else. I merely had some familiarity with the most immediate reasons and circumstances, but beyond them the long chain of cause and effect vanished into oblivion. I felt that my "action" was a link in a chain, a surge of a wave, a link and a surge that had begun long before my first conscious thought and long before the day my father first looked with desire at my mother. I could feel the law of necessity, feel it physically, like a shiver in the marrow of my bones. I felt no guilt. There is no guilt. The shiver was the same sensation I sometimes feel from solemn, majestic music or solitary, elevated thoughts.

I hadn't been in a church for years. I remembered how at fourteen or fifteen I'd sat in these very pews, clenching my teeth in fury at the fat scoundrel at the altar in his absurd get-up, thinking to myself that this hoax might last for twenty, even thirty more years. Once, during a long, boring sermon I decided to become a minister myself. I thought the ones I'd seen and heard were miserable representatives of the profession and that I'd be able to do all that much better than they did. I would attain great heights, become a bishop, then archbishop. And when I'd become archbishop—then there'd be entertaining sermons! Then people would flock to Uppsala Cathedral! But even before the minister said "amen" my career was over: I had a good friend at school with whom I discussed everything; I was in love with a girl; and then there was my mother. To become bishop I'd have to lie and put on an act even for them, and that was impossible. There have to be some people with whom one can be sincere. . . Oh, Lord, that was then, in those days of innocence. . . It's strange to sit here trying to recapture a mood, a way of thinking, from long ago. This sort of thing makes one feel the passage of time. The law of change, as the preacher said (for that matter he'd stolen it from some Ibsen play). It's like examining an old photograph of yourself. And I also thought: how much longer can I still have left to meander without purpose through this world of riddles and dreams and inexplicable phenomena? Perhaps twenty years, perhaps more. . . Who will I be in twenty years? If, at sixteen, through some sort of hocus pocus I'd had a vision

of my life as it is now, how would I have felt? Who will I be in twenty years, in ten? What will I then think of my present-day life? These past days I've been waiting for the Furies. They haven't come. I don't think there are any. But who knows. . . Perhaps they're not in a hurry. Perhaps they think they have plenty of time. Who knows what they could do to me over time? Who will I be ten years from now?

And so my thoughts flitted about like speckled butterflies while the ceremony drew to a close. The doors of the church were opened, people surged toward the entrance while the bells pealed, the coffin shook and pitched like a ship as it was carried out, and an autumn wind blew into my face. Outside the sky was mostly gray, with a weak, pale sun. I myself felt somewhat gray and weak and pale, the way you do from sitting cooped up so long in a church, especially for a funeral or communion service. I went to the bath house at Malmtorg Street to take a Finnish sauna.

Once undressed and in the sauna I heard a familiar voice:

"It's as hot and cozy here as a small compartment of hell. Stina! Rubdown in three minutes!"

It was Markel. He was sitting curled up on a platform just under the ceiling, partially hiding his gnawed-off bones behind a fresh *Evening News*.

"Don't look at me," he said when he caught sight of me. "Priests and scribes shouldn't be seen naked, according to Ecclesiastes."

I wound a wet towel around my head and stretched out on a bench.

"Speaking of priests," he went on, "I noticed Pastor Gregorius was buried today. Perhaps you were at the service?"

"Yes, I've just come from there."

"I was on duty at the paper when the news of his death came in. The man who'd written the article had sensationalized the story and mixed your name up in it. I thought that was uncalled for. I know you're not particularly fond of publicity. I rewrote the whole thing and crossed most of it out. As you know, our paper represents an enlightened point of view and doesn't make much of a fuss when a minister has a heart attack. But a few kind words had to said nevertheless, and that gave me quite a bit of trouble. 'Warm personality' was an obvious choice, but that wasn't enough. Then it occurred to me that given the way he died, he must have had a fatty heart or something like that, and lo—my characterization was complete: 'a warm personality with an expansive heart'."

"My dear friend," I said, "you have an enviable mission in life."

"Indeed—and don't you laugh at it!" he responded. "Let me tell you something: there are three kinds of human beings: thinkers, scribblers, and cattle. In secret I count among the scribblers most of those who are con-

sidered thinkers and poets, and most of the scribblers belong among the cattle, but that's not the point. The duty of the thinkers is to figure out the truth. But there's a secret about the truth that oddly enough isn't widely known, though it seems to me it should be clear as day. It's as follows: the truth is like the sun. Its value to us depends entirely on our keeping the correct distance from it. If the thinkers had their way, they'd steer our planet directly into the sun and burn us to a crisp. It's scarcely surprising that their activities periodically make the cattle so anxious that they cry, 'Put out the sun, damn it, put it out.' The task for us scribblers is to preserve the correct and beneficial distance to the truth. A really good scribbler, and there aren't many of them, can reason with the thinkers and feel with the cattle. It's our duty to protect the thinkers from the fury of the cattle and the cattle from too strong doses of the truth. But I confess that the latter is the easier of the two duties and the one that we ordinarily do best, and I also confess that along the way we receive invaluable assistance from a slew of spurious thinkers and intelligent cattle. . ."

"Dear Markel," I replied, "your words are wise, and despite the fact that I have a dim suspicion you place me neither among the thinkers nor the scribblers but in the third category, it would be a great pleasure to have dinner with you. That confounded day when I ran into the pastor at the water stand I'd been chasing all over looking for you with precisely that in mind. Are you free today? We could drive out to Hasselbacken. . . ?"

"An excellent idea," said Markel. "That idea alone would place you among the thinkers. There are thinkers who have the savvy to hide among the cattle. That's the most subtle kind, and I've always accounted you one of them. At what time? Ah, six o'clock—excellent."

I went home to free myself of the black trousers and white cravat. At home a pleasant surprise awaited me: the new dark gray suit that I'd ordered the previous week was ready and had been delivered. A blue vest with white polka-dots went with it. It's hard to imagine a more appropriate suit for dinner at Hasselbacken on a lovely late summer evening. But I was somewhat uneasy about Markel's appearance. He's quite unpredictable along those lines; one day he can be dressed like a diplomat, the next like a tramp—after all, he knows everyone and moves just as freely in public as in his own rooms. My uneasiness wasn't due to vanity or concern for how others would react: I'm a well-known man with an established position, and I can eat dinner at Hasselbacken with a cab driver if it pleases me; as for Markel, I'm always honored by his company regardless of what he wears. But it offends my aesthetic sense to see careless attire at a finely laid table in an elegant restaurant. The pleasure is diminished by half. There are great men who like to underscore their greatness by going around dressed as rag pickers: that sort of thing is indecent.

I was supposed to meet Markel at Tornberg's clock. I felt lighthearted and free, younger, renewed, as if I'd recovered from an illness. There was a hint in the fresh autumn air of a fragrance I associated with my youth. Perhaps it was the cigarette I was smoking. I'd gotten hold of a brand I was fond of long ago but hadn't smoked in many years. . . I found Markel in buoyant high spirits, wearing a cravat that looked like a scaly green snakeskin, and overall turned out in such a way that King Solomon in all his glory couldn't have been as elegant as he. We climbed onto a cab; the driver saluted with the whip, gave it a flick to stimulate himself and the horse, and drove off.

I'd asked Markel to phone ahead and reserve a table at the edge of the veranda—he has more authority there than I do. We passed the time with a shot of akvavit, a couple of sardines and some olives while deciding on the menu: potage à la chasseur, fillet of sole, quail, fruit. Chablis; Mumm extra dry; Manzanilla.

"You weren't at the Rubins' last Thursday?" asked Markel. "The hostess missed you a great deal. She said you have such a pleasant way of keeping quiet."

"I had a cold, it was completely out of the question. Stayed home and played solitaire all morning, and at dinnertime went to bed. Who was there?"

"A whole menagerie. Birck among others. He's managed to get rid of his tapeworm. Rubin explained how that came about: some time ago Birck swore a solemn vow to quit his government job and focus exclusively on literature. And when the tapeworm got wind of this, the intelligent animal likewise swore a solemn vow and took off for greener pastures."

"Well, is he serious about it? Birck, I mean?"

"No. He'll content himself with having taken a stand and stay with the Customs Authority. And now, of course, he wants it to seem as if it was just a ruse. . ."

I thought I caught a glimpse of Klas Recke's face over at a table far away. It really was he. He was in a party of four with another man and two ladies. I didn't know any of them.

"Who is Recke with over there?" I asked Markel.

He turned around, but couldn't catch sight of either Recke or his companions. The noise around us rose, competing with the orchestra, which was playing the Boulanger March. Markel's face grew dark. He's a passionate supporter of Dreyfus and regarded this musical piece as an anti-Dreyfus demonstration arranged by a coterie of lieutenants.

"Klas Recke?" he resumed. "I don't see him. But no doubt he's here cozying up to his future inlaws. It will soon be clear sailing for him, I think. A girl with money has cast her eyes on him—very beautiful eyes, by the way. But speaking of beautiful eyes, my dinner partner at the Rubins was the young Miss Mertens. A charming girl, quite enchanting. I've never met her there before. I don't recall how it came up, but I happened to mention you, and as soon as it was clear to her that we were close friends she talked of nothing but you and asked me all sorts of questions I couldn't answer . . . Then all of a sudden she stopped and blushed out to the tips of her ears. The only reasonable explanation is that she's in love with you."

"Your conclusions are a bit hasty," I interjected.

But I was thinking about what he said about Recke. I didn't know what to believe: Markel talks a lot of nonsense that's just hot air—it's a weakness of his. And I didn't want to ask. But he kept on talking about Miss Mertens, and with such enthusiasm that I felt inclined to tease him:

"Clearly you're in love with her yourself, your heart's on your sleeve! Take her, my dear Markel—I won't be a dangerous rival. I'm easily shoved aside."

He shook his head. He was somber and pale.

"I'm out of the reckoning," he responded.

I said nothing, and we fell silent. The waiter poured the champagne with the solemnity of a temple attendant. The orchestra started playing the prelude from *Lohengrin*. The clouds from earlier in the day had blown away and were clustered in rosy bands at the horizon, but above us the sky had deepened into an endless dark blue, blue like this wonderful blue music. I listened to it and forgot myself. My thoughts and preoccupations of the last few weeks and the action to which they had led seemed to float away into the distant blue as if they already were gone, as if they were unreal, something separate and apart that would never trouble me again. I felt that I would never again will such a thing or commit such an act. Was it all an illusion? But still, I'd acted according to my best judgment. I'd weighed and tested, for and against. I'd gotten to the bottom of the matter. Was that an illusion? It didn't matter. The music now came to the mysterious leitmotif: "Thou shalt not ask!" And in this mystical series of notes and these four words it seemed to me I could find the sudden revelation of an ancient and hidden wisdom. "Thou shalt not ask!" Don't get to the bottom of things: if you do, you yourself will founder. Don't seek the truth: you won't find it and will lose yourself. "Thou shalt not ask!" The amount of truth that is beneficial will come to you with no effort; it's mixed with delusions and lies, but that's for the sake of your health—in pure form it would burn your insides. Don't try to cleanse your soul of lies—many other things will be

lost, too, things you haven't considered. You'll lose your bearings and everything that's dear to you. "Thou shalt not ask!"

"When appealing to Parliament to subsidize the opera," Markel said, "one always has to point out that music has 'an ennobling effect.' I myself wrote some such nonsense in an editorial a year or so ago. There's actually some truth to it, though it's expressed in translation to make it comprehensible for our legislators. In the original language it would be, 'Music stimulates and strengthens, intensifies and confirms: confirms the saint in his innocence, the warrior in his courage, the debaucher in his vice.' Bishop Ambrosius forbade chromatic progressions in church music because in his personal experience they awakened impure thoughts. In the 1730s there was a pastor in Halle who found clear confirmation of the Augsburg Confession in the music of Handel. I own the book. And a good Wagnerian can base an entire philosophy of life on a motif from *Parsifal*."

We'd reached the coffee. I handed Markel my cigar case. He took a cigar and examined it closely.

"This cigar has a serious look about it," he said. "It's definitely the real thing. In fact I've been somewhat anxious about the cigar question. As a physician I'm sure you know that the best cigars are the worst for you. So I was worried you'd give me some damned wretched stogie."

"My dear friend," I replied, "from a health standpoint this entire meal is a mockery of good sense. And as for the cigar, it's a product of the esoteric branch of the tobacco industry. It appeals to the elite."

The crowd around us had thinned out, the electric lights were turned up, and outside it was beginning to grow dark.

"Ah," Markel said suddenly, "now I can see Recke, in the mirror. And indeed, just as I suspected, he's in the company of that young lady. I don't know the others in the party."

"Well, and who is she?"

"Miss Lewinson, the daughter of the stockbroker who died a year or so ago. . . She has half a million."

"And you think he's marrying for money?"

"By no means, of course not. Klas Recke is a gentleman. You can be sure he'll see to it that first he falls passionately in love with her and then marries for love. He'll manage that so well that the money will virtually take him by surprise."

"Do you know her?"

"I've met her a few times. She's very attractive, but her nose it just a bit too sharp, and her intellect, too, for that matter. A young lady who with uncompromising integrity tacks between Spencer and Nietzsche and says, "Here and there that one's correct, but here and there the other

one is right on target"—she disturbs me a bit, but not in the right way . . . What did you say?"

I hadn't said a thing. I sat lost in thought, and possibly my lips had moved with my thoughts, perhaps I'd mumbled something to myself without noticing. . . I could see her before me, the one who is constantly on my mind. I could see her walking back and forth in the twilight on an empty street, waiting for someone who never came. And I mumbled to myself, "Dearest, this is your dilemma. This you must get through by yourself. In this matter I can't help you, and even if I could, I wouldn't want to. Here you must be strong." And I also thought, "It's a good thing you're free and on your own. It will make it easier for you to get through this."

"No, Glas, this won't do at all," said Markel with a worried expression. "How long do you expect us to sit here without a drop of whisky?"

I rang for the waiter and ordered whisky and a couple of throws, since it was beginning to grow chilly. Recke and his party left, passing by our table without noticing us. He didn't notice anything at all. He was walking with the deliberate step of a man who's set his sights on a particular goal. A chair was in his path; he didn't see it and knocked it over. The place had emptied out around us. The wind in the trees brought a touch of autumn. The twilight deepened and grew impenetrable. And with our throws draped over us like red capes, we stayed there for a long time, talking about matters both lowly and elevated, and Markel said things that were far too true to be captured in writing on paper and that I've forgotten.

AUGUST 27

Yet another day has passed; night is here again, and I'm sitting at my window.

Oh, my dear one, left alone!

Do you already know? Are you suffering? Do you stare with waking eyes into the night? Are you in anguish, tossing in your bed?

Are you weeping? Or have you run out of tears?

But perhaps he'll fool her as long as possible. He's considerate. He takes into consideration that she's mourning her husband. He hasn't let her suspect anything yet. She's sleeping soundly, completely unaware.

My dear, you must be strong when it comes. You must get over it. You'll see that much in life still awaits you.

You must be strong.

SEPTEMBER 4

The days come and go, one like the other.

And promiscuity, I note, still flourishes. Today, for a change, it was a man who wanted me to rescue his fiancée from her predicament. He brought up old memories and Headmaster Snuffy from the school out in Ladugårdslandet.

I was implacable. I recited my oath as a physician. That impressed him to such a degree that he offered me two hundred crowns in cash and an IOU for the same amount, plus his unswerving friendship for life. This was almost touching; he didn't seem very well off.

I threw him out.

SEPTEMBER 7

From darkness to darkness.

Life, I don't understand you. Sometimes I feel a spiritual vertigo, a whispering and murmuring that warns me I've gone astray. I felt that way just now, when I took out my report of the court proceedings: those diary pages when I questioned both the voices within me, the one who willed it and the one who didn't. I read through it again and again, and no matter what it seemed to me that the voice I finally obeyed was the one that rang true and the other one sounded hollow. The other voice may have been the wiser one, but I'd have lost the last shred of respect for myself if I'd obeyed it.

And yet—yet—

I've started dreaming about the pastor. That was predictable, of course, and that's why it surprises me. I thought I'd be spared simply because I'd predicted it.

❦

I gather King Herod didn't like it when prophets went around awakening the dead. In other respects he held them in high regard, but this aspect of their activity he found distasteful. . .

❦

Life, I don't understand you. But I don't claim it's your fault. I consider it more likely I'm a bad son than that you're an inadequate mother.

And I'm finally beginning to suspect that perhaps we're not meant to understand life. All these furious attempts to explain and understand, this ongoing quest for the truth, may be a dead end. We bless the sun

because we live the exact distance from it that is beneficial. A few million miles closer or farther away and we would burn or freeze to death. What if the truth is like the sun?

The old Finnish myth says that he who sees the face of God must die.

And Oedipus—he solved the riddle of the Sphinx and became the most wretched of men.

Don't try to solve riddles! Don't inquire! Don't think! Thought is a corrosive acid. At first you think it will only corrode what's rotten and diseased and should be removed. But thought doesn't proceed that way: it corrodes arbitrarily! It begins with the spoils you toss to it willingly and gladly, but don't think it will rest content with this. It won't end until the last thing you hold dear has been gnawed to pieces.

Perhaps I shouldn't have thought so much; instead I should have continued my studies. "The sciences are beneficial because they prevent human beings from thinking." A scientist said that. Perhaps I should also have lived a full life, as they say, or lived it up, as they also say. I should have gone skiing and played soccer and had a happy, healthy time of it with women and friends. I should have married and had children, creating responsibilities for myself. These are things to cling to that sustain you. Perhaps it was a mistake that I didn't involve myself in politics and show up at voting rallies. Our country has claims on us, too. Well, perhaps there's still time for that. . .

The first commandment: Thou shalt not understand overmuch.

But the person who understands that commandment has already understood overmuch.

I'm dizzy—everything's going round in circles.

From darkness to darkness.

SEPTEMBER 9

I never see her.

I often walk out onto Ship's Isle, solely because that's where I spoke to her last. This evening I stood up on the hill by the church, watching the sunset. It struck me how beautiful Stockholm is. I hadn't thought much about that before. The newspapers are always going on about how beautiful Stockholm is, so one doesn't pay much attention.

SEPTEMBER 20

At a dinner party at Mrs. P.'s today Recke's imminent engagement was mentioned as if it were common knowledge.

. . . I've become more and more impossible socially. I forget to respond when people talk to me. Often I don't hear what they say. I wonder if I'm starting to go deaf?

And all these masks! All of them wear masks. And what's more, it's their greatest virtue. I wouldn't want to see them unmasked. I wouldn't want to appear unmasked myself, either. Not to them!

But to whom?

I left as soon as I could. Walking home I felt chilly; the nights have suddenly grown cold. I think there's a harsh winter ahead.

As I walked I thought of her. I remembered the first time she came to me, asking for my help. How she suddenly bared herself and laid open her secret even though it wasn't necessary. How her cheeks burned then! And I remember telling her that things like that should be kept secret, and that she said, "I wanted to tell you. I wanted you to know who I am." What if I were to turn to her now, in my need, as she turned to me? Go to her and say, "I can't endure being the only one who knows who I am, wearing a mask in front of everyone, constantly! I have to reveal myself to *someone, one person* must know who I am. . ."

Oh, it would only drive both of us insane.

I wandered randomly through the streets. I came to the building where she lives. There was a light in one of her windows. No shades had been drawn; she doesn't need any. On the opposite side of the street are just large vacant lots filled with lumber and such; no one can look in. I couldn't see anything, either—no dark figure, no arm or hand moving, just the yellow light of the lamp on the muslin curtain. I thought: what can she be doing now, what occupies her? Reading a book or sitting with her head in her hands thinking, or fixing her hair for the night. . . Oh, if only I were there, if only I could be there with her. . . Lie there watching her, waiting while she fixes her hair in front of the mirror and slowly loosens her clothes. . . But not as a beginning, not for the first time, but as part of a long-standing, pleasant routine. Everything that begins also comes to an end. This would have neither beginning nor end.

I don't know how long I stood there, motionless as a statue. An uneven bank of clouds, dimly lit by the moon, passed over my head like a distant landscape. I was cold. The street was empty. A street-walker appeared out of the darkness and came toward me. Halfway past she stopped, turned around, and looked at me with hungry eyes. I shook my head; then she left and vanished into the darkness.

Suddenly I heard a key turn in the lock of the door; it opened and a dark figure slipped out. . . Was it really she. . . ? Leaving in the middle

of the night without putting out the lamp. . . ? What could this be? I felt my heart freeze. I wanted to see where she went. Slowly I followed her.

She only went to the mailbox on the corner, tossed a letter into it, and quickly hurried back. I could see her face under a street light—it was white as a sheet.

I don't know whether she saw me.

❦

Never will she be mine. I never made her cheek blush, nor was I the one who'd made it turn so pale. And never will she, with anguished heart, cross the street at night with a letter addressed to me.

Life has passed me by.

OCTOBER 7

Autumn ravages my trees. The chestnut outside the window is already bare and black. The clouds pass over the rooftops in heavy clusters and I never see the sun.

I've put up new curtains in my study: plain white. When I awakened this morning at first I thought it had snowed; the light in the room was exactly the same as after the first snowfall. I thought I could smell the newly fallen snow.

And soon the snow will come. I can feel it in the air.

It will be welcome. Let it come. Let it fall.

NOTES

Grigori Aleksandrovich Potemkin (1739–1791), Russian statesman and field marshal, was a favorite of Catherine the Great (1762–1796). In 1787, when Catherine sailed down the Dneipir to inspect development in newly colonized areas of southern Russia, where Potemkin was Governor General, he built sham villages—a sort of extended theater set—along the river banks to impress her.

Katarina von Bora, a former nun, became Luther's wife.

In Sweden, **Midsummer Eve**, the shortest night of the year, is a holiday with almost magical connotations, traditionally associated with love and love-making.

Felix Faure, the president of France, died in 1899.

Stallmästaregården, a restaurant dating back to the eighteenth century and still flourishing today, is located just beyond Norrtull, the northern city gates. **August Strindberg** (1849–1912), an older contemporary of Söderberg's and Sweden's best-known writer internationally, describes a party held there in his youth in two separate works, the story "Dygdens lön" in *Giftas* (1885; "The Reward of Virtue," *Getting Married*), and the second volume of his fictional autobiography, *Tjänstekvinnans son* (1886; *The Son of a Servant*).

Hans Christian Andersen's story "Skyggen" ("The Shadow") was first published in 1847.

Carl Michael Bellman (1740–1795), Sweden's most beloved poet of all time, set many of his texts to popular tunes of the day. The exact site of **Bellman's grave** in St. Klara churchyard is unknown, but in 1851 the Swedish Academy placed a memorial stone near the entrance to the church.

Madame de Maintenon (1635–1719) was first the mistress and later the second wife of Louis XIX, King of France.

The **Per Hallström** story alluded to is "Göken" (The cuckoo), from the collection *Thanatos* (1900). In the original, the small boy confuses the abstract noun 'lyckan' (happiness, fortune, luck) with the more concrete and familiar 'lyktan' (lantern, lamp, light). The line quoted comes from

a familiar child's prayer, roughly analogous to "Now I lay me down to sleep," that reads in full:

Gud, som haver barnen kär,
se till mig, som liten är.
Vart min väg i världen vänder
står min lycka i Guds händer.
Lyckan kommer, lyckan går.
Den Gud älskar, lyckan får.

God, who loves all children dear,
Look after me, for I am small.
Wherever in the world I turn,
My happiness rests in God's hands.
Happiness comes, happiness goes,
The one God loves, happiness knows.

"The one with the whip," the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), wrote *Also sprach Zarathustra* (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) in 1881–1882. In this treatise he formulates his conception of the Übermensch (usually translated 'Superman', thanks to G. B. Shaw) and proclaims that since God is dead, human beings must find their own meaning in the here and now.

Viktor Rydberg's poem "Tomten" (The Christmas elf) has been committed to memory by generations of Swedish school children. First published in 1881, both the text and Jenny Nyström's accompanying illustration helped establish the *tomte* as a Swedish analogue to St. Nicolas or Santa Claus. In his novels, Rydberg (1828–1895) often addressed religious and philosophical issues in a historical setting. He turned to the history of religion in nonfiction works as well, asserting in *Bibelns lära om Kristus* (1862; The Bible's teaching about Christ) that the divinity of Jesus is not supported by the evidence of the Gospels. He also published several works about Nordic mythology.

The haunting **flute melody** is from Mascagni's one-act *verismo* opera *Cavalleria Rusticana,* 1890.

Both Raskolnikov, in ***Crime and Punishment*** (1866), by Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevski (1821–1881), and the murderers in Zola's ***Thérèse Raquin*** (1867), eventually suffer self-induced psychological punishment in the aftermath of their misdeeds.

In 1894, the French army officer **Alfred Dreyfus** (1859–1935), accused of selling military secrets to the Germans, was convicted of treason and

imprisoned on Devil's Island. He was later released and exonerated when evidence revealed that he had been the victim of conspiracy and anti-Semitism. The Dreyfus affair became a *cause cèlebre*, a rallying point for liberals and progressives throughout Europe. When the actual perpetrator, Major Esterhazy, was courtmartialed but acquitted in 1898, the novelist and social thinker Émile Zola (1840–1902) published "J'Accuse," a ringing denunciation of the verdict and of the French military establishment, and again affirmed Dreyfus's innocence. Söderberg, drawing on his own experience in the novel *Den allvarsamma leken* (1912; The serious game), describes how a group of Stockholm journalists stayed up half the night translating Zola's polemic so that it could appear as a special supplement in the morning paper. Söderberg also refers to the Dreyfus affair elsewhere in his production, most notably in "Kyrkofadern Papinianus," *Historietter* (1898; "Patriarch Papinianus," *Short Stories by Hjalmar Söderberg*).

The figures glimpsed outside the **Royal Dramatic Theater** are Nils Personne, the chief administrator, and the influential director Ludvig Josephson, who died in 1899.

The 1857 collection *Les Fleur du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), by **Pierre Charles Baudelaire** (1821–1867), includes the sonnet "Spleen (I)," from which the lines are taken. Glas misquotes one of them: "L'âme d'un vieux poete. . . " (the soul of an old poet. . .) here becomes "L'ombre. . ." (the shadow/ ghost. . .). The change further underscores the parallel between the poem and Glas's own situation as well as to the Andersen story.

Given in the original Danish in Söderberg's text, the ironic quotation about **heroic verse** is from Ludvig Holberg's play *Barselstuen* (1724; The lying-in room).

"The law of change" is a leitmotif in **Henrik Ibsen's** play *Lille Eyolf* (*Little Eyolf*), published in 1894.

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