

SPELLBOUND

(Prose Version)

By Victoria Benedictsson

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I cannot write it properly yet. It's cast down upon the paper in trembling haste and almost without regard to form.

There's an empty space. I cannot fill it. It's like etching with the point of a needle on one's own heart.

UPON INVESTIGATION of the papers of the deceased, the following was found:

I'm sitting with a red notebook in my hand. A little book, hardly as big as my hand; not half of its pages are filled with writing, and yet they contain my whole life story: the story of a secret, stolen happiness that I am paying for with my entire life.

No one knows like the one who is about to die the need to be true, not to conceal anything, to unburden one's self of all he has been carrying about and hiding -- just to talk, to talk and confess until everything is said. I have nothing to confess, no friend upon whose knee I can hide my face as I speak, and yet I cannot take my story with me into death. It's as if it were a debt that I was forced to pay to life, and this is why I am writing these pages. Just as the drowning person, in one minute, sees his life slip by, I want yet another time to see all this that's brought me to where I am standing now. I see it all now with a calm, fatalistic compassion.

Someone will read this eventless story: who, I do not know, nor do I worry about that. The one who is to die is quite indifferent to everything concerning the living. I am not worried either about whether or not it is interesting. But I hope I can write it in such a way that it is understood that I cannot live -- that since everything has happened the way I'm now

describing, I must end as I do. That there was something in our two natures that made things go this way.

My earlier history is not important here. It would explain the development of my character, but then I would have to include too many persons and events. What is relevant for me is only to show why the world of the living is not my own.

I'm not defending my life; I'm defending my death.

I HAD NEVER SEEN PARIS, and I came there quite alone. As my brother is a well-known Swedish painter, it was not difficult for me to gain entry among the Scandinavian artists, but according to what they told me, there was not the cohesion and fellowship in the artists' world that there was in the previous years. Two or three socialized with each other, and I was first with one little coterie, then with another.

For the most part, however, I went about on my own. It was as if it were a break. I had for a long time been taking care of a sister who suffered from a nervous disease which finally had broken out into open insanity. My mother had died shortly after my sister was brought to the mental hospital, and the breakup of the home, the absence left by my mother, and the awful impressions of the delirium of the mentally ill had felt like a crushing weight upon my mind. All this was still too new, and it was as if I needed a quiet time in order to be cured.

The one I liked best was a young painter and one of my brother's closest friends. He had a kind of sullen, serious good will in his manner that seemed to have a salutary effect upon me, and you sensed that you could be silent in his company. He, like I, was a newcomer to Paris, and we often went out together. He called it a "moderated solitude."

One day we went through the sculpture section of the Luxembourg Gallery, and I stopped in front of a work that never would have been possible for me to bypass without lingering a few minutes.

I will not mention the name of the sculptor -- you'd guess it anyhow.

"Isn't it strange that in five years he hasn't done a single major work?" asked my companion.

"Yes. How can that happen?"

"People thought that the last one (which he had in the salon a few years ago and which

was sold to Berlin) was weaker than his others; they said he'd regressed. I think that's what has held him back."

"He hasn't exhibited anything since then?"

"Yes, portrait busts. Admirable."

"Nothing else?"

"No, nothing else. But I think he has immortalized all of Europe's princesses in marble. As you know, his strength is in female figures. With a man, he never completely succeeds."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, we met in Berlin."

"What's he like?"

"He makes an exceptionally good impression."

After that day there was an end to our walks: I came down with a fever, something like typhus, and when I started to get well, it was time for the young painter to leave Paris.

Because we soon were to part, and because I was so alone, he used to come by more frequently than otherwise, and often he had flowers or fruit with him. It was getting on into autumn. A few days before he was to travel, he came up to me quite out of breath.

"Can you imagine who has come to Paris?"

"No."

He mentioned the name of the sculptor.

"Oh!"

"Yes. And he's coming here."

"It's not possible!"

"Yes, I met him quite by accident just outside here. He has a studio in the neighborhood.

I was walking with my hands full of these." He showed her the flowers.

"Well?"

"He laughed and said: 'Oh, really? You're in love? And still in the flower stage?' But I told him I wasn't in love but was just bringing flowers to a countrywoman who was ill. And then I told him that you were Swedish and a sister of our well-known painter. He knew of you."

"Impossible."

"No. He said he'd heard your brother mention you, and he asked if it would please you if he were to look up, since you're still weak and can't go out. I answered yes right away, and he's coming tomorrow right before lunch."

I grew tired. It was as if a surprise had gripped me. I had always admired him so highly, considered him one of the most eminent of the living artists, but I had never imagined the possibility of meeting him. He was beyond my circle, almost beyond my world.

"Then I would be unhappy," I said in a relatively frail tone of voice.

"Why! And here I thought that I would make you so happy!"

"Well, I speak such poor French, and when I get flustered, it's even worse than otherwise."

"Nonsense. You speak much better than I."

I merely smiled, for the praise was faint.

"Besides, he's hardly a Frenchman himself."

"He? Of course."

"He's a half-breed. Didn't you know that?"

"No."

"His maternal grandmother was Norwegian, and his paternal grandfather was a Pole. It's only on his father's side that he's pure French. I know he speaks Norwegian. So he understands Swedish too."

"Impossible."

"Certainly not. He has a Russian's ear for languages."

I drew a worried breath.

"So now," said my friend consolingly, "it's a shame to say so, but he understands my Swedish better than my French."

"Well, then. But so you know, I cannot converse."

"Then you can be silent. That I know!" the painter broke out in irritation.

"Yes, it's possible with you, but --"

"Then it's much too stupid to judge such a man as if he were a German philistine. You think conversational gifts are required! Be simple and natural, be a *human being*, that's all that's necessary."

I had to conceal my apprehensions to myself and then came the following day.

I'd arranged everything as neatly as possible in a medium-sized Parisian *pension*. There were roses on the table, and I'd turned the chairs so that, I reckoned, my guests would sit facing the light and I myself would be in the shadow. I was so worried that I'd hardly been able to keep quiet. With my taciturn, stiff demeanor, I would flounder helplessly, I knew it, and he'd go off with the most unfavorable, unfriendly impression of me, without an inkling that there doesn't exist an artist individuality in the world for whom I harbor more sympathy and admiration.

I'd heard talk of his being a perfect salon hero, almost a man of the court, he was accustomed to intellectual conversation with distinguished ladies -- and I -- an unknown little Swedish provincial miss, a mousy little character!

There was a knock on the door. He was alone.

I thanked him in my groping French for having come, and as I extended my hand to him, I looked at his face.

So completely different from what I had imagined! Nothing of the polished imprint of Paris; not the blue, beard bottom or the black moustache I'd imagined -- none of the acid cold courtesy.

A sullen seriousness not outdone by a smile, a squinting glance searchingly fixed on me, plus rough black hair and a short-clipped beard were what I observed.

"My young friend wanted to come with," he said in Norwegian which acquired a remarkably foreign character through his French pronunciation, "but I told him I'd like to introduce himself."

I mumbled something once again about his goodness. I couldn't get over my surprise in finding him so different from what I'd imagined.

"Have you been ill? Sit down, you're quite pale."

It was he who offered me a seat and not vice versa, and he immediately turned his chair so he could see my face in full light, as I could see his.

"I want to look at you first," he said, regarding me as calmly as if I'd been a work of sculpture he'd inspected.

I fell silent and met his gaze. I too was pleased to look at him. It was a sight that I could not easily tire of seeing. It looked as if all human sufferings had etched their lines there, but as if they'd all become evened out and subdued by the artist's calm self-consciousness and harmonic mental equilibrium.

"I like you."

I came to smile sadly, as a woman always smiles when she thinks it's been a long time since she was young and called beautiful.

"Do you think I just want to say something polite to you?" he said harshly. "It would never occur to me."

"I don't think that of you either."

"No, I usually say what I think, and I like you."

What was I supposed to reply to this! He continued to look at me, and I didn't care. It seemed to me so natural that he would not be like other people. It also gave me a feeling of freedom: we had become quits of all forms of social life. We were two human beings.

"How old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"Then . . . I am eight years older. But if life were measured by intensity instead of duration, I think mine would be twice as long as yours."

"I think so too."

"You look much younger."

I knew he was not telling the truth, but it was far too banal to contradict him. How could he condescend to such! I just looked at him.

He noticed my thought.

"That's a fact I'm stating, not a compliment I'm telling you. What does it matter, whether you look old or young. Eight years more or eight years less, what difference does it make? It's your face I like."

He spoke with vexed displeasure, and it hurt me. Perhaps he saw that.

My hand lay on the table, and he put his on top of it. Not as any sign of tenderness but merely as if it were a place to put his. It didn't occur to me to withdraw mine.

"Tell me something about yourself," he said after a pause as he raised up my hand and put it down again, mechanically as one plays with a piece of needlework.

The more I saw him, the more it occurred to me that two of us were so different, so alien to each other's nature, as if each of us were from his or her own planet, yet I did not feel shy. It was as if he could see right into my soul and as if I voluntarily admitted that to him. I felt that he would regard what I could call events -- major events in my life -- as nothing. And in my own eyes it suddenly became so. My entire past seemed to me like one long bore.

"There's nothing to tell," I answered for this reason.

"Haven't you really been alive?" he said after a moment.

"What do you call it otherwise?"

"Vegetating."

I felt in some way he was right: that I was like an organism, a plant that had been standing in the same soil my entire life and merely absorbing nutrition from it. It was as if I belonged to a different class of creatures than he. "And your eyes look so wise and good anyhow," he said. "Do you love your brother? He must be the one who has given you a bit of life."

"Yes. Before."

"Why not now?"

"He's married."

My guest smiled.

"Yes, that always stifles a person," he said. "Hasn't your brother ever spoken with you about me?"

"Yes, about your works. I've seen photographs of them."

"But we've met though!" he broke out, as if hurt.

"Yes, but later probably. I've not seen my brother in two years, and we seldom write. He was in Constantinople when my mother died, and that was too far to travel home."

"Oh? Your mother is dead?" He looked at my mourning dress.

"Yes."

"And you are quite alone?"

"Yes."

"You ought to get married."

I smiled. "Why, you just said that it always stifles a person."

"Yes, a *man*, but not a woman. And society being what it is, she has to get married. A woman alone ages early. She withers and dries up." There was something in his words that was

supportive of me, but not in his way of saying them. He spoke so calmly and naturally as if it were impossible to express himself differently.

I took my hand away and moved it down to my knee.

"You're not like your brother," he said, "I nearly said you seem more than he."

I laughed. He laughed too.

"It's only the stern features," he observed, "when you laugh, you take on a different appearance."

He sat looking at me with a childish curiosity.

"I do so like new people," he said, "from each face one learns something."

Then he asked me once again to say something about myself, and I gave him the outline of my life, but made it even more banal than it had been and stumbled through an instinctlike shyness about everything that had intervened deeply into it. It must have struck him as being incredibly flat.

"Of course, I knew you a bit before through your brother. He seems to care a lot about you."

"Yes, but how could he come to talk about me to *you*."

"I had a woman lover who resembled you."

Once again there was something that offended me about this manner he had of talking freely on everything as if he'd been speaking with a male acquaintance. I sensed that I was blushing. "It wasn't a model," he said hastily. "I don't think that I've had more than a single one of that kind of liaisons. If you knew her -- the one I mentioned just now -- you wouldn't feel insulted by the comparison. Her husband was a diplomat and employed in Vienna. She was one of the most beautiful women I'd seen."

I grew quiet. It was so evident that we too had different views on everything. He was just as alien to my world as I was to his.

"Don't you have any work?" he asked.

"Work?" I repeated. My thoughts flew irresolutely around about the crocheting and embroidery handiwork. "Yes." But then I understood what he meant before I'd answered.

"No. I only have occupation; no work."

"Yes, of course that's the way it always is with the women," he said and got up as if to leave. I also rose.

"He -- your friend -- said that he is soon going off?" he inquired.

"Yes, tomorrow."

"Then you'll feel as if the place is empty!"

"Yes, very."

"Would it amuse you if I came by and chatted away a few minutes for you sometime?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you!"

"Don't thank me so ardently," he replied, "don't believe that I'm doing it as a work of charity. As I said, I like you." And then he was serious again.

When he extended his hand to me in farewell, we looked at each other in the eyes one more time, as steadily and calmly as I'd ever felt two people could. I felt this was a person who never could stoop to an untruth. And I knew that if he asked me about anything, I would look him right into his surly face and answer only the truth. This was more than a gentleman of the salon -- it was a personality, it was more than an artist-individuality -- it was a character for better or worse.

Without a smile he raised my hand and kissed it. It happened so naturally that he did this.

When he'd gone and closed the door after him, I looked at this hand. He was accustomed to the elegant, fine, beautiful hands of the aristocrat ladies, and he had followed his custom. It was everything. And mine was lean and frozen after my illness.

I thought of his marble thought in the Luxembourg Gallery. It was as if it occurred to me only then who I had been talking with. And I'd meet him again!

With an attack of boisterous youth, I raised my hands and pressed my lips to the spot he had kissed.

AFTER THAT DAY there came many days, and none of them passed without his looking up to me a few moments in the afternoon, always around the same time so I could stay at home if I wanted to see him.

A couple of times he ran into some of my acquaintances. It seemed to annoy him, and he didn't seem to care to conceal it, but then usually he stayed away a few days, saying with a certain irritation that he had no right to keep me from my friends. In this way it happened that I gradually isolated myself almost completely so as not to need to lose out on his visits, which became dearer to me day by day.

An odder couple could not be imagined, and yet we seemed to suit each other. During the hour or half hour he gave me every day, it was almost exclusively he who spoke, following all his moods, sometimes roguish and full of little pranks as a boy, sometimes telling of his travels or about his past, telling about sorrow or wounded vanity, about trampled dreams of youth or his enemies' chess moves, fascinating through the incalculable shifts in his character and the easy, sensitive loveliness that he developed further day after day. He could fool me by laughing with a hundred funny little, witty whims, but never laughed himself; just smiled with a sly and smug little smile that was hidden by his beard and visible only from his eyes.

He often came to me just for company before venturing out to the evening's diversion, and I could understand that he lived a variegated life in the circles of artists and aristocrats who were a foreign world to me.

"I need distraction," he said. "I prefer to live in a constant fever when I'm not working. Work is the only thing that can give me peace of mind and pleasure." And so he quickly changed the subject.

I had decided to go into art history, and it pleased me incredibly, particularly as he had led my studies and was very satisfied when I worked hard. He could not endure my going around all day without anything to do except wait for his visits.

Sometimes we would go together on a walk before lunch, either in some museum or some place off the beaten track.

It had turned spring, and the salon had recently opened. We had gone there one day. He thought it was fun to see me there, he said. I was not so glad to go, for I took it as a criticism

of me; however, we had come to talk as usual and passed rather indifferently through the halls without referring to the catalogue.

Suddenly I stopped.

"What's that!" I cried out, captured by a picture whose power and fidelity to nature struck me so that I'd broken off in mid-conversation.

"That's a Woman Painter with Blue Apron and Brushes in Hand," answered my companion with contentious dryness.

"So I see!" I exclaimed in annoyance. "But just look how it's painted!"

"You don't have such bad judgement," he said.

I didn't want to exchange any more words with him when I heard he didn't want to give me information; I looked it up in the catalogue and saw that it was a self-portrait.

I almost forgot I was not alone, the portrait had gripped me so. It was executed with a sincerity and diligence that was surprising.

This woman was no longer young, she could well be my age or somewhat older, her blouse was turned down to a V-neck in order to leave her neck free during the work and was held together only by a loosely knotted sailor's scarf. Her neck was thin, but with a sinewy power that was not unpleasant but giving the impression of a certain nakedness. The face was boldly cut, with a pair of brown, bright eyes that seemed to fix on the observer, the mouth was broad with full red lips and was shaded by a light-bluish down. The chin was strong as a man's. The lean hands were painted masterfully. If this woman was flirting with anything, it was with the absence of all flirtation; she had recreated herself with almost brutal love of truth.

"Imagine such a portrait," I burst out.

"Yes, her fortune is made," said my escort, "People are noticing."

I continued to regard it in mute admiration.

"What does it tell you?" he said, with an odd intonation in his voice.

"That for this woman there is nothing in the world but courage and the joy of work. Everything else she has done away with."

He stuck his hand under my arm and led me away from the picture.

"That woman and I have made love to each other."

I quickly turned away and looked at his face; it had an expression I had never seen there before, like dreaming and resignation.

"Have made love to each other!"

"Yes."

We stood farther away in the hall but could still see the picture. She followed us with her eyes and smiled, so proud of her work.

"During that period I did the best works I probably ever will do," he said slowly, as if he were speaking of the dead.

"But why . . . why in all the world . . .? I looked at him almost in horror. I could not formulate my question.

"That's the way it goes, you slip away from each other," he said heavily.

Something like anguish gripped me.

"Not always?"

"Yes, always. And she hates me now."

We walked and turned without looking at the pictures. "We've lived together as comrades or as much more than that. Those times when I really produce something I'm always a hermit. During periods like that I can't bear to see more than one person, usually a woman."

"And when the work is completed?"

"Then things go the way they did with her."

We had turned around in order to start for the exit. I noticed that something amazing had come over me. I walked along thinking of this woman's life. It was as if he had understood my silence. "She's well provided for. She has her work, and you see how she manages it."

We walked slowly through the halls and along the broad steps of the industrial palace. "Every woman I really love means a new work to me," he added.

I couldn't help regarding him a bit mischievously. "So haven't you loved anyone the last years?"

"Yes, but there were too many," he replied letting go of my arm.

AFTER HE STARTED to visit me and I spent more time indoors, I had also done more to make things comfortable. I'd procured two rooms for myself instead of one, and I had rented a piano.

My living room was facing the boulevard -- one of the quiet boulevards on the left bank of the Seine -- and there was a little balcony from which the view was unimpeded. It pleased me to see how he lingered longer and longer when he visited me. His humor had become more uneven than before, or he inhibited it less since we'd become closer acquaintances. Sometimes he could be soft as a child, lean his forehead against my hands, and say: "I have sorrows, heavy sorrows, which you cannot understand. At least give me your compassion!"

One time quite by accident I came to say: "Aren't you working on anything?"

He jumped up, quite pale, and I thought he would hit me.

"Don't ask me about it!" he shouted out. "Oh, women can martyr a man to death and just stand looking at you with a friendly little smile as if they'd done no harm."

"Forgive me," I said slowly, since I noticed that I had caused him pain, though I didn't know its source.

"Forgive? Forgive?" he repeated, "well, what shall I forgive? But promise me never to ask about that anymore."

I didn't even dare to say yes, I was so afraid of touching with a word what he wanted to forget.

"Talk about anything. Tell me a story."

He had discovered my only talent. Playing all sorts of Swedish folk songs and dances. For a time I'd been driven by an all-out craze for collecting and now knew an endless supply of such music by heart and in all variations. In my repertoire there were also some Norwegian ones, and among these some that his mother used to play. He often asked me for these, and I would have to play them over and over while he sat with his head bent against the wall, staring up at the bright spring sky.

Or also I might sit hunched up in a little settee off in the corner, and he would draw his chair up close, eagerly talking about one thing and another, about everything and nothing.

"Do you know what 'happy love' is?" he asked suddenly on such an occasion.

"Well, I don't know," I answered hesitatingly. "Naturally it

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"I don't mean eternal love, I mean happy love. Love without obstacle, without compulsion. To love fully, to give of oneself body and soul, to live in the present so the rest of the world does not exist. This I call happy love."

"Then I have never felt it."

He smiled.

"No, naturally, with your puritanical ways. But I also think one walks through the world blind. One understands nothing of what one sees."

I could answer nothing. Perhaps he was right, perhaps not.

"Don't you think there are many people who don't know that?" I asked

"Yes, but then there's something austere and impoverished about all they do. Have you, for example, never noticed in your own handwriting, if you merely write a letter, that it lacks, as it were, light and air. The sentences stand there so dry and pinched. Whether I write or sculpt, I want sun in the work -- everything concealing, it seems, a secret magic music. That's how it is with love. It is having lived."

He lay down with his elbow on the sofa and took my hand as he kissed it. Then he released it once again, sat upright, and started talking about something else.

There had come something comfortable and trusting in our style, although there were areas in which we were alien to each other. So he never asked me, for example, about anything

that concerned my future plans, family relationships or conditions of fortune; he didn't know whether I was living on the last of my savings. I, for my part, had no notion how or with whom he spent his days, with the exception of the hour that was my own.

Through his reluctance to see strangers at my place, I had come to live an odd life. Since I only had quite new acquaintances in Paris, and not a one I was closely attached to, it was easy for me to withdraw completely. And so I was always alone, it seems, closed inside a magic circle, without any alien influence -- alone in the crowd or alone with him.

We went out together like good comrades, and he often used to say: "But you *aren't* a woman; why, you're almost a man."

Gradually he began to grumble about this.

"I can't comprehend what it is that makes you look this way," he said one day. "There's something so stern about your appearance that doesn't agree with your character at all."

He took me by the shoulders and looked at me.

"Ah, yes, it's your hair. Why do you want it this way? You know, you have beautiful hair, lots of it, so don't pull it back like a puritan, let it curl and curve and fill in around your face. Hair should fall prettily around the forehead. Look at mine! How would I look?" He pulled his hair back with both his hands.

"Hideous!" I exclaimed, laughing.

"So, you can see. And this cut of your clothes! Dress like a woman! You're not still obliged to dress in mourning, are you?"

"Yes." I said it only in spite. It was now more than one year since my mother died.

"When a person looks like you, I cannot understand why they'd hide it!" he added oppressively.

So without his knowing about it, and to prepare a surprise for him, I went one day to a shop and acquired for myself a dress in a bronze color, with yellow-colored satin.

I'd decided to hide the surprise for some special occasion and that day I also changed my hair so it fell free and curving on my forehead, as he liked.

When he came, he did a double take and was about not to recognize me. "Do you know what day it is?" I said laughing. "It's my birthday. Congratulate me!"

"May I look at you?" He took my hand in his and drew me forward to the window.

"You must have looked like this when you were a young girl! You're good, you're beautiful, you're clever, and I like you a very great deal." With this he ran for the door. I understood that he probably would be coming back, and he came with a couple of big yellow roses that he fastened to my shoulder.

"Now you're my only company."

"I'd be pleased for you to celebrate my birthday by drinking a cup coffee at my place."

"Splendid! And you will play folk songs for me afterwards!"

"Yes."

After we had drunk coffee, I brought out wine and fruit, and we lit the lamp. "Aha, so you're not one of those ladies of total denial!" he said when he saw the champagne glasses. "Oh, you are . . . you are . . ." he kissed my hands between words. "You're a woman nonetheless and not just a comrade."

I felt embarrassed about something in his tone and hurried with the serving. He was in a radiant mood. After we had clinked glasses, I had to play. He stood beside me with his hands on the back of my chair. Suddenly he gripped me around the head with both of his hands and kissed me twice, violently as anyone had ever kissed me before. I was seized by a terror that paralyzed me . . . a declaration of love . . . an insult . . . a shame?

I knew that I had let our two-member club go on much too long and much too freely, that he might think that I myself had wanted to develop it. I was annihilated, for I sensed I ought to set him straight, and I couldn't. I knew that now it would no longer last, but I couldn't separate without letting him know how dear he had become to me.

I enclosed both his hands in mine and looked anxiously up into his face as if for help, perhaps for an explanation, I don't know. But none came.

I felt that I must go away, far away. I had never before now felt the meaning of the word *temptation* -- the frightening attraction you can't get away from. And here the only way out was to flee.

"We'll part now," I said, so calmly that it became unnatural. "Do you want to leave?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes, I've decided to leave on my trip the day after tomorrow."

"It isn't true!"

I'd supported my elbows against the piano and put my hands over my face. He walked about in the room and then came up to me.

"Why?" he asked me sharply.

"I don't want to see you anymore now."

"Not see me? So nothing has changed between us?"

"Yes."

"No, nothing, nothing."

He once again walked about; then he stopped abruptly.

"You don't think, do you, that I can endanger your peace of mind?"

I did not reply.

"Why, it's impossible! You don't even know me!"

It came back to me as a crushing accusation, but I couldn't deny it.

"When?" when I grew silent. "As soon as you saw me?"

"No, but before you left."

"Let's think about it till tomorrow," he said.

"Yes. And go now."

He walked toward the door, and I heard him put on his wraps. Then he came back, bent

down, and looked at me with a strangely worried expression. Then he pulled his hands away from my face and kissed me yet another time, while the tears were running down my cheeks.

"Leaving has its price," he mumbled very quietly, "I'd like to stay here."

This is how we parted, without my moving from the chair.

The following day then, when he came, he looked happier and more friendly than ever.

"I'm going to tell you something," he said in a low voice. "You can't go away. I've started working."

He held both my hands and tried to kiss me. But this formal *you* of his offended me. I drew back abruptly. "Have I offended you somehow?"

"No -- oh, yes I have. I've been too forward, and you're dissatisfied with me."

"And if that were the case, what would you care?"

His face clouded over. "Not care that I'd offended you? So by this you're insinuating that I was rude?"

My unfriendliness hurt him -- there couldn't be the least doubt about that. I was happy to see it, and I excused his formal *you* with my illusion that the Frenchman says *vous* even to those who are close to him.

Then some days passed, but the unclarity in our relationship became increasingly troublesome to me. It always made me shy and unnatural in my character toward him: the previous openness was gone, and I was uncertain. I was afraid to show how dear he was to me, and I was afraid of offending him. I went along as if on thin ice. Finally it became unbearable to me, and I hoped to be able to bring it to a breaking point or explanation.

I'd started to criticize him in silence, I examined his manner, his conduct, his gestures; I thought that in this manner of gradual success I could glimpse something of the cleverness of a professional. Indignation and wounded vanity entered in. He had made a fool of himself over me, taken the little Swedish girl as an easy mark. I decided to throw discretion to the wind and to speak out.

The next time he came and, with the simple, natural friendliness characteristic of him, wanted to kiss me good day. I stepped back abruptly and, before he had a chance to ask any

questions, it came over him like a downpour.

I had known all along he was a habitual sportsman, and he shouldn't believe that I hadn't seen through him; I myself had been driven only by an indomitable curiosity and a zeal to experiment, but now there was to be an end to it. I laughed in order to conceal the fact that I was about to break into tears. For me it had been so interesting to study this man of the world, the famous artist, but what had *he* had as a motive for this comedy? How could he, without suspicion, walk into my simple-minded trap? What kind of interest could he have in an insignificant creature like me -- an unknown conquest who would not yield him the smallest honor? Why had he begun this game? What was his motive? His grounds?

He stood still and just looked at me.

When I had said everything, I grew silent and there was a long pause. He had the clouded, sullen facial expression that I'd seen the first day he came and then something of dislike and distaste.

Now I saw what I was to lose. I just waited. I had wounded and insulted him. I had not a thought of compassion, and I did not make any effort to relent. I threw myself in a chair, unable to stand on my feet. His gaze clung to me still. And then it came.

He had located me -- come to meet me -- without any side intentions, but openly, confidently. He had believed me to be a true human being, and so I'd suddenly come toward him with this artificial, chewed over, detestable thing, exactly what he hated more than anything else in the world. If I was that way, then our natures were incompatible, then we would never again have anything to say to each other. I had, with a kind of paltry, small-time stinginess, just thought of collecting erotic experience. Hence, I had figured out everything in advance, thought of everything.

"Are you one of those people who go around stringing up your own moods on needles? If you're one of those, then there's nothing for us. Nothing, nothing, nothing!"

"It hurts me about you," he added. "When my bottomless despair was printed all over my face It's much too disgusting.

I twisted my hands. There were no words. Now he was going to leave, leave! And I would never get to see him again.

"When I had come to you so warmly, when I'd wanted to live with you so completely -- it even plagued me to see other people in your presence -- you've just found the whole thing

ridiculous and thought of nothing but studying me. Like a conceited fool, I gave you my portrait without your asking for it. At least give *it* back to me."

This punishment was worse than everything else. The portrait! My only little solace when I would never be able to see him anymore. The tears were trying to burst from my eyes. I swayed forward a few steps -- for he could take it over there on the table if he wanted to. I clenched my hands.

"Don't take it. Oh, let me keep it."

It was as if I were begging for my entire life. There was no consideration anymore. The shell of my entire upbringing and womanliness broke. If I was not a human being at that moment, then I have never been one.

"Don't take it so hard; it hurts me so about you," he said more gently.

"Yes, but don't take the portrait, let me keep it." It had become a *fix idé* with me, and I could not grasp the possibility that he himself would stay, or that this expression of disfavor and loathing might disappear from his face.

"No, I'm not going to take it, but sit down and let us talk reason. Let's see if there's a way to get through this. Why *couldn't* you let it develop as it would -- what existed between the two of us? Couldn't it have been allowed to grow in peace -- this thing sprouting so tender and fine? Why should you claw it to pieces?"

"Yes, why, why! It was madness. Oh, I don't know what it was. I think I meant what I said. I don't myself know what got into me."

"You don't have the slightest qualifications to understand a person such as myself. Measuring me by your paltry little philistine yardstick. What trivial suspicions! What shabby misgivings! And what ridiculous speculations! Do you think that a man stands around figuring out why is he going to kiss a woman! You don't reflect over it. If it doesn't happen of its own accord, you don't do it. To dissertate on such things! Don't you notice there's something coarse about it?"

"I was crazy. I'd been brooding."

"Did you think I would consider you easy?"

"Yes."

He smiled.

"My dear! Not a chance, with those eyes and that brow and that mouth. Why, you're entire appearance gives quite the opposite impressions. If you'd been my property for seven days and seven weeks, I wouldn't consider you easy just for that, and you go around worrying about it!"

"If you knew my upbringing and my surroundings, you'd understand that I have to think of such things."

We had grown calmer, both of us.

He took my head between his hands and looked at me, into my eyes with an expression of compassionate pain. "Poor thing," he said in a low voice. "Life has made you suspicious and bitter: it has treated you worse than I thought."

He started walking back and forth on the floor, sunk in thoughts. Then he came up to me again.

"All that offended me was only a kind of self-defense," he said. "You felt as if I was going to inflict pain upon you, and with your deep sensitivity it follows you were instinctively trying to defend yourself against everything that would produce suffering."

"Yes, yes!"

"I bite out about me like an mad dog when I feel somebody is going to dig too deep into my life."

"I understand, but now how are we going to get over this thing? We will try to get over it, won't we?"

"Oh, yes."

"Let us bury it like two children bury a sparrow in a meadow." He stroked my hair and cheek, and when he then put his hand on the chair's upholstered back, I bent down and pressed my lips to it; I gripped it with both my hands, leaning my brow into it -- I didn't know what to do. There was nothing in the world then but for him to forgive me; there was no pride, no tomorrow, no thinking back -- there was only he and this moment.

And so it was time for him to go, as he was invited out.

"Oh, don't go, don't go now!" I begged and prayed. I didn't know that I could beg this way -- my voice had an intonation I never had heard. What he thought or did not think no longer worried me, for there was just one thing: I loved him.

Then he stood looking down into my face, smiling as I've never seen anyone else smile, warm and clear as sunshine.

"Sweetheart, I can't stay."

"Remember, later we're to part."

"I'll come tomorrow."

"But I'll be longing -- I'll long myself to death."

"No; no, don't long, just be calm."

"I cannot."

"And don't think of me, just sleep -- and don't dissect."

How caressing his voice was! And we kissed each other as if after a reconciliation.

I HAD COME TO PARIS only for the sake of my own pleasure, or rather, in order for a time -- after all those harrowing scenes with my insane sister and after the difficult loss of my mother -- to enter into new surroundings and through fresh impressions to get my benumbed mind to heal. It was my intention to travel home in the middle of May; a long stay would bring with it larger expenses than the state of my fortune could tolerate. Thus to a certain degree I had told the truth when I'd disclosed that I'd made up my mind to go home. As conditions were at the present, however, I could decide neither to travel nor to stay until we had talked together more closely.

When he came in the evening he immediately brought up the trip. He didn't want to hear anything but that I should stay. Of course, I could live in some of the city's nearby neighborhoods. He himself was to go off in a couple of days for two or three weeks. I could always live in town until he returned. And so it was decided. He didn't want to say anything about the purpose of his trip, but I've since thought he was going to get a block of marble for his

new work.

I was so glad and happy. All these agreements indicated a long and secure life together, but since our previous agreement, I didn't dare say anything about the future, hardly to think of it. We sat on my little sofa talking. Off on the piano stood the only lamp in the room, with the red shade on it. As we sat, he held both of my hands and looked smilingly into my eyes.

"*Du*," he said merely.

Inside me was a cry of joy! Finally! No longer this formal *Ni*, that seemed to say this was only a waste of time, a joke, a whim.

And then came the question, without transition and quite unawaited. "You're completely mine now, yes? Come now!"

I lingered and was silent with my head against his shoulder. "Yes" brought disdain, "no" repulsion. There we stood at the parting of the ways. Oh, that he had not asked or spoken the question! One more moment of friendliness, a moment of rest merely, and then I would go -- out into my wilderness.

"You don't want to?"

"Don't be angry!"

"Is that the philistine view?"

"No."

"Is it disgust?"

"No."

"But, my dearest, then why?"

"Because I care about you."

"Would you do it if it were someone you didn't care about?"

"No. Naturally, even less."

"Yes. There, you see! So what kind of logic is that?"

I couldn't help laughing a bit nervously.

"My logic."

"Oh, well, you'll follow your own nature."

It grew silent. I trembled because now the punishment would come.

He sat motionless with his gaze directed at the floor. I saw only the back of his neck plus part of his cheek. I dared not say anything, dared not make a motion. I felt like an evildoer because I had said no; I would have felt like an even greater evildoer if I'd said yes.

Suddenly he shook as if from a shiver, and his cheek turned pale gray. He did not turn around, but it was as if he had felt my frightened gaze.

"N'ayez pas peur," he said, contrary to his habit speaking French, *"C'est seulement de la passion. Cela passera.* After some minutes he got up, went over in the room, and started talking about different things, as if nothing had happened. He just looked somewhat more serious than otherwise and was very pale. Once he in haste happened to say *du*, the informal you.

"No, it's stupid," he said, correcting himself with the formal you.

This little correction hit me like the sting of a knife.

The following several days he was not like himself, but it was still the formal you, and his manner was a bit chillier than usual.

When he went to the station, I was the one who accompanied him -- he'd asked me to.

"Think of me with friendliness and stay until I come back," he said as he hugged me to him before we stepped out of the carriage.

The view of all the people and the anxiety about the trip seemed to have an exhilarating effect upon him. He laughed gayly and smiled. I felt, as it were, a security where I was standing in the crowd.

"You'll write to me, won't you?" he asked.

"Yes. Providing I don't fall in love and get carried away."

"Then you should write to let me know about it. Promise me that."

We shook hands on the matter jokingly, and I returned to the city.

I looked up some of my acquaintances and spent the time as pleasantly as possible.

Not more than four days passed before I received a letter:

Dear Friend,

According to promise, I must hereby inform you that I am mortally in love. The object is a young American widow, enchantingly beautiful, rich and independent, so nobody one can know how far she will bring me. But write as soon as possible to Rome, poste restante. I do not wish to arouse your envy by describing all of Mrs. Laird's accomplishments; I just want to say they are sufficient to turn the heads of ten men, far more resilient than

Yours, etc.

It felt like fire in my veins and hammers in my head. I saw them in the compartment, I heard them laughing and chatting, I heard him repeating the words he had said to me -- only more softly, in a more caressing tone of voice. The whole night I was lying awake in the wildest fantasies and the whole time it was just him and her -- whispering, laughing, happy, free, unworried. And sun -- sun! Italy's sun.

In the morning, as soon as I got dressed, I rode out to Montmartre to look up one of my women friends in her studio. I told her I could not be alone; I found a consolation only from sitting quietly in a corner and watching while she painted. All day we stayed together and took our meals with her friends, chatting and laughing: I needed only to get away from myself. But the whole time I heard the other two -- happy, free, whispering words of love under Italy's sun. The following day I was calmer, but I felt a dull pain, mixed with indignation.

I wrote to him approximately as follows:

Dear Friend!

Since falling in love means the ability to work, I heartily congratulate, both yourself and all of us, friends of your artistry. My envy is so far from being roused by your descriptions of Mrs. Laird that, on the contrary, I would be very glad to hear from you soon again. When or if you no longer have any little room left for me in your affection, I'll slip away by myself, quite easily and before you even notice it. In the meantime I remain,

With true friendship,

To this I received no answer. I started seriously to think of a trip back to Sweden, and I had even written to my brother to ask if I could live with him and his wife out on the West Coast, where they intended to settle down. Granted I felt a frightful emptiness and absence, but I hoped for the salutary influence of time and company of my next of kin.

I'd even taken out one of my trunks so as to send it on ahead with "petite vitesse," to keep the cost down.

I stood arranging some things that I could easily do without, and bent over the trunk, I stuffed them into it.

Then there was a knock on the door. I heard immediately who it was.

His glance flew past me and stopped at the trunk. There was an expression on his face that I'd never seen there before. A cold, scornful, nasty expression that made him look old.

"So, you're packing," he said as he extended his hand to me in a strange, cold fashion.

"It's only something I wanted to send home in advance," I said, hurrying to move the trunk into the other room.

"One slips away," he quoted mockingly. "Thank you for your lovely letter."

His tone pained me in an inexplicable way. It seemed bitter and hostile.

We sat facing each other.

"Well, aren't you curious?" he asked.

"Yes," I replied. The anguish pinched my windpipe so I could hardly get a word out.

"We kept company till Rome. It's in Rome one is dealt the death blow. In Rome one becomes captivated and bound -- in Rome one kneels and surrenders one's weapon. Do you understand?"

"Yes?" I tried to smile without a worry and as if I'd been sitting listening to a hilarious story with many funny turns.

"*She* knew how to give a deathblow, my American woman."

"Experience perhaps."

"Confidence at least. It's a pleasure to be conquered by such an opponent."

"I can believe that."

"So -- now you know about my entire trip. Eh?"

"Yes."

"I've told you everything. In full confidence. That's the way you wanted it, isn't it?"

I could no longer manage even a monosyllabic word. It went black before my eyes. I sat down and looked down at my knee as if I found the whole thing a bit comical, but I had to hold on hard to the little sofa, for I thought it was swaying as if in an and I was about to fall off.

He sat staring at me the whole time as if he feared that a single twitch in my face could evade him.

"Is there anything in my story you dislike, with your strict ground rules," he said sullenly.

I stiffened to the utmost and looked him calmly in the face. "My ground rules concern only myself. Naturally you have your own lawbook, which I don't care to interpret."

He looked at me as if he wanted to force his way all the way down into my soul.

"We both realize that nature must have created us two expressly for each other," he continued. "Don't you think it must be strange to feel that way?"

"Oh, yes."

He bent forward in order to be able to look fully into my face.

I strained in order to smile and to look as usual, but it felt as if the air were running out and as if I were inhaling absolutely nothing. In a few moments I would suffocate.

Then he hurled himself back into the chair, and I looked at him in astonishment.

"It *worked*, anyhow!" he exclaimed in triumph. "It worked! It worked!"

He had a broad mouth with dark teeth, and he opened it up into a great laugh of malicious pleasure.

It was the first time I'd heard him laugh.

"It worked! It worked!" he repeated.

He looked around him to both sides of the room as if to see if there weren't someone to witness the success of his ploy; he shrank into the chair with laughter; he behaved as if he'd been out of his mind, and the whole time he was enjoying himself at my expense, where I was sitting strained in convulsive rigidity so as not to fall down.

And I looked at him too. I thought at that moment he no longer resembled a human being but a jubilant fiend.

All pretense was pointless; he was my superior. He would twist the truth out of me with red-hot tongs, if necessary: he could always resort to torture.

I rose gripping hold of the arm of the sofa. A strange, icy chill crept about my face.

"You look as if the whole world were but sorrow and affliction," he said. "Go hang yourself -- Ophelia."

"So I shall."

It grew deathly quiet in the room and I dragged myself to the window in order to get some air through the sight of the sky.

A little time passed before he came up to me.

"You're sick," he said. "Promise me that tomorrow you will go out into the country with some of your friends.

"No."

"You will obey me. You will do as I say."

"No."

"Now I'm leaving, and you will do as I say."

I didn't reply, I didn't say good-bye, I didn't turn around. Then I heard him leave and the door close.

Well, why shouldn't it come to an end now as well as later? That's the way it always goes, he had said. It was three days I didn't see him. Three days in which I could scarcely speak: three twenty-four-hour periods without sleep, without peace, without food.

I'd received a letter from my brother:

There is such a strange tone through the lines of your last letter. You must be sick. Come! We will carry you on our hands. Poor sister, you've been alone far too long; we've been so happy that we almost forgot you. Forgive us. Write and tell us if you're coming.

I replied on a postcard only these words:

"Yes. Oh, to be able to come to one's own people."

I felt as if I'd been enclosed in a magic underground world in which the light was flames and where there was joy in people's torments. I felt as if there could be salvation up there, where the sun shone upon green woods and where the wind blew cold from the sea.

Everything was dead inside me. It lay there, charred.

The morning of the fourth day, when I was busy packing, I had an errand out in the corridor. From the entry door there came toward me a figure that seemed like a ghost. I shrank back from it, stepping backward into the room, as if by a secret power it had slowly shoved me in front of itself. Inside we both stopped the same distance away from each other.

He looked almost terrified.

"God, what a change!" he stammered. "What has happened?"

"Nothing."

"Why, you are grieved, devastated. It looks as if you've been lying in the grave."

"Yes."

"And it's only three days since I saw you." He'd once again tried to approach, and I'd once again tried to withdraw without noticing. I feared him the way one fears a hangman!

"Do I frighten you?"

"No," My answers seemed to me to come from someone else and not from myself.

"Are you mad at me?"

"No."

"My dear, what *is* it?"

"Nothing."

"Why are you avoiding me?"

"You're a stranger now -- a stranger."

"You're going mad!"

He took a couple of hasty steps, grabbed me by the shoulders, and led me to a sofa, he put my head against his chest, and he caressed my hair.

"Silly, silly child! Silly, silly child!" he repeated. I looked up into this familiar face that I seemed not to have seen in a human lifetime. It was as if tangled restraints were loosened from all my senses; it was as if I'd been unlocked from a rigid cramp and I could smile.

"Don't you know that this was mental illness? Outright mental illness?"

"Yes."

"Is it better now?"

"Yes."

"Silly, silly child," he continued to caress me, "what frightful sensitivity. Why, you're dying."

"That's not my fault."

"But now we must see to it that you get healthy."

"Thank you."

"And you're to work. To occupy yourself. I am going to tell you what you have to do every day. You will obey me, won't you?"

"Yes, yes."

"You read this," he got up and led me up to the table in order to show me in the book. "Then you go out to the Bois de Vincennes with some one of your friends, and in the evening you go to the theatre. You sleep the whole night."

"Yes."

"And now I must go, I'm in a hurry."

He left and I felt calm, but tired. So tired that it was a relief not to have to think and to support myself instead solely upon his will.

Then several days passed. He came, he read out loud to me, and took care of me as if I were a sick child. We never talked about Rome or the American woman. He tried to be friendly and even-tempered toward me but often there appeared a bitterness, a desire to injure, that he had

not been able to check and the basis for which I did not understand. I thought he secretly desired for me to leave or go away, and I wanted to as soon as I felt strong enough. But when I spoke of it, he always said: "What's the good of traveling?"

Finally he said: "Well, make the trip if you miss your family, but come back."

We often sat talking in the evenings when it was warm and still light out, so we could have the doors to the balcony open. And sometimes he talked about his works, of the swings between self-reliance and lack of courage, of the all-consuming gloom that could come over him for long periods.

"I admire Michelangelo," he said once when we were sitting that way talking. "For me he is the model for the true man. Most of all because he was able to work without a woman lover. One should be able to do that, eh? For Michelangelo the art itself was what all the women lovers put together are for us others."

I fell silent. Such statements cut into my heart. Not merely because they wounded my self, but they also roused such an inconsolable compassion in me for the man who uttered them. For I knew that despair lay at bottom -- the despair of the artist -- and so I stroked my hands across his brow, and he closed his eyes with an expression so weary and helpless that one had to be less than a human being in order not to be forced to love him.

When I saw him that way, it was as if my whole being were filled with tears, and I had to stand there keeping my eyes motionless so they wouldn't stream over. Once, however, a few tears dropped down, and one of them fell upon his hand. He looked up at me.

"You're good," said he, who otherwise always used the forma *Ni*, and he kissed my hand as if in gratitude.

That was the only thing he said, also the best thing he could say. I had never before thought that it could mean so much for someone to call you good.

Now I never get to hear it anymore; now it doesn't matter whether I'm good or evil either. Everything is indifferent now.

I hadn't informed him in advance of the day of my departure, for it bothered me to speak

of it when there was no need. It was my intention to see whether distance and time wouldn't help me to conquer this unfortunate fancy. I knew it would be easier if only we could part as friends, without bitterness or scenes, plus if I could take with me the consciousness that his friendship and respect would follow me on my lonesome road.

The evening before he came as usual. I told him that I intended to leave.

"Oh, in a couple of weeks," he said.

I made no objection. I was so frightened that some displeasure or some break would come between us this last evening and upset the good impression.

We sat talking in the little sofa, turned toward each other, glad and without a care. I had almost managed to expel the thought of my departure. Perhaps at the last moment I had also some insane hope that I didn't prepare myself for.

"How strange it is to see you that way," he said suddenly, "so yielding and so happy and so womanly. Your laugh alone has taken on a resonance different from when I first saw you."

I nodded in affirmation.

"And yet you're not the way you look, but so bloodless, so sexless, so artificial."

"That's not true."

"Isn't it?" He looked at me a moment. "Do you remember a certain evening or late afternoon?"

"What then?" I replied. I wanted to say that my rejection didn't prove all that.

"But then? But then!" That was what he thought I'd said. "Do you mean to say you changed your mind later?"

His entire face beamed when he hugged me to him.

Need I say that I was not bloodless or sexless or artificial? That on the contrary I was willing to pay for these minutes with an equal number of years of my life? And nevertheless I knew I would not do what he requested. But in order to buy a few minutes, I told an untruth.

"Yes."

He looked at me at once glad and doubting. "You will?" he asked with the formal *Ni*.

"Yes."

He seized me around the throat with a grip so hard as if he were trying to kill me and as he bent me back, he kissed me violently.

It disgusted me. I jumped to my feet.

"You won't?" I didn't reply. I wanted to possess his love but not his contempt.

"Either out of free will or not at all; you're never to think that I'm trying to seduce you."

His tone had grown cold and harsh. He was annoyed at my behavior, over my untruth. In his features I saw rage take effect, though he wished to appear calm.

I dropped my head. Was this to be our farewell.

"Don't look so angry."

"I'm not angry." I would have liked to beg him on my knees for forgiveness, as if I'd done something wrong.

"Remember, I'm leaving tomorrow!"

Oh, how I thirsted for a single parting word.

"Well, leave. I don't deserve to have anybody stay with me. You saw the right thing. I'm only an old roué who wants love but who no longer can love himself. And yet I believe I'm better than most other men."

It was as if I was to twist the heart out of my breast and go.

He got up to say good-bye; gave me his hand, lean and cold.

So we were to part!

"Thank you -- thanks for everything," I stammered as tears attempted to suppress my

voice.

"You have nothing to thank me for," he said harshly. "You've learned nothing from me. When you go, you'll be the same half-crippled, confined creature as when you came."

I was still standing holding his hand.

"Shall we part this way?"

"Why, that's what you yourself want."

I fell silent.

"With me one must be either hot or cold; tepidity is not acceptable to me," he said, releasing his hand.

I stood looking at him as he walked to the door. No hope, no conciliation. Then he stopped.

"Come back soon," he said in a morose, unfriendly command.

"I wish I could refrain," the words emerged. I felt he was restricting me -- that I would come back to him from the very blessedness of heaven just to suffer this pain.

"Is it I who have such a magnetic power?" he said, off by

"Yes," I replied as a dull refrain.

He laughed.

"Why, between us there is nothing -- absolutely nothing!" he said, closing the door.

Such was our farewell.

THE TRIP WAS one long yearning, for home, for Sweden, for the language of my countrymen that I had not heard for a long time -- for friendly, healing hands.

The first thing I visited was home. Home, where I had lived with my mother and with

my two siblings, where I would also live for years afterward, till year had been laid to year and I sat there old and fragile, with quiet resignation awaiting death, that perhaps would let me wait a long time.

When I stood here in the quiet, low, little rooms, where the dust cloths clad the furniture like white shrouds, when I stood here looking around me and feeling so alien, like a ghost from another world. . . It was as if the family had come and gone and then I was standing here at last. And yet it was not quite a year ago.

Was I really the one who had played and grown up here, was I the one who had felt so secure and strong in the awareness of my firm principles and my fragile pride that I would have found the mere thought of a temptation impossible; the one who previously would have thought heaven would fall before she would listen to words about free love and not push the presumptuous man away?

Was I the one who had stood here looking around me as if the whole world were dead because there lay many miles between this forbidden love and myself? Was I the one who now reprimanded myself for having been vulgar and low and halfhearted and contemptible because I'd not given my faith for life in exchange for his fleeting fancy?

Yes, it was me, and I came from a world different from this. Here I felt old as if my hair had grown gray on my head; here I would freeze until my heart turned to ice in my breast. Here everything was foreign to me. I didn't belong here.

In greatest haste, I traveled onward, and I came to my brother. It was a joy to see him again. But how changed he was

"How Paris has made you different. Or the grief after mother. . . . So quiet. . . . so much greater. . . so much more of a woman than before."

Always this word!

When I jumped into the sailboat that would bring us to the skerry where he lived, I felt a jubilant sense of freedom. The sea has always been dear to me, and now I felt its cold, salty breath on my cheek. Perhaps it would have the power to heal my devastated innards.

I laughed out loud as I leaped forward and sat down on the rower's seat.

"What are you laughing about?" said my brother.

"I don't know. I feel like gloating."

I felt as if I'd come outside the power of the magic circle. As if I were saved.

But it didn't last long. As soon as I set foot upon land, it was over. When I thought that I'd come to stay forever in the cold, when I thought of year after year without seeing him, without hearing his dear voice, then I knew that the years would not seem to me worth living. When day after day passed without letters send a messenger back or forth, and when I started to realize that this would be my life, then it seemed to me this salvation was only a burden. It lay like a veil in front of my eyes: for me there was neither joy nor beauty, there was only desolate void, endless and deep as the sea, I saw.

Then I wrote; I know not what. There was a trembling between the lines, probably to conceal my fear.

In reply I received these lines:

Be well and come; of course I'm waiting for you.

That was all I needed to know. My place was not filled, returning was not completely out of the question. I would see him -- see him again! And as before.

It was as if sea and sky had acquired new color and brilliance.

Now I knew that I was going to die, but I knew I would have lived first, that before my death I would be able to buy myself the right to love.

My cheeks became healthy, my walk was vigorous, and eight days afterward I was on a steamer heading south.

It was spring -- the summer-warm, newly sprung spring of Paris.

In the little garden patch outside the studio the lilacs were in bloom, they interwove themselves over the laths of a broken-down roof, hanging like a tassel-edged coverlet on all sides, surrounding the entire garden spot and guarding the grass from the sun and dust. There also was budding foliage -- this grass -- as in a beech forest with new leaves. A woman was

sitting on the bottom stair step, leaning against the doorpost and with her feet on the sand path. She was no longer young, but the expression in her eyes was young, and across her face fell the playful light formed by the greenery and sun. She had folded her hands together on one knee and sat looking up among the tender leaves against the light-blue sky, without thinking of what she saw.

It was with a peculiar gentleness this woman could smile; or rather, she didn't smile, it was merely an inner clarity spreading out over her features, over what was ravaged and worn, which was lying underneath like the dark foliage that gives radiance. What was beaming around this face was happiness – a quiet, secret, deep and enigmatic happiness: like the sea, in which everything can drown, sink, and disappear while what is on the surface is sunny and calm.

She sat thinking about what it is to be happy. She had never known it before. She looked back at her long life, poor in joy, nothing but suppression of her own ego, the struggle for beauty, resignation, and a subdued, never-ended longing for something she never experienced, something warm and rich she had not had permission to seek out. She smiled and felt compassion with her old, impoverished self. And she saw no future -- nothing other than this moment that filled her so completely.

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And so it was spring again and artists turned in their works to the salon.

"Now you can come down to my studio," he said. "You alone."

"I call it *Destiny*," he said.

I stood still and looked. To begin with it was as if the block of marble blinded my eyes, but then the contours were there firm and clear.

The foot position was formed by a rough block of rock, which on the left side rose

upward and which to the back seemed to suggest the entry to a cavity or cleft, the strong sloping forward gave the sense of the sea, and there was an edging of sea grass and reeds. The main figure was of something more than body size, a mighty form of a woman with strong limbs, wrapped in a draping which the wind tore at; in one of her hands she held the draping together over her throat, and the other she reached out as if to be able to take support from the stoneblock. Her posture was leaning forward, and her gaze searched sharply and coldly ahead out into space toward a goal invisible to others. She seemed to be in a walking position and had just taken a step forward over the body that lay cast to the ground. A lifeless, naked, female body. The feet and legs were hanging loosely down the slope, the head had got support against a stone so that her chin rested against her breast, and her arms rested deadly and heavily as if they'd been hurled by the waves. It was powerlessness and helplessness ennobled by death's peace. The calm in this face had something of supernatural balance, the cold mildness in the one to whom people's sufferings and people's desires no longer existed -- the entire oblivion, of all that is called good and evil here. This face, upon whose lips the enigmatic smile of death had stiffened, was the work of a visionary.

I felt myself gripped by trembling, anguish, admiration. This master, this artist I had treated as an equal -- this man had been my companion in my daily life, and I had believed he needed my consolation, almost my help! This great man of art!

I looked shyly to the side. He regarded me only with scholarly interest so as to study my impression.

I trembled, as if in the presence of something supernatural. . . . This dead woman bore my traits, refined, immortalized; this dead woman was my petrified self, my saga.

I clenched my hands together and did not dare look to the side. He had sensed the most secret thoughts of my soul; what was to come he knew in advance.

Destiny!. . . .

I raised my eyes and looked into the unyielding features of the divinity. Yes, that's what it was. For destiny a human life is nothing, it passes beyond as if it were merely the grass and rootless reeds of the beach, staring forward toward a goal that our eyes can not comprehend. The features were those of a human being, but the expression was more than human; it was the strength, the law abiding, the steadfastness to which everything in our world bends or must be crushed. It was life's great, unsolved puzzle; the inevitable that must occur. Such was the face.

I feel that this is my best work. I haven't gone backwards."

I knew he was right. The artist had completed a work that must survive himself. It has consumed an unnoticed existence -- that will die.

I HAVE FINISHED the notebook's little items. I have almost nothing to add. I'm sitting once again in the lonely country house where I spent so many happy days. My window juts out almost over the river, and I see its yellowish water hurry by.

Perhaps he left before he tired of me, perhaps he found it best that way. At least I could not detect any chill. I did nothing to keep him there -- to do so would have been to drive him away.

Our good-bye was calm. He took me in his arms and kissed me one last time.

"You're good," he said. "No human being is happy."

So we parted without tears and without scenes; parted as he wished it.

I don't know if he'd understood that I had broken with my past, with my ground rules, with my upbringing indeed, even with the peculiarities of my race -- and that I am without foothold and return would be impossible.

I think I was still hoping after he'd gone, hoping he would call me to him and say, "Live -- you are dearer to me than the others."

I also wrote to him once, I know not what -- shy phrases of friendship, nothing.

He answered me with a few lines in a little letter that began: "*Chère mademoiselle.*" And he ended with: "I have no time to write letters; I have begun a new work."

I know that now: from his hands there was not to be one word of reminder about our dead love. Why has all this happened?

Who knows why one loves! I don't know myself what it is that made it happen. Perhaps it was because I admired his works for so long or because his world was so foreign to mine that there just was magic within it, or quite simply because it was my nature to love once. His personality consumed mine, and separated from him, I became only a shadow.

Everything is empty.

In the beginning I waited for it to pass -- I hardly know if I was waiting for a long time or briefly. I don't know if the days have lost their length or if they no longer have any end. Time has become something formless that flows together. And I know that the void is eternal.

One who is spellbound can never more live among his own.

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