“Well belongs to the great constellation of European authors, in the company of Joyce, Proust, Kafka and Svevo. . . . (This translation is a literary and intellectual event of singular importance.)”
—Jens Huyghebrouck

ROBERT MUSIL
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PART III
INTO THE MILLENNIUM (THE CRIMINALS)
THE FORGOTTEN SISTER

On his arrival in ——— toward evening of the same day, as Ulrich came out of the station he saw before him a wide, shallow square that opened into streets at both ends and jolted his memory almost painfully, as happens with a landscape one has seen often and then forgotten again.

“Believe me, income has dropped by twenty percent and prices have gone up twenty percent, that’s a total of forty percent!” “Believe me, a six-day bike race promotes international goodwill like nothing else!” These voices were still coming out of his ear: train voices. Then he distinctly heard someone saying: “Still, for me, there’s
nothing to beat opera!” “Is that your hobby?”
“It’s my passion.”

He tilted his head as though to shake water out of his ear. The train had been crowded, the journey long. Dribblets of the general conversation around him that had seeped into him during the trip were oozing out again. Ulrich had waited for the joyfulness and bustle of arrival—which had poured into the quiet square from the station exit as from the mouth of a drainpipe—to subside to a trickle; now he was standing in the vacuum of silence left behind by such noise. But even as his hearing was still disturbed from the abrupt change, he was struck by an unaccustomed peace that met his eyes. Everything visible was more intensely so than usual, and when he looked across the square the crossbars of perfectly ordinary windows stood as black against the pale sheen of glass in the dimming light as if they were the crosses of Golgotha. And everything that moved
seemed to detach itself from the calm of the street in a way that never happens in very large cities. Whether passing or standing still, things evidently had the space here in which to make their importance felt. He could see this with the curiosity of reacquaintance as he gazed out on the large provincial town where he had spent some brief, not very pleasant, parts of his life. It had, as he well knew, an air of someplace colonial, a place of exile: here a nucleus of ancient German burgher stock, transplanted centuries ago to Slavic soil, had withered away so that hardly anything was left, apart from a few churches and family names, to remind one of it; nor, except for a fine old palace that had been preserved, was there evidence of its having become, later on, the old seat of the Provincial Diet. But in the era of absolute rule this past had been overlaid by a vast apparatus of imperial administration, with its provincial headquarters, schools and
universities, barracks, courthouses, prisons, bishop’s palace, assembly rooms, and theater, together with the people needed to run them and the merchants and artisans who came in their wake, until finally an industry of entrepreneurs moved in, filling the suburbs with their factories one after the other, with a greater influence on the fate of this piece of earth in the past few generations than anything else had had. This town had a past, and it even had a face, but die eyes did not go with the mouth, or the chin with the hair; over everything lay the traces of a hectic life that is inwardly empty. This could possibly, under special personal circumstances, foster great originality.

To sum it up in a phrase perhaps equally arguable, Ulrich had the sense of something “spiritually insubstantial” in which one lost oneself so entirely as to awaken unbridled imaginings. In his pocket he carried his father’s eccentric telegram,
which he knew by heart: “This is to inform you that I am deceased” was the old gentleman’s message for him—or was it to him? as indicated by the signature at the end: “Your father.” His Excellency the Privy Councillor never went in for levity at serious moments. The weird information of the message was consequently infernally logical, since he was himself notifying his son when, in expectation of his end, he wrote or dictated word for word the message that was to be dispatched the instant he had drawn his last breath; the facts could really not be more correctly stated, and yet this act by which the present tried to dominate a future it could not live to see emitted from the grave an uncanny whiff of an angrily decayed will!

This manifestation, which somehow reminded Ulrich of the meticulously undiscriminating taste of small towns, made him think with some misgiving of his sister, who had married in the provinces and whom he
was about to meet, in the next few minutes. He had been wondering about her already on the train, for he did not know much about her. From time to time standard items of family news reached him through his father’s letters; for example: “Your sister Agathe is married,” adding some of the details, since at the time Ulrich had not been able to come home for the wedding. Only about a year later he received notice of the young husband’s death; then, three years or so after that, if he was not mistaken, word came that “Tour sister Agathe, I am glad to say, has decided to marry again.” At this second wedding, five years ago, Ulrich had been present and had seen his sister for a few days, but all he remembered was a ceaseless whirl, like a giant wheel of white cambric and lace. He also remembered the bridegroom, who made a poor impression on him. Agathe must have been twenty-two then, while he was twenty-seven, for he had just received his doctorate,
so that his sister had to be twenty-seven now; but he had not seen her since that time, nor exchanged letters with her. He recalled only that his father had later written more than once: “It pains me to report that all does not seem to be going as well as it might in your sister’s marriage, although her husband is a capital fellow” and “The latest successes of your sister Agathe’s husband have been most gratifying”: Such, more or less, were his father’s comments in letters to which Ulrich had, regretfully, never paid any attention; but once, as he now remembered quite clearly, in connection with a disapproving comment on his sister’s childlessness, their father expressed the hope that she was nevertheless contented in her marriage, although it was not in her character ever to admit it.

“I wonder what she looks like now,” he thought.
It had been one of the old gentleman’s eccentricities to keep them conscientiously informed about each other after he had sent them away from home at a tender age, right after their mother’s death, to be educated in different schools. Ulrich, who got into scrapes, was often not allowed home for school holidays; so that since their childhood, when they had in fact been inseparable, he had hardly seen his sister again, with the exception of one longish visit when Agathe was ten.

In the circumstances, Ulrich had thought it only natural that they did not write. What would they have had to say to each other? At the time of Agathe’s first marriage he was, as he now remembered, a lieutenant in the army, and in the hospital recovering from a bullet wound received in a duel: Lord, what an ass he had been! In fact, he had made every kind of ass of himself. For he remembered now that the memory of the
wounded lieutenant belonged someplace else. He had been about to qualify as an engineer and had something “important” to do that had kept him from the family ceremony. Later he learned that his sister had been very much in love with her first husband; he could not remember who had told him, but what does “very much in love” mean anyway? It’s what people say. She had married again, and Ulrich could not stand her second husband; that was the one thing he was sure of. He disliked him not only for the bad impression he made personally but also for that made by some of his books, which Ulrich had read, so that Ulrich’s subsequent forgetting of his sister might not have been quite unintentional. It was nothing to be proud of, but he had to admit that even during this last year, when he had thought of so many things, he had never given her a thought, not even when he had received the news of their father’s death. But he did ask the old
manservant who came to meet him at the station whether his brother-in-law had arrived yet, and was relieved to hear that Professor Hagauer was not expected until the day of the funeral. Even though it could be no more than two or three days till then, it seemed to him like a respite of indefinite duration, which he would spend alone with his sister as though they were the closest people in the world. There would have been no point in trying to see any logic in this; the thought of “my unknown sister” was evidently one of those roomy abstractions in which many feelings that are not quite at home anywhere could find a place.

Thus preoccupied, Ulrich had walked slowly into the town that opened up before him, at once strange and familiar. He had sent on his luggage, into which he had stuffed quite a number of books at the last minute, in a cab with the old servant, a part of his childhood memories, who had come to
combine the functions of caretaker, butler, and clerk in a fashion that over the years made them hard to distinguish from one another. It was probably this self-effacing, taciturn man to whom Ulrich’s father had dictated his death notice, and Ulrich’s feet led him homeward in pleasurable wonder as his now alert senses curiously took in the fresh impressions that every growing city springs on someone who has not seen it for a long time. At a certain point, which they remembered before he did, Ulrich’s feet turned off the main street, and he soon found himself in a narrow lane formed by two garden walls. Diagonally across his path stood the house of barely two stories, the main building higher than the wings, with the old stable to one side and, still pressed against the garden wall, the little house where the servant and his wife lived; it looked as though for all his confidence in them the aged master had wished to keep them as far as
possible from him while still embracing them within his walls. Ulrich had absently walked up to the locked garden gate and dropped the big ring-shaped knocker that hung there in lieu of a bell against the low door, black with age, before the servant came running up to correct his error. They had to go back around the wall to the main entrance, where the cab had drawn up, and it was only at this moment, seeing the shuttered facade of the house before him, that it occurred to Ulrich that his sister had not come to meet him at the station. The servant reported that Madame had a migraine and had retired after lunch, ordering them to wake her when the Herr Doktor arrived. Did his sister suffer from migraine often? Ulrich went on to ask, then instantly regretted his slip in drawing the old servant’s attention to family matters that were better passed over in silence.
“The young Madame gave orders for tea to be served in half an hour,” the well-trained old man replied, with a servant’s politely blank expression giving discreet assurance that he understood nothing beyond his duty.

Spontaneously Ulrich glanced up at the windows, supposing that Agathe might be standing there observing his arrival. He wondered whether she would be agreeable, becoming uneasily aware how awkward the visit would be if he happened not to like her. That she had neither come to meet his train nor met him at the house door was distinctly in her favor, however, showing a certain rapport of feeling: rushing to meet him, after all, would have been as uncalled for as it would have been for him on arrival to rush to his father’s coffin. He left word for her that he would be down in half an hour, and went to his room to get himself in order. The room he was to stay in was in the mansard-
roofed second story of the main house and had been his childhood room, now curiously supplemented by the addition of a few random pieces for an adult’s comfort. “It was probably the best they could do as long as the body is still in the house,” Ulrich thought, settling in among the ruins of his childhood a little awkwardly, yet also with a rather warm feeling that seemed to rise like mist from the floor. As he started to change it occurred to him to put on a pajama-like lounging suit he came across while unpacking. “She might at least have come down to say hello when I got here,” he thought, and there was a hint of rebuke in his casual choice of dress, even as he continued to feel that his sisters reason for acting as she did was likely to be a congenial one, so that he was also complimenting her by his unforced expression of ease.

The loose lounging suit of soft wool he put on was patterned in black and gray
squares, almost a Pierrot costume, gathered at the waist, wrists, and ankles; he liked its comfort, which felt pleasant after that sleepless night and the long train journey, as he came down the stairs. But when he entered the room where his sister was waiting, he was amazed at his costume, for by some mysterious directive of chance he found his appearance echoed in that of a tall, blond Pierrot in a pattern of delicate gray and rust stripes and lozenges, who at first glance looked quite like himself.

“I had no idea we were twins!” Agathe said, her face lighting up with a smile.
CONFIDENCES

They did not greet each other with a kiss but merely stood amicably facing each other, then moved apart, and Ulrich was able to take a good look at his sister. They were of matching height. Agathe’s hair was fairer than his and had the same dry fragrance as her skin, the fragrance that was the only thing he liked about his own body. Instead of being all bosom she had small, firm breasts, and her limbs seemed to have the long, slender spindle shape that combines natural athletic ability and beauty.

“I hope you’re over your migraine,” Ulrich said. “It doesn’t show.”
“I never had migraine; it was just the simplest thing to say,” Agathe explained. “I couldn’t very well send you a long and complicated message through the servants. I was lazy, that’s all. I took a nap. In this house I’ve got into the habit of sleeping every chance I get. I’m basically lazy—out of desperation, I think. And when I heard you were coming I thought, ‘Let’s hope this is the last time I feel sleepy,’ and I gave myself up to a sort of sleep cure. I thought it over carefully and then, for the butler’s convenience, decided to call it migraine.”

“Don’t you go in for any sports?” Ulrich asked.

“Some tennis. But I detest sports.”

As she spoke, he studied her face again. It did not seem very like his own, but perhaps he was mistaken; maybe it was like the same face done in pastels and in a woodcut, the difference in the medium obscuring the
congruence of line and plane. There was something in this face he found disturbing. After a while, he realized that he simply could not read its expression; what was missing was whatever it is that enables one to draw the usual inferences about the person. It was an expressive face, but nothing in it was emphasized, nothing combined in the way that normally suggests traits of character.

“How did you happen to dress like that?” Ulrich asked.

“No special reason. I thought it would be nice.”

“It’s very nice!” Ulrich laughed. “But positively a conjuring trick of chance! And Father’s death doesn’t seem to have greatly upset you either?”

Agathe rose slowly on her toes and then just as slowly sank back on her heels.
“Is your husband here yet?” her brother asked, just to say something.

“Professor Hagauer is coming for the funeral.” She seemed to relish the occasion to pronounce that name so formally and to dissociate herself from it as if it were some strange object.

Ulrich was at a loss how to respond. “Oh yes, so I was told,” he said.

Again they looked at each other, and then they went, as the proper next step, into the little room where the body lay.

The room had been kept artificially dark for a whole day; it was drenched in black. Flowers and lighted candles glowed and scented the air. The two Pierrots stood straight as they faced the dead man, as if watching him.

“I’ll never go back to Hagauer,” Agathe said, just to get it out. One could almost
think she wanted the dead man to hear it too.

There he lay on his bier, as he had directed: in full evening dress, the pall drawn halfway down his chest to expose the stiff shirtfront with all his decorations, his hands folded without a crucifix. Small, hard-ridged brows, sunken cheeks and lips. Stitched into the horrible, eyeless corpse’s skin, which is still a part of the personality and yet already something apart: life’s traveling bag. In spite of himself, Ulrich felt shaken at his very core, deep beneath any feeling or thought; but nowhere else. If he had had to put it into words, he would only have been able to say that a tiresome, loveless relationship had come to an end. Just as a bad marriage debases the people who cannot get free of it, so does every burdensome bond meant to last forever when the mortal substance shrivels away from under it.
“I would have liked you to come sooner,” Agathe went on, “but Papa wouldn’t have it. He made all the arrangements for his death himself. I think he would have been embarrassed to die with you looking on. I’ve been living here for two weeks now; it’s been horrible.”

“Did he love you, at least?” Ulrich asked.

“Whatever he wanted done he told old Franz to take care of, and from then on he gave the impression of someone who has nothing to do and has no purpose in life. But every fifteen minutes or so he’d lift up his head to check whether I was still in the room. For the first few days, that is. Then it was only every half hour, then every hour, and during that frightful last day it happened only two or three times. And all that time he never said a word to me except when I asked him something.”
As she spoke, Ulrich was thinking: “She’s really hard. Even as a child she could be incredibly stubborn, in her quiet way. And yet she seems to be amenable enough....” And suddenly he thought of an avalanche. He had once almost lost his life in a forest that was being devastated by an avalanche. It had been no more than a soft cloud of powdery snow, and yet the irresistible force behind it gave it the impact of a toppling mountain.

“Was it you who sent me the telegram?” he asked.

“That was old Franz, of course. It was all settled beforehand. He wouldn’t let me take care of him, either. He certainly never loved me, and I don’t know why he sent for me. I felt miserable and shut myself up in my room as often as I could. It was during one of those times that he died.”
“He probably did it to prove that you were in the wrong,” Ulrich said bitterly. “Come on!” He drew her toward the door. “But maybe he wanted you to stroke his forehead? Or kneel by his bedside? Even if it was only because he had always read that it’s the proper way to take leave of a father for the last time. Only he couldn’t bring himself to ask you.”

“Maybe,” she said.

They had stopped for another look at him.

“How horrible it is, all of it!” Agathe said.

“Yes,” Ulrich said. “And we know so little about it.”

As they were leaving the room Agathe stopped again and said to Ulrich: “I’m springing something on you that can’t be of any concern to you, of course, but it was
during Father’s illness that I decided not to go back to my husband under any circumstances.”

Her brother could not help smiling at the stubbornness with which she said this, for Agathe had a vertical furrow between her brows and spoke vehemently; she seemed to fear that he would not be on her side, and reminded him of a terrified cat whose fright makes it leap bravely to the attack.

“Does he consent?” Ulrich asked.

“He knows nothing about it yet,” Agathe said. “But he won’t consent!”

Her brother gave her a questioning look. She shook her head impatiently. “Oh no, it’s not what you think. There’s no third person involved,” she said.

With this, their conversation came to an end for the time being. Agathe apologized for having been so unmindful of Ulrich’s hunger
and fatigue, led him to a room where tea had been laid out, then went herself to fetch something that was missing from the tray. Left to himself, Ulrich used the opportunity to concentrate on whatever he could recollect about her husband, the better to understand her. Professor Hagauer was a man of medium height with a ramrod bearing and plump legs in baggy trousers, rather fleshy lips under a bristly mustache, and a fondness for florid neckties, probably as a sign that he was no common schoolmaster but one who was future-oriented. Ulrich felt his cold misgivings about Agathe’s choice reawaken, but that Gottlieb Hagauer, with candor shining from his brow and eyes, would harbor secret vices was entirely out of the question. “He’s the very model of the industrious, capable person, doing his best for humanity in his own field without meddling in matters beyond his scope,” Ulrich decided, remembering
Hagauer’s writings, as well, and falling into not entirely agreeable thoughts.

Such people can first be recognized for what they are even in their school days. They study not so much conscientiously—as it is called, confusing the effect with the cause—as in an orderly and practical fashion. They lay out every task beforehand, just as one has to lay out every piece of tomorrow’s clothing, down to the last collar button, the night before if one wants to dress quickly and without a hitch in the morning. There is no chain of thought they cannot fix in their minds by using half a dozen such laid-out studs, and there is no denying that the results do them credit and stand up to scrutiny. This takes them to the head of the class without their being perceived as prigs by their classmates, while people like Ulrich, who may be far more gifted but are given to overdoing a bit here and falling a bit short there, get gradually left behind in some
imperceptibly fated way. It occurred to him that he was secretly somewhat in awe of these favored types, because the precision with which their minds worked made his own romantic enthusiasm for precision seem a bit windy. “They haven’t a trace of soul,” he thought, “and they’re good-natured fellows. After the age of sixteen, when adolescents get worked up about intellectual problems, they seem to fall behind a little, not quite able to catch on to new ideas and feelings, but here, too, they work with their ten studs, and the day comes when they’re able to prove that they have always understood everything, of course without going to any untenable extremes, and in the end they are the ones who introduce the new ideas into practical life when for everyone else those ideas have faded away with their long-past adolescence, or have become lonely eccentricities.” And so, by the time Agathe came back into the room, Ulrich could still not imagine what
had actually happened to her, but he felt that entering the lists against her husband, even if it was unfair, was likely to offer him a most reprehensible pleasure.

Agathe seemed to see no point in trying to explain her decision rationally. Outwardly her marriage was in the most perfect order, as was only to be expected in the case of a man of Hagauer’s character. No quarrels, hardly any differences of opinion; if only because Agathe, as she told Ulrich, never confided her opinion to him on any subject. Of course no vices: no drink, no gambling, not even bachelor habits. Income fairly apportioned. Orderly household. Smooth social life as well as unsocial life, when they were alone.

“So if you simply leave him for no reason at all,” Ulrich said, “the divorce will be decided in his favor, provided he sues.”

“Let him sue!” Agathe said defiantly.
“Wouldn’t it be a good idea to offer him a small financial compensation if he’ll agree to a friendly settlement?”

“All I took away with me,” she replied, “was what I would need during an absence of three weeks, except for a few childish things and mementos from the time before Hagauer. He can keep all the rest; I don’t want it. But for the future he’s to get nothing more out of me—absolutely nothing!”

Again she had spoken with surprising vehemence. One could perhaps explain it by saying that Agathe wanted to revenge herself on this man for having let him take too much advantage of her in the past. Ulrich’s fighting spirit, his sportsmanship, his inventiveness in surmounting obstacles, were now aroused, although he was not especially pleased to feel it; it was too much like the effect of a stimulant that moves the superficial emotions while the deeper ones remain quite
untouched. Groping for an overview, he gave the conversation a different turn:

“I’ve read some of his work, and I’ve heard of him too,” he said. “As far as I can gather, he’s regarded as a coming man in pedagogy and education.”

“Yes,” Agatha said. “So he is.”

“Judging by what I know of his work, he’s not only a sound educator but a pioneer of reform in higher education. I remember one book of his in which he discussed the unique value of history and the humanities for a moral education on the one hand, and on the other the equally unique value of science and mathematics as intellectual discipline, and then, thirdly, the unique value of that brimming sense of life in sports and military exercise that makes one fit for action. Is that it?”

“I suppose so,” Agatha said, “but did you notice his way with quotations?”
“Quotations? Let me see: I dimly remember noticing something there. He uses lots of quotations. He quotes the classics. Of course, he quotes the moderns too....Now I’ve got it: He does something positively revolutionary for a schoolmaster—he quotes not merely academic sources but even aircraft designers, political figures, and artists of today....But I’ve already said that, haven’t I?” He ended on that uncertain note with which recollection runs into a dead end.

“What he does,” Agatha added, “with music, for instance, is to go recklessly as far as Richard Strauss, or with painting as far as Picasso, but he will never, even if only to illustrate something that’s wrong, cite a name that hasn’t become more or less established currency in the newspapers, even if it’s only treated negatively.”

That was it. Just what he had been groping for in his memory. He looked up. He
was pleased by the taste and the acuity shown in Agathe’s reply.

“So he’s become a leader, over time, by being among the first to follow in time’s train,” he commented with a laugh. “All those who come after him see him already ahead of them! But do you like our leading figures yourself?”

“I don’t know. In any case, I don’t quote them.”

“Still, we ought to give him his due,” Ulrich said. “Your husband’s name stands for a program that many people today regard as the most advanced. His achievement represents a solid small step forward. His rise cannot be long in coming. Sooner or later he will have at least a university chair, even though he has had to toil for his living as a schoolteacher, while as for me, all I ever had to do was go straight along the course laid out for
me—and today I’ve come so far that I probably wouldn’t even get a lectureship.”

Agathe was disappointed, which was probably why her face took on a blank, porcelain-smooth, ladylike mask as she sweetly said: “Oh, I don’t know; perhaps you ought to keep on his good side.”

“When do you expect him?” Ulrich asked.

“Not before the funeral; he has no time to spare. But under no circumstances is he to stay in this house—I won’t have it!”

“As you like,” Ulrich decided unexpectedly. “I shall meet him at the station and drop him off at some hotel. And if you want, I’ll tell him, ‘This is where you stay.’”

Agathe was surprised and suddenly elated.

“That will make him furious, because he’ll have to pay; he was of course counting
on staying here with us!” Her expression had instantly changed and regained the look of a wild and mischievous child.

“What is the situation, actually?” her brother asked. “Does the house belong to you, me, or both of us? Is there a will?”

“Papa left a big package for me that’s supposed to contain all we need to know.”

They went to the study, which lay beyond the deceased.

Again they moved through candlelight and the scent of flowers, through the field of vision of those two eyes that no longer saw. In the flickering half-darkness Agathe was for the space of a second a shimmering haze of gold, gray, and pink. They found the package holding the will and took it back with them to the tea table, where they then forgot to open it.

For as they sat down again Agathe told her brother that, to all intents and purposes,
she had been living apart from her husband, though under the same roof; she didn’t say how long this had been going on.

It made a bad impression on Ulrich at first. When a married woman sees a man as a possible lover, she is likely to treat him to this land of confidence, and although his sister had come out with it in embarrassment, indeed with defiance, in a clumsy and palpable effort to throw down a challenge, he was annoyed with her for not coming up with something more original; he thought she was making too much of it.

“Frankly,” he said, “I have never understood how you could have lived with such a man at all.”

Agathe told him that it was their father’s idea, and what could she have done to stop it?

“But you were a widow by then, not an underage virgin!”
“That’s just it. I had come back to Papa. Everyone was saying that I was still too young to live on my own; even if I was a widow, I was only nineteen. And then I just couldn’t stand it here.”

“Then why couldn’t you have looked for another man? Or studied something and made yourself independent that way?” Ulrich demanded relentlessly.

Agathe merely shook her head. There was a pause before she answered: “I’ve told you already: I’m lazy.”

Ulrich felt that this was no answer. “So you had some special reason for marrying Hagauer?”

“Yes.”

“You were in love with someone you couldn’t have?”

Agathe hesitated. “I loved my first husband.”
Ulrich regretted he had used the word “love” so glibly, as though he regarded the importance of the social arrangement it refers to as inviolable. “Trying to comfort the grieving is no better than handing a dry crust to a beggar,” he thought. Nevertheless, he felt tempted to go on in the same vein. “And then you realized what you’d let yourself in for, and you started to make trouble for Hagauer?” he suggested.

“Yes,” she admitted, “but not right away—quite late,” she added. “Very late, in fact.”

At this point they got into a little argument.

These confessions were visibly costing Agathe an effort, even though she was making them of her own accord and evidently, as was to be expected at her age, saw in her sex life an important subject of general conversation. From the first she seemed ready to
take her chances on his sympathy or lack of it; she wanted his trust and was determined, not without candor and passion, to win her brother over. But Ulrich, still in the mood to dispense moral guidance, could not yet meet her halfway. For all his strong-mindedness he was by no means always free of those same prejudices he rejected intellectually, having too often let his life go one way and his mind another. For he had more than once exploited and misused his power over women, with a hunters delight in catching and observing his quarry, so he had almost always seen the woman as the prey struck down by the amorous male spear. The lust of humiliation to which the woman in love subjects herself was fixed in his mind, while the man is very far from feeling a comparable surrender. This masculine notion of female weakness before male power is still quite common today, although with the successive waves of new generations more modern
concepts have arisen, and the naturalness with which Agathe treated her dependence on Hagauer offended her brother. It seemed to him that his sister had suffered defilement without being quite aware of it when she subjected herself to the influence of a man he disliked and went on enduring it for years. He did not say so, but Agathe must have read something of the kind in his face, for she suddenly said:

“After all, I couldn’t simply bolt the moment I had married him; that would have been hysteria!”

Ulrich was suddenly jerked out of his role as elder brother and dispenser of edifying narrow-mindedness.

“Would it really be hysteria to feel disgusted and draw all the necessary conclusions?” He tried to soften this by following it up with a smile and looking at his sister in the friendliest possible manner.
Agathe looked back at him, her face somehow rendered defenseless with the effort of deciphering the expression on his.

“Surely a normal healthy person is not so sensitive to distasteful circumstances?” she persisted. “What does it matter, after all?”

Ulrich reacted by pulling himself together, not wanting to let his mind be ruled by one part of himself. He was once more all objective intelligence. “You’re quite right,” he said. “What happens doesn’t really matter. What counts is the system of ideas by which we understand it, and the way it fits into our personal outlook.”

“How do you mean?” Agathe asked dubiously.

Ulrich apologized for putting it so abstractly, but while he was searching for a more easily accessible formulation, his
brotherly jealousy reasserted itself and influenced his choice of terms.

“Suppose that a woman we care about has been raped,” he offered. “From a heroic perspective, we would have to be prepared for vengeance or suicide; from a cynical-empirical standpoint, we would expect her to shake it off like a duck shedding water; and what would actually happen nowadays would probably be a mixture of these two. But this lack of a touchstone within ourselves is more sordid than all the rest.”

However, Agathe did not accept this way of putting it either. “Does it really seem so horrible to you?” she asked simply.

“I don’t know. I thought it must be humiliating to live with a person one doesn’t love. But now...just as you like.”

“Is it worse than a woman who wants to marry less than three months after a divorce having to submit to an examination by an
officially appointed gynecologist to see whether she’s pregnant, because of the laws of inheritance? I read that somewhere.” Agathe’s forehead seemed to bulge with defensive anger, and the little vertical furrow between her eyebrows appeared again. “And they all put up with it, if they have to!” she said disdainfully.

“I don’t deny it,” Ulrich responded. “Everything that actually happens passes over us like rain and sunshine. You’re probably being much more sensible than I in regarding that as natural. But a man’s nature isn’t natural; it wants to change nature, so it sometimes goes to extremes.” His smile was a plea for friendship, and his eyes saw how young she looked. When she got excited her face did not pucker up but smoothed out even more under the stress going on behind it, like a glove within which the hand clenches into a fist.
“I’ve never thought about it in such general terms,” she now said. “But after listening to you, I am again reminded that I’ve been leading a dreadfully wrong land of life.”

“It’s only because you’ve already told me so much, of your own accord, without coming to the point,” said her brother, lightly acknowledging this concession in response to his own. “How am I to judge the situation properly when you won’t let me know anything about the man for whom you are, after all, really leaving Hagauer?”

Agathe stared at him like a child or a pupil whose teacher is being unfair. “Does there have to be a man? Can’t it happen of itself? Did I do something wrong by leaving him without having a lover? I would be lying if I said that I’ve never had one; I don’t want to be so absurd; but I haven’t got a lover now, and I’d resent it very much if you thought I’d really need one in order to leave Hagauer!”
Her brother had no choice but to assure her that passionate women were known to leave their husbands even without having a lover, and that he even regarded this as the more dignified course.

The tea they had come together to share merged into an informal and haphazard supper, at Ulrich’s suggestion, because he was very tired and wanted to go to bed early to get a good night’s sleep on account of the next day, which was likely to be busy with bothersome details. They smoked their final cigarettes before parting, and Ulrich still did not know what to make of his sister. She did not have anything either emancipated or bohemian about her, even if she was sitting there in those wide trousers in which she had received her unknown brother. It was more something hermaphroditic, as it now seemed to him; as she moved and gestured in talking, the light masculine outfit suggested the tender form beneath with the
semitransparency of water, and in contrast to the independent freedom of her legs, she wore her beautiful hair up, in true feminine style. But the center of this ambivalence was still her face, so rich in feminine charm yet with something missing, something held in reserve, whose nature he could not quite make out.

And that he knew so little about her and was sitting with her so intimately, though not at all as he would with a woman for whom he would count as a man, was something very pleasant in his present state of fatigue, to which he was now beginning to succumb.

“What a change from yesterday!” he thought.

He was grateful for it and tried to think of something affectionately brotherly to say to Agathe as they said goodnight, but as all this was something new to him, he could
think of nothing to say. So he merely put his arm around her and kissed her.
The next morning Ulrich woke early as smoothly as a fish leaping out of water, from a dreamless sound sleep that had wiped out every trace of the previous day’s fatigue. He prowled through the house looking for breakfast. The ritual of mourning had not yet fully resumed; only a scent of it hung in all the rooms; it made him think of a shop that had opened its shutters early in the day, while the street is still empty of people. Then he got his scientific work out of his suitcase and took it into his father’s study. As he sat there, with a fire in the grate, the room looked more human than on the previous
evening: Even though a pedantic mind, always weighing all pros and cons, had created it, right up to the plaster busts facing each other symmetrically on the top bookshelves, the many little personal things left lying about—pencils, eyeglass, thermometer, an open book, boxes of pen nibs, and the like—gave the room the touching emptiness of a habitat that had just been abandoned. Ulrich sat, not too far from the window, in the midst of it, at the desk, the room’s nerve center, and felt a peculiar listlessness. The walls were hung with portraits of his forebears, and some of the furniture dated from their time. The man who had lived here had formed the egg of his life from the shells of theirs; now he was dead, and his belongings stood as sharply there as if he had been chiseled out of the space; yet already die order of things was about to crumble, adapt itself to his successor, and one sensed all these objects that had outlasted him quickening
with a new life as yet almost imperceptible behind their fixedly mournful air.

In this mood Ulrich spread out his work, which he had interrupted weeks and months ago, and his eyes immediately alighted on the equations in hydrodynamics where he had stopped. He dimly remembered having thought of Clarisse as he used the three basic states of water to exemplify a new mathematical operation, and Clarisse having distracted him from it. There is a kind of recollection that evokes not the word itself but the atmosphere in which it was spoken, and so Ulrich suddenly thought: “Carbon...” and got the feeling, as if from nowhere, that at this instant all he needed to continue was to know all the various states in which carbon occurred; but he could not remember, and thought instead: “The human being comes in twos. As man and as woman.” He paused at this for quite a while, evidently stunned with amazement, as if he
had just made some earthshaking discovery. But beneath this stalling of his mind something different was concealed. For one can be hard, selfish, eager, sharply profiled against the world, as it were, and can suddenly feel oneself, the same Ulrich What’s-his-name, quite the opposite: deeply absorbed, a selfless, happy creature at one with an ineffably tender and somehow also selfless condition of everything around him. And he asked himself: “How long is it since I last felt like this?” To his surprise it turned out to be hardly more than twenty-four hours. The silence surrounding Ulrich was refreshing, and the condition he was reminded of did not seem as uncommon as he ordinarily thought. “We’re all organisms, after all,” he thought, relaxing, “who have to strain all their energies and appetites in an unkind world to prevail against each other. But together with his enemies and victims each one of us is also a particle and an offspring of this
world, not at all as detached from the others and as independent as he imagines.” In which case it was surely not incomprehensible that at times an intimation of oneness and love arises from the world, almost a certainty that the normal exigencies of life keep us from seeing more than half of the great pattern of the interrelationships of being. There was nothing objectionable in this for a man of mathematical-scientific bent and precise feelings; on the contrary, it reminded Ulrich of a study by a psychologist whom he happened to know personally, which dealt with two main opposing groups of concepts, one based on a sense of being enveloped by the content of one’s experiences, the other on one’s enveloping them, and advanced the connection that such a “being on the inside” and “looking at something from the outside,” a feeling of “concavity” and “convexity,” a “spatiality” as well as a “corporeality,” an “introspection” and an “observation,”
occurred in so many other pairs of opposites of experience and in their linguistic tropes that one might assume a primal dual form of human consciousness behind it all. It was not one of those strictly factual academic studies but one of the imaginative kind, a speculative groping into the future, that are prompted by some stimulus outside the scope of everyday scientific activity; but it was well grounded and its deductions were persuasive, moving toward a unity of feeling back in the mists of creation, whose tangled wreckage, Ulrich thought, might be the origin of the present-day attitude that vaguely organizes our experience around the contrast between a male and a female mode of experience but is secretly and mysteriously shadowed by ancient dreams.

Here Ulrich tried to secure his footing—literally, as one uses ropes and crampons for a descent down a dangerous rock face—and began to reflect further:
“The most ancient philosophies, obscure and almost incomprehensible as they are to us, often speak of a male and a female principle,” he thought.

“The goddesses that existed alongside the gods in primitive religions are in fact no longer within our emotional range,” he thought. “Any relationship we might have to such superhuman women would be masochistic!

“But nature,” he thought, “provides men with nipples and women with rudimentary male sex organs, which shouldn’t lead us to conclude that our ancestors were hermaphrodites. Nor need they have been psychological hybrids either. And so it must have been from outside that they received the double possibility of a giving and a receiving vision, as a dual aspect of nature, and somehow all this is far older than the difference of gentler, on which the sexes later drew to fill out their psychological wardrobe....”
As he thought along these lines he remembered a detail from his childhood that distracted him, because—this had not happened for a long time—it gave him pleasure to remember. Here it must be mentioned that his father had in earlier days been a horseman and had even kept riding horses, to which the empty stable by the garden wall, the first sight Ulrich had seen on his arrival, bore witness. Riding was evidently the only aristocratic inclination his father had presumed to adopt, out of admiration for his feudal friends’ way of life. But Ulrich had been a little boy; now, in his musings, he experienced anew the sense of the infinite or at least something immeasurable that the horse’s high, muscular body aroused in the marveling child, like some awesome legendary mountain range covered with slopes of hair, across which the twitchings of the skin ran like the waves of a great wind. It was the kind of recollection, he realized, that
owes its glamour to the child’s powerlessness to make its wishes come true; but that hardly counts compared with the greatness of that splendor, which was no less than supernatural, or with the no less miraculous splendor little Ulrich touched shortly afterward with his fingertips in his quest for the first one. For at that time the town was placarded with circus posters showing not only horses but lions and tigers, too, and huge, splendid dogs that lived on good terms with the wild beasts. He had stared at these posters for a long time before he managed to get one of the richly colored pieces of paper for himself, cut the animals out, and stiffen them with little wooden supports so that they could stand up. What happened next can only be compared to drinking that never quenches one’s thirst no matter how long one drinks, for there was no end to it, nor, stretching on for weeks, did it get anywhere; he was constantly being drawn to and into these adored
creatures with the unutterable joy of the lonely child, who had the feeling every time he looked at them that he owned them, with the same intensity that he felt something ultimate was missing, some unattainable fulfillment the very lack of which gave his yearning the boundless radiance that seemed to flood his whole being. Along with this peculiarly boundless memory there arose unbidden from the oblivion of that early time another, slightly later experience, which now, despite its childish futility, took possession of the grown body dreaming with open eyes. It was the little girl who had only two qualities: one, that she had to belong to him, and the other, the fights with other boys this got him into. And of these two things only the fights were real, because there was no little girl. Strange time, when he used to go out like a knight errant to leap at some boy’s throat, preferably when the boy was bigger than he, in some deserted street that might
harbor a mystery, and wrestle with the surprised enemy! He had collected quite a few beatings, and sometimes won great victories too, but no matter how it turned out he felt cheated of his satisfaction. Nor would his feelings accept any connection, obvious as it was, between the little girls he actually knew and the secret child he fought for, because, like all boys his age, he froze and became tongue-tied in the presence of girls until, one day, an exception occurred. And now Ulrich remembered as clearly as if the circular image in the field of a telescope were trained across the years on that evening when Agathe was dressed up for a children’s party. She wore a velvet dress, and her hair flowed over it like waves of bright velvet, so that the sight of her, even though he was himself encased in a terrifying knight’s costume, suddenly filled him, in the same indescribable way as he had longed for the animals on the circus posters, with the longing to be a girl.
At that age he still knew so little about men and women that he did not regard this as entirely impossible, but he knew enough not to try immediately, as children usually do, to force his wish to come true; rather, if he tried to define it now, it had been as if he were groping in darkness for a door and suddenly came up against some blood-warm or warmly sweet resistance, pressing against it time and again as it yielded tenderly to his urge to penetrate it without actually giving way. Perhaps it also resembled some harmless form of vampire passion, which sucks the desired being into itself, except that this infant male did not want to draw that infant female into himself but wanted to take her place entirely, and this happened with that dazzling tenderness present only in the first intimations of sexuality.

Ulrich stood up and stretched his arms, astonished at his daydreaming. Not ten steps away, on the other side of the wall, his
father’s body was laid out, and he now noticed for the first time that around them both the place had been for some time swarming with people, as though they had shot up out of the ground, bustling about this dead house that went on living. Old women were laying down carpets and lighting fresh candles, there was hammering on the staircase, floors were being waxed, flowers delivered, and now he was about to be drawn into these goings-on. People had come to see him who were up and about at this early hour because they wanted something, or needed to know something, and from this moment the chain of people never stopped. There were inquiries from the university about the funeral, a peddler came and shyly asked for clothing, a German firm had commissioned a dealer in local antiquities, who with profuse apologies made on the firm’s behalf an offer for a rare legal tome that the library of the deceased might contain; a chaplain needed to see
Ulrich about some point that had to be cleared up in the parish register, a man from the insurance company came with long and complicated questions, someone wanted a piano cheap, a real estate agent left his card in case the house might be for sale, a retired government clerk offered to address envelopes; and so they incessantly came, went, asked, and wanted all through the precious morning hours: at the front door, where the old servant shook off as many as he could, and upstairs, where Ulrich had to see those that managed to slip through, each beginning with a matter-of-fact reference to the death, and each asserting, vocally or in writing, his own claim to life. Ulrich had never before realized how many people were politely waiting for someone to die, and how many hearts are set throbbing the moment one’s own stops. It took him somewhat aback, and he saw a dead beetle lying in the
woods, and other beetles, birds, and flapping butterflies gathering around.

For all this commotion of profit-seeking was shot through with the flickerings and flutterings of the forest-deep darkness. Through the lenses of eyes veiled with emotion the profit motive gleamed like a lantern left burning in bright daylight, as a man with black crepe on the black sleeve of something between mourner’s garb and business suit entered, stopping at the door; he seemed to expect either Ulrich or himself to burst into tears. When neither happened, after a few seconds he seemed satisfied, for he came forward and like any other businessman introduced himself as the funeral director, come to make sure that Ulrich was satisfied with the arrangements thus far. He assured Ulrich that everything else would be conducted in a manner that even the late lamented, who everyone knew had been a gentleman none too easy to please, was bound to have
approved. He pressed into Ulrich’s hand a form covered with fine print and rectangles and made him read through what turned out to be a contract drawn to cover all possible classes of funerals, such as: eight horses or two horses...wreath carriage...number of...harness, style of...with outrider, silver-plated...attendants, style of...torches a la Marienburg...a la Admont...number of attendants...style of lighting...for how long...coffin, land of wood...potted plants...name, date of birth, gentler, occupation...disclaimer of liability...Ulrich had no idea where these terms, some of them archaic, came from; he inquired; the funeral director looked at him in surprise; he had no idea either. He stood there facing Ulrich like a synapse in the brain of mankind, linking stimulus and response while failing to generate any consciousness whatever. This merchant of mourning, who had been entrusted with centuries-old traditions which he could
use as his stock-in-trade, felt that Ulrich had loosened the wrong screw, and quickly tried to cover this up with a remark intended to expedite the business in hand. He explained that all this terminology was unfortunately required by the statutes of the national association of undertakers, but that it really didn’t matter if they were ignored in practice, as indeed they always were, and if Ulrich would just be good enough to sign the form—Madame, his sister, had refused to do so yesterday without consulting her brother—it would simply indicate that the client was in accord with the instructions left by his father, and he would be assured of a first-rate execution of the order.

While Ulrich signed, he asked the man whether he had already seen here in town one of those electrically powered sausage machines with a picture of Saint Luke as patron of the guild of butchers and sausage makers; he himself had seen some once in
Brussels— but there was no answer to wait for, because in the place of the funeral director stood another man who wanted something from him, a journalist from the leading local newspaper seeking information for the obituary. Ulrich gave it, dismissing the undertaker with the form; but as soon as he tried to provide an account of the most important aspects of his father’s life, he realized that he did not know what was important and what was not, and the reporter had to come to his aid. Only then, in the grip of the forceps of a professional curiosity trained to extract what was worth knowing, did the interview proceed, and Ulrich felt as if he were present at the Creation. The journalist, a young man, asked whether the old gentleman had died after a long illness or unexpectedly, and when Ulrich said that his father had continued lecturing right up to the last week of his life, this was framed as: “...working to the very end in the vigorous exercise of
all his powers.” Then the chips began to fly off the old man’s life until nothing was left but a few ribs and joints: Born in Protivin in 1844...educated at...and the University of...appointed to the post of...on [date]...until, with the listing of five such appointments and honorary degrees, the basic facts were almost exhausted. Marriage at some point. A few books. Once nearly became Minister of Justice, but someone’s opposition prevailed. The reporter took notes, Ulrich checked them, they were in order. The reporter was pleased; he had the necessary number of lines. Ulrich was astonished at the little heap of ashes that remains of a human life. For every piece of information he had received, the reporter had had in readiness some six-or eight-cylinder phrase: distinguished scholar, wide sympathies, forward-looking but statesmanlike, mind of truly universal scope, and so on, as if no one had died for a long time and the phrases had been
unemployed for quite a while and were hungering to be used. Ulrich tried to think; he would have liked to add something worth saying about his father, but the chronicler had his facts and was putting his notebook away; what remained was like trying to pick up the contents of a glass of water without the glass.

The comings and goings had meanwhile slackened. All the flood of people who had, the day before, been told by Agathe to see him had now passed; so when the reporter took his leave, Ulrich found himself alone. Something or other had put him in an embittered mood. Hadn’t his father been right to drag along his sacks of knowledge, turning the piled grain of that knowledge now and then, and for the rest simply submitting to those powers of life that he regarded as the strongest? Ulrich thought of his own work, lying untouched in a desk drawer. Probably no one would even be able to say of him,
someday, as they could of his father, that he had turned the grain pile over! Ulrich stepped into the little room where the dead man lay on his bier. This rigid, geometric cell surrounded by the ceaseless bustle to which it gave rise was incredibly eerie. The body floated stiff as a little wooden stick amid the floods of activity; but now and then for an instant the image would be reversed, and then all the life around him seemed petrified and the body seemed to be gliding along with a peculiarly quiet motion. “What does the traveler care,” it said at such moments, “for the cities he has left behind at the landings? Here I once lived, and I did what was expected of me, and now I’m on my way again.” Ulrich’s heart constricted with the self-doubt of a man who in the midst of others wants something different than they do. He looked his father in the face. What if everything he regarded as his own personality was no more than a reaction against that face, originating
in some childish antagonism? He looked around for a mirror, but there was none, only this blank face to reflect the light.

He scrutinized it for resemblances. Perhaps there were some. Perhaps it was all there: their race, their ties with the past, the impersonal element, the stream of heredity in which the individual is only a ripple, the limitations, disillusionments, the endless repetitiveness of the mind going around in circles, which he hated with every fiber of his deepest will to live.

In a sudden fit of discouragement he thought of packing up and leaving even before the funeral. If there really was something he could still achieve in life, what was he doing here?

But in the doorway he bumped into his sister, who had come looking for him.
OLD ACQUAINTANCE

For the first time Ulrich saw her dressed as a woman, and after his impression of her yesterday she seemed to be in disguise. Through the open door artificial light mingled with the tremulous gray of mid-morning, and this black apparition with blond hair seemed to be standing in an ethereal grotto through which radiant splendor flowed. Agathe’s hair was drawn back closer to her head, making her face look more feminine than it had yesterday. Her delicate womanly breasts were embedded in the black of the severe dress in that perfect balance between yielding and resistance characteristic of the feather-light hardness of a pearl; the slim long legs he had
seen yesterday as so like his own were now curtained by a skirt. Now that her appearance as a whole was less like his own, he could see how alike their faces were. He felt as if it were his own self that had entered through a door and was coming to meet him, though it was a more beautiful self, with an aura in which he never saw himself. For the first time it flashed on him that his sister was a dreamlike repetition and variant of himself, but as the impression lasted only a moment he forgot it again.

Agathe had come to remind her brother of certain duties that were on the point of being delayed too long, for she had overslept. She held their father’s will in her hands and drew Ulrich’s attention to some dispositions in it that must be dealt with at once. Most urgent was a rather odd stipulation about the old man’s decorations, which was also known to the servant Franz. Agathe had zealously, if somewhat irreverently, underlined
this point in the will in red pencil. The deceased had wanted to be buried with his decorations on his chest, and he had quite a few of them, but since it was not from vanity that he wanted this done he had added a long and ruminative justification of this wish. His daughter had read only the beginning, leaving it to her brother to explain the rest to her.

“Now, how shall I put it?” Ulrich said after he had read the passage. “Papa wants to be buried with all his decorations because he considers the individualistic theory of the state to be false! He favors the universalist view: It is only through the creative community of the state that the individual gains a purpose that transcends the merely personal, a sense of value and justice. Alone he is nothing, which is why the monarch personifies a spiritual symbol. In short, when a man dies he should wrap himself in his
decorations as a dead sailor is wrapped in the flag when his body is consigned to the sea!”

“But didn’t I read somewhere that these medals have to be given back?”

“The heirs are obliged to return the medals to the Chamberlain’s Office. So Papa had duplicates made. Still, he seems to feel that the ones he bought are not quite the real thing, so he wants us to substitute them for the originals only when they close the coffin; that’s the trouble. Who knows, perhaps that’s his silent protest against the regulation, which he wouldn’t express any other way.”

“But by that time there’ll be hundreds of people here, and we’ll forget!” Agathe worried.

“We might just as well do it now.”

“There’s no time now. You’d better read the next part, what he writes about Professor
Schwung. Professor Schwung may be here at any moment; I was expecting him all day yesterday."

"Then let's do it after Schwung leaves."

"But it's not very nice," Agathe objected, "not to let him have his wish."

"He'll never know it."

She looked at him doubtfully. "Are you sure of that?"

"Oh?" Ulrich laughed. "Are you not quite sure, by any chance?"

"I'm not sure about anything," Agathe answered.

"Even if it weren't sure, he was never satisfied with us anyway."

"That's true," Agathe said. "All right, let's do it later. But tell me something," she added. "Don't you ever bother about what's expected of you?"
Ulrich hesitated. “She has a good dressmaker,” he thought. “I needn’t have worried that she might be provincial!” But because these words somehow brought back all yesterday evening, he tried to think of an answer that would really be appropriate and helpful to her; but he could not find a way to put it that would not cause misunderstanding, so he ended up with involuntarily youthful brashness:

“It’s not only Father who’s dead; all the ceremonials around him are dead too. His will is dead. The people who turn up here are dead. I’m not trying to be nasty; God knows we probably ought to be grateful to all those who shore up the world we live in: but all that is the limestone of life, not its oceans!” He noticed a puzzled glance from his sister and realized how obscurely he was talking. “Society’s virtues are vices to the saint,” he ended with a laugh.
He put his hands on her shoulders, in a gesture that could have been construed as either patronizing or high-spirited but sprang only from embarrassment. Yet Agathe stepped back with a serious face and would not go along.

“Did you make that up yourself?” she asked.

“No; a man whom I love said it.”

She had the sullenness of a child forcing itself to think hard as she tried to sum up his responses in one statement: “So you would hardly call a man who is honest out of habit a good man? But a thief who steals for the first time, with his heart pounding, you’ll call a good man?”

These odd words took Ulrich aback, and he became more serious.

“I really don’t know,” he said abruptly. “In some situations I personally don’t very
much care whether something is considered right or wrong, but I can’t give you any rules you could go by.”

Agathe slowly turned her questioning gaze away from him and picked up the will again. “We must get on with this; here’s another marked passage,” she admonished herself.

Before taking to his bed for the last time the old gentleman had written a number of letters, and his will contained explanations elucidating them and directions for sending them. The marked passage referred to Professor Schwung, one of his old colleagues, who after a lifelong friendship had so galled the last year of his life by opposing his view on the statute relating to diminished responsibility. Ulrich immediately recognized the familiar long-drawn-out arguments about illusion and will, the sharpness of law and the ambiguity of nature, which his father had summarized for him again before his
death. Indeed, nothing seemed to have been so much on his mind in his final days as Schwung’s denunciation of the social school of thought, which his father had joined, as an emanation of Prussian influence. He had just begun to outline a pamphlet that was to have been titled “The State and the Law; or, Consistency and Denunciation,” when he felt his strength beginning to fail and saw with bitterness the enemy left in sole possession of the field. In solemn words such as are inspired only by the imminence of death and the struggle to preserve that sacred possession, one’s reputation, he enjoined his children not to let his work fall into oblivion, and most particularly charged his son to cultivate the influential connections he owed to his father’s tireless efforts, in order to crush totally all Professor Schwung’s hopes of realizing his aims.

Once one has expressed oneself in this fashion, then after one’s task is done, or at
least the way is paved for its completion, it by no means precludes one’s feeling the urge to forgive a former friend such errors as have arisen from gross vanity. When a man is seriously ill and feels his mortal coil quietly uncoiling, he is inclined to forgive and ask forgiveness; but when he feels better he takes it all back, because the healthy body is by nature implacable. The old gentleman must have experienced both these states of mind as his condition fluctuated during his last illness, and the one must have seemed as justified as the other. But such a situation is unbearable for a distinguished jurist, and so his logically trained mind had devised a means of leaving his last will unassailably valid, impervious to the influence of any last-minute emotional waverings: He wrote a letter of forgiveness but left it unsigned and undated, with instructions for Ulrich to date it at the hour of his father’s death, then sign it together with his sister Agathe as proxies, as can be
done with an oral will when a dying man no longer has the strength to sign his name. Actually, he was, without wanting to admit it, an odd fish, this little old man who had always submitted to the hierarchies of existence and defended them as their most zealous servant while stifling within himself all sorts of rebellious impulses, for which, in his chosen course of life, he could never find an outlet. Ulrich was reminded of the death notice he had received, which had probably been dictated in the same frame of mind; he even almost recognized a certain kinship with himself in it, though not resentfully this time but with compassion, at least in the sense that he could see how the old man’s lifelong frustration at not being able to express his feelings must have led to his being infuriated to the point of hatred by this son who made life easy for himself by taking unpardonable liberties. For this is how the ways of sons always appear to father’s, and Ulrich
felt a twinge of filial sympathy as he thought of all that was still unresolved inside himself. But he no longer had time to find some appropriate expression for all this that Agathe would also understand; he had just begun when a man swung with great energy into the twilit room. He strode in, hurled forward by his own energy right into the shimmer of the candlelight, before the derailed old servant could catch up to announce him. He lifted his arm in another wide sweep to shield his eyes with his hand, one step from the bier.

"My revered friend!" the visitor intoned sonorously. And the little old man lay with clenched jaws in the presence of his enemy Schwung.

"Ah, my dear young friends," Professor Schwung continued: "Above us the majesty of the starry firmament, within us the majesty of the moral law!" With veiled eyes he gazed down upon his faculty colleague.
“Within this breast now cold there lived the majesty of the moral law!” Only then did he turn around to shake hands with the brother and sister.

Ulrich took this first opportunity to acquit himself of his charge.

“You and my father were unfortunately at odds with each other lately, sir?” he opened cautiously.

For a moment the graybeard did not seem to catch his meaning.

“Differences of opinion, hardly worth mentioning!” he replied magnanimously, gazing earnestly at the deceased. But when Ulrich politely persisted, hinting that a last will was involved, the situation in the room suddenly became tense, the way it does in a low-down dive when everyone knows someone has just drawn a knife under the table and in a moment all hell will break loose. So even with his last gasp the old boy
had managed to gall his colleague Schwung! Enmity of such long standing had of course long since ceased to be a feeling and become a habit; provided something or other did not happen to stir up the hostility afresh, it simply ceased to exist. There was only the accumulated experience of countless grating episodes in the past, which had coagulated into a contemptuous opinion each held of the other, an opinion as unaffected by the flux of emotion as any unbiased truth would be. Professor Schwung felt this just as his antagonist, now dead, had felt it. Forgiveness seemed to him quite childish and beside the point, for that one relenting impulse before the end—merely a feeling at that, not a professional admission of error—naturally counted for nothing against the experiences of years of controversy and, as Schwung saw it, could only serve, and rather brazenly, to put him in the wrong if he should take advantage of his victory. But this had nothing to do with
Professor Schwung’s need to take leave of his dead friend. Good Lord, they had known each other back at the start of their academic careers, before either of them was married! Do you remember that evening in the Burggarten, how we drank to the setting sun and argued about Hegel? However many sunsets there may have been since then, that’s the one I always remember. And do you remember our first professional disagreement, which almost made enemies of us way back then? Those were the days! Now you are dead, and I’m still on my feet, I’m glad to say, even though I’m standing by your coffin.

Such are the feelings, as everyone knows, of elderly people faced with the death of their contemporaries. When we come into the sere and yellow leaf, poetry breaks out. Many people who have not turned a verse since their seventeenth year suddenly write a poem at seventy-seven, when drawing up
their last will. Just as at the Last Judgment the dead shall be called forth one by one, even though they have long been at rest at the bottom of time together with their centuries, like the cargoes of foundered ships, so too, in the last will, things are summoned by name and have their personalities, worn away by use, restored to them: “The Bokhara rug with the cigar burn, in my study...” is the sort of thing one reads in such final dispositions, or “The umbrella with the rhinoceros-horn handle that I bought at Sunshine & Winters in May 1887...” Even the bundles of securities are named and invoked individually by number.

Nor is it chance that, as each object lights up again for the last time, the longing should arise to attach to it a moral, an admonition, a blessing, a principle, to cast one last spell on so many unreckoned things that rise up once more as one feels oneself sinking. And so, together with the poetry of
testament-making time, philosophy too awakens; usually an ancient and dusty philosophy, understandably enough, hauled out from where it had been forgotten fifty years earlier. Ulrich suddenly realized that neither of these two old men could possibly have given way. “Let life take care of itself, as long as principles remain intact!” is an appropriate sentiment when a person knows that in a few months or years he will be outlived by those very principles. And it was plain to see how the two impulses were still contending with each other in the old academician: His romanticism, his youth, his poetic side, demanded a fine, sweeping gesture and a noble statement; his philosophy, on the other hand, insisted on keeping the law of reason untainted by sudden eruptions of feeling and sentimental lapses such as his dead opponent had placed on his path like a snare. For the last two days Schwung had been thinking: “Well, now he’s dead, and there’ll no
longer be anything to interfere with the Schwungian view of diminished responsibility”; his feelings flowed in great waves toward his old friend, and he had worked out his scene of farewell like a carefully regulated plan of mobilization, waiting only for the signal to be put into operation. But a drop of vinegar had fallen into his scenario, with sobering effect. Schwung had begun on a great wave of sentiment, but now he felt like someone suddenly coming to his senses in the middle of a poem, and the last lines won’t come. And so they confronted each other, a white stubby beard and white beard stubble, each with jaws implacably clenched.

“What’s he going to do now?” Ulrich wondered, intent on the scene before him. But finally Hofrat Schwung’s happy certainty that Paragraph 318 of the Penal Code would now be formulated in accordance with his own proposals prevailed over his irritation, and freed from angry thoughts, he would
most have liked to start singing “Should auld acquaintance be forgot...” so as to give vent to his now entirely benevolent and undivided feelings. But since this was out of the question, he turned to Ulrich and said: “Listen to me, my friend’s young son: It is the moral crisis that comes first; social decay is its consequence!” Then, turning to Agathe, he added: “It was the mark of greatness in your father that he was always ready to support an idealistic view struggling to prevail in the foundation of our laws.”

Then he seized one of Agathe’s hands and one of Ulrich’s, pressed them both, and exclaimed:

‘Tour father attached far too much importance to minor differences of opinion, which are sometimes unavoidable in long years of collaboration. I was always convinced that he did so in order not to expose his delicate sense of justice to the slightest reproach. Many eminent scholars will be
coming tomorrow to take their leave of him, but none of them will be the man he was!"

And so the encounter ended on a conciliatory note. When he left, Schwung even assured Ulrich that he might count on his father’s friends in case he should still decide to take up an academic career.

Agathe had listened wide-eyed, contemplating the uncanny final form life gives to human beings. “It was like being in a forest of plaster trees!” she said to her brother afterward.

Ulrich smiled and said: “I’m feeling as sentimental as a dog in moonlight.”
“Do you remember,” Agathe asked him after a while, “how once when I was still very small, you were playing with some boys and fell into the water right up to your waist and tried to hide it? You sat at lunch, with your visible top half dry, but your bottom half made your teeth start chattering!”

When he had been a boy home from boarding school on vacation—this had actually been the only instance over a long period—and when the small shriveled corpse here had still been an almost all-powerful man for both of them, it was not uncommon for Ulrich to balk at admitting some fault, and he resisted showing remorse even when
he could not deny what he had done. As a result, he had, on one occasion, caught a chill and had to be packed off to bed with an impressive fever.

“And all you got to eat was soup,” Agathe said.

“That’s true,” her brother confirmed with a smile. At this moment the memory of his punishment, something of no concern to him now, seemed no different than if he were seeing on the floor his tiny baby shoes, also of no concern to him now.

“Soup was all you would have got anyway, on account of your fever,” Agathe said. “Still, it was also prescribed for you as a punishment.”

“That’s true,” Ulrich agreed again. “But of course it was done not in anger but in fulfillment of some idea of duty.” He didn’t know what his sister was getting at. He was still seeing those baby shoes. Or not seeing
them: he merely saw them as if he were seeing them. Feeling likewise the humiliations he had outgrown. And he thought: “This having-nothing-to-do-with-me-anymore somehow expresses the fact that all our lives, we’re somehow only half integrated with ourselves!”

“But you wouldn’t have been allowed to eat anything but soup anyway!” Agathe reiterated, and added: “I think I’ve spent my whole life being afraid I might be the only person in the world who couldn’t understand that sort of thing.”

Can the memories of two people talking of a past familiar to both not only supplement each other but coalesce even before they are uttered? Something of the kind was happening at this moment. A shared state of mind surprised and confused both brother and sister, like hands that come out of coats in places one would never expect and suddenly grasp each other. All at once they both
knew more of the past than they had supposed they knew, and Ulrich was again seeing the fever light creeping up the walls like the glittering of the candles in this room where they were now standing. And then his father had come in, waded through the cone of light cast by the table lamp, and sat down by his bed.

“If you did it without realizing the full extent of the consequences, your deed might well appear in a milder light. But in that case you would first have had to admit to yourself that it was so.” Perhaps these were phrases from the will or from those letters about Paragraph 318 foisted back onto that memory. Normally he could not remember details or the way things were put, so there was something quite unusual in this recollection of whole sentences in formal array; it had something to do with his sister standing there before him, as though it were her
proximity that was bringing about this change in him.

" ‘If you were capable, spontaneously and independent of any outward necessity, of choosing to do something wrong, then you must also realize that you have behaved culpably’,” he continued, quoting his father aloud. “He must have talked that way to you too.”

“Perhaps not quite the same way,” Agathe qualified this. “With me, he usually allowed for mitigating circumstances arising from my psychological constitution. He was always instructing me that an act of the will is linked with a thought, that it is not a matter of acting on instinct.”

“ ‘It is the will’,” Ulrich quoted, “ ‘that, in the process of the gradual development of the understanding and the reason, must dominate the desires and, relative to them,
the instincts, by means of reflection and the resolves consequent thereon.’ “

“Is that true?” his sister asked.

“Why do you ask?”

“Because I’m stupid, I suppose.”

“You’re not stupid!”

“Learning always came hard to me, and I never quite understand.”

“That hardly proves anything.”

“Then there must be something wrong with me, because I don’t assimilate what I do understand.”

They were close together, face-to-face, leaning against the jamb of the doorway that had been left open when Professor Schwung took his departure. Daylight and candlelight played over their faces, and their voices intertwined as in a responsory. Ulrich went on intoning his sentences like a liturgy, and
Agathe’s lips moved quietly in response. The old ordeal of those admonitions, which consisted in imprinting a hard, alien pattern on the tender, uncomprehending mind of childhood, gave them pleasure now, and they played with it.

And then, without having been prompted by anything preceding, Agathe exclaimed: “Just imagine this applied to the whole thing, and you have Gottlieb Hagauer.” And she proceeded to mimic her husband like a schoolgirl: “You mean to say you really don’t know that Lamium album is the white dead nettle?” ‘But how else can we make progress except through the same hard process of induction that has brought our human race step by step through thousands of years, by painful labor full of error, to our present level of understanding, as at the hand of a faithful guide?’ ‘Can’t you see, my dear Agathe, that thinking is also a moral obligation? To concentrate is a constant
struggle against one’s indolence.’ ‘Mental discipline is that training of the mind by means of which a man becomes steadily more capable of working out a growing series of concepts rationally, always consistently questioning his own ideas, that is by means of flawless syllogisms categorical, hypothetical, or disjunctive, or by induction, and finally of submitting the conclusions gained to verification for as long as is necessary to bring all the concepts into agreement!’ “

Ulrich marveled at his sister’s feat of memory. Agathe seemed to revel in the impeccable recitation of these pedantic dicta she had appropriated from God knew where, some book perhaps. She claimed that this was how Hagauer talked.

Ulrich did not believe it. “How could you remember such long, complicated sentences from only hearing them in conversation?”
“They stuck in my mind,” Agathe replied. “That’s how I am.”

“Do you have any idea,” Ulrich asked, astonished, “what a categorical syllogism is, or a verification?”

“Not the slightest!” Agathe admitted with a laugh. “Maybe he only read that somewhere himself. But that’s the way he talks. I learned it by heart as a series of meaningless words by listening to him. I think it was out of anger because he talks like that. You’re different from me; things lie inert in my mind because I don’t know what to do with them—so much for my good memory. Because I’m stupid, I have a terrific memory!” She acted as though this contained a sad truth she would have to shake off in order to go on in her exuberant vein: “It’s the same even when he’s playing tennis. When, in learning to play tennis, I deliberately for the first time place my racket in a certain position in order to give a specific new direction
to the ball, which up to that point had been following the precise course I intended, then I intervene in the flow of phenomena: I am experimenting!’ “

“Is he a good tennis player?”

“I beat him six-love.”

They laughed.

“Do you realize,” Ulrich said, “that with all the things you’re making Hagauer say, he’s actually quite right? It just sounds funny.”

“He may be right, for all I know,” Agathe replied. “I don’t understand any of it. But do you know that a boy in his class once translated a passage from Shakespeare quite literally, and the effect was touching, beginning with ‘Cowards die many times before their deaths,’ and without any feeling for what the boy had done, Hagauer simply
crossed it out and replaced it, word for word, with the old Schlegel version!

“And I remember another instance, a passage from Pindar, I think: The law of nature, King of all mortals and immortals, reigns supreme, approving extreme violence, with almighty hand,’ and Hagauer polished it: The law of nature, that reigns over all mortals and immortals, rules with almighty hand, even approving violence.’

“And wasn’t it lovely,” she urged, “the way that little boy, whom he criticized, translated the words so literally it gave one the shivers, just the way he found them lying there like a collapsed heap of stones.” And she recited:” ‘Cowards die so much before they die, / The brave ones just die once. / Among all the miracles, why should men fear death / Because it happens to everyone whenever it comes.’ “ With her hand high around the doorpost as though it were a tree trunk, she flung out the boy’s roughhewn
version of Caesar’s lines with a splendid wildness, quite oblivious of the poor shriveled body lying there under her youthful gaze alight with pride.

Frowning, Ulrich stared at his sister. “The person who won’t try to ‘restore’ an old poem but leaves it in its decayed state, with half its meaning lost, is the same as the person who will never put a new marble nose on an old statue that has lost its own,” he thought. “One could call it a sense of style, but that’s not what it is. Nor is it the person whose imagination is so vivid that he doesn’t mind when something’s missing. It’s rather the person who cares nothing for perfection and accordingly doesn’t demand that his feelings be whole’ either. She’s capable of kissing,” he concluded with a sudden twist, “without her body going all to pieces over it.”

At this moment it seemed to him that he need know nothing more of his sister than her passionate declamation to realize that
she, too, was only ever “half integrated” with herself, that she, like himself, was a person of “piecemeal passions.” This even made him forget the other side of his nature, which yearned for moderation and control. He could now have told his sister with certainty that nothing she did ever fitted in with her surroundings, but that all was dependent on some highly problematic vaster world, a world that begins nowhere and has no limits. This would satisfactorily explain the contradictory impressions of their first evening together. But his habitual reserve was stronger, and so he waited, curious and even slightly skeptical, to see how she would get herself down from the high limb she had got herself out on. She was still standing, with her arm raised against the doorpost, and one instant too many could spoil the whole effect. He detested women who behaved as though they had been brought into the world by a painter or a director, or who do an artful fade-out
after such a moment of high excitement as Agathe’s. “She could come down,” he thought, “from this peak of enthusiasm with the dim-witted look of a sleepwalker, like a medium coming out of a trance. She doesn’t have much choice, and it’s bound to be awkward.” But Agathe seemed to be aware of this herself, or possibly something in her brother’s eye had put her on guard. She leapt gaily from her high limb, landed on both feet, and stuck out her tongue at him.

But then she was grave and quiet again, and without saying a word went to fetch the medals. And so brother and sister set about acting in defiance of their father’s last will.

It was Agathe who did it. Ulrich felt shy about touching the defenseless old man lying there, but Agathe had a way of doing wrong that undercut any awareness of wrongdoing. Her movements of hand and eye were those of a woman tending a patient, and they had at times the spontaneous and appealing air
of young animals who suddenly pause in their romping to make sure that their master is watching. The master took from her the decorations that had been removed and handed her the replicas. He was reminded of a thief whose heart is in his mouth. And if he had the impression that the stars and crosses shone more brightly in his sisters hand than in his own, indeed as if they would turn into magical objects, it might really have been true in the greenish darkness in the room, filled with glimmerings of light reflected off the leaves of the big potted plants; or it might have been that he felt his sisters will, hesitantly taking the lead and youthfully seizing his. But since no conscious motive was to be recognized in this, there again arose in these moments of unalloyed contact an almost dimensionless and therefore intangibly powerful sense of their joint existence.
Now Agathe stopped; it was done. Yet something or other still remained, and after thinking about it for a while she said with a smile: “How about each of us writing something nice on a piece of paper and putting it in his pocket?”

This time, Ulrich instantly knew what she meant, for they did not have many such shared memories, and he recalled how, at a certain age, they had loved sad verses and stories in which someone died and was forgotten by everyone. It might perhaps have been the loneliness of their childhood that had brought this about, and they often made up such stories between them, but even then Agathe had been inclined to act them out, while Ulrich took the lead only in the more manly undertakings, which called for being bold and hard. And so it had been Agathe’s idea, one day, that they each should cut off a fingernail to bury in the garden, and she even slipped a small lock of her blond hair in
with the parings. Ulrich proudly declared that in a hundred years someone might stumble across these relics and wonder who it might have been, since he was concerned with making an appearance in posterity; but for little Agathe the burial had been an end in itself. She had the feeling that she was hiding a part of herself, permanently removing it from the supervision of a world whose pedagogical demands always intimidated her even though she never thought very highly of them. And because that was when the cottage for the servants was being built at the bottom of the garden, they decided to do something special for it. They would write wonderful poems on two slips of paper, adding their names, to be bricked up in the walls. But when they began writing these poems that were supposed to be so splendid, they couldn’t think of anything to say, day after day, and the walls were already rising out of the foundations.
Finally, when it was almost too late, Agathe copied a sentence out of her arithmetic book, and Ulrich wrote: “I am...” and added his name. Nevertheless, their hearts were pounding furiously when they sneaked up on the two bricklayers at work in the garden, and Agathe simply threw her piece of paper in the ditch where they were standing and ran off. But Ulrich, as the bigger and as a man even more frightened of being stopped and questioned by the astonished bricklayers, could move neither hand nor foot from excitement; so that Agathe, emboldened because nothing had happened to her, finally came back and took his slip from him. She then sauntered along with it innocently, inspected a brick at the end of a freshly laid row, lifted it, and slipped Ulrich’s name into the wall before anyone could turn her away. Ulrich himself had hesitantly followed her and felt at the moment she did it the vise in which in his fright he had been gripped
turning into a wheel of sharp knives whirling so rapidly in his chest that it threw off sparks like a flaming Catherine wheel.

It was this incident to which Agathe was alluding now, and Ulrich gave no answer for the longest while, but smiled in a way that was meant to deter her, for repeating such a game with the dead man seemed taboo to him. But Agathe had already bent down, slid from her leg a wide silk garter that she wore to relieve the pull on her girdle, lifted the pall, and slipped it into her father’s pocket.

And Ulrich? He could hardly believe his eyes to see this childhood memory restored to life. He almost leapt forward to stop her, just because it was so completely out of order. But he caught in his sister’s eyes a flash of the dewy fresh innocence of early morning that is still untainted by any of the drab routines of the day, and it held him back.
“What do you think you’re doing?” he admonished her softly. He did not know whether she was trying to propitiate the deceased because he had been wronged, or doing him one last kindness because of all the wrong he had done himself. He could have asked, but the barbaric notion of sending the frosty dead man on his way with a garter still warm from his daughter’s thigh tightened his throat and muddled his brain.
THE OLD GENTLEMAN IS FINALLY LEFT IN PEACE

The short time left before the funeral was filled with any number of unaccustomed small chores and passed quickly; in the last half hour before the departure of the deceased, the number of callers in black whose coming had run through all the hours like a black thread finally became a black festival. The undertakers men had intensified their hammering and scraping—with the gravity of a surgeon to whom one has entrusted one’s life and from that moment on surrendered any right to interfere—and had laid, through the untouched normality in the rest of the house, a gangway of ceremonial feeling,
which ran from the entrance past the stairs into the room that held the coffin. The flowers and potted plants, the black cloth and crepe hangings, and the silver candelabra with trembling little golden tongues of flame, which received the visitors, knew their responsibility better than Ulrich and Agathe, who had to represent the family and were obliged to welcome all who had come to pay their last respects, though they hardly knew who any of them were and would have been lost without their father’s old servant, who unobtrusively prompted them whenever especially eminent guests appeared. All those who appeared glided up to them, glided past, and dropped anchor somewhere in the room, alone or in little groups, motionlessly observing the brother and sister, whose expressions grew stiff with solemn restraint, until at last the funeral director—the same man who had given Ulrich the printed forms to sign and in this last half hour had dashed up
and down the steps at least twenty times—bounded up to Ulrich from the side and, with the studiously modulated self-importance of an adjutant reporting to his general on parade, told him that all was ready.

To conduct the funeral cortege ceremoniously through the town—the mourners would only later be seated in their carriages—Ulrich had to take the lead on foot, flanked on one side by His Imperial and Royal Majesty’s representative, the Governor of the province, who had come in person to honor the final sleep of a member of the Upper House, and on the other by an equally high-ranking gentleman, the senior member of three from the Upper House, followed by the two other noblemen of that delegation, then by the Rector and Senate of the University. Only after these, though ahead of the interminable stream of silk hats topping off public figures of slowly diminishing importance and dignity, came Agathe, hemmed
in by women in black and personifying the point where, among the peaks of officialdom, the sanctioned private grief had its place. For the unregulated participation of those who had come “merely to show their sympathy” had its place only after those officially in attendance, and it is even possible that it may have consisted solely of the old serving couple trudging along by themselves behind the procession. Thus it was a procession composed mainly of men, and it was not Ulrich who walked at Agathe’s side but her husband, Professor Hagauer, whose apple-cheeked face with the bristly caterpillar mustache above the upper lip had been rendered unfamiliar to her by its curious dark-blue cast, produced by the thick black veil that allowed her to observe him unseen. As for Ulrich, who had been spending the many preceding hours with his sister, he could not help feeling that the ancient protocol of funeral precedence, dating back to the
medieval beginnings of the University, had torn her from his side, and he missed her without daring to turn around to look for her. He tried to think of something funny to make her laugh when they met again, but his thoughts were distracted by the Governor, pacing along silently beside him with his lordly bearing and occasionally addressing a quiet word to Ulrich, who had to catch it, along with the many other attentions being shown him by all the Excellencies, Lordships, and Worships, for he was looked upon as Count Leinsdorf’s shadow, so that even the mistrust with which His Grace’s patriotic campaign was gradually coming to be regarded added to Ulrich’s prestige.

The curbs and the windows were filled with clusters of the curious, and even though he knew it would all be over in an hour, like a theater performance, he nevertheless experienced everything happening that day with a special vividness, and the universal concern
with his personal fate weighed on his shoulders like a heavily braided cape. For the first time he felt the upright attitude of tradition. The involvement that ran like a wave ahead of the procession, among the chatting crowds that lined the pavements, who fell silent and then breathed freely again; the spell cast by the clergy; the thudding of clods of earth on wood that one knew was coming; the dammed-up silence of the procession—all this plucked at the spinal cord as if it were some primordial musical instrument, and Ulrich was amazed to sense within himself an indescribable resonance whose vibrations buoyed up his whole body as though he were actually being borne along by the waves of ceremony around him. And as he was feeling closer to the others on this day, he imagined how it would be if at this moment he were really striding forward in the original sense—half forgotten in the pomp it assumed in its present-day form—as the real heir of a
great power. The thought banished the sadness, and death was transmuted from a horrible private affair to a transition that was completed as a public ceremony. Gone was the gaping hole, stared at in dread, that every man whose presence one is accustomed to leaves behind in the first days after his disappearance, for his successor was already striding along in his place, the crowd breathing in homage to him, the funeral being at the same time a coming of age for him who now took up the sword and, for the first time without someone ahead of him, and alone, now walked toward his own end.

“I should have been the one,” Ulrich surprised himself by thinking, “to close my father’s eyes! Not for his sake, or my own, but...” He did not know how to complete the thought. That he had neither liked his father, nor his father him, seemed a petty overestimation of personal importance in the face of this order of things; in the face of death,
anyway, personal concerns had the stale taste of meaningless-ness, while everything that was of significance now seemed to emanate from the gigantic body of the cortege moving slowly through the streets lined with people, no matter how much idleness, curiosity, and mindless conformity were intermingled with it.

Still, the music played on, it was a light, clear, dazzling day, and Ulrich’s feelings wavered this way and that, like the canopy carried in procession above the Holy of Holies. Now and then he would see his own reflection in the glass panes of the hearse in front of him, his head with its hat, his shoulders, and from time to time he glimpsed on the floor of the hearse, beside the armorially resplendent coffin, little droppings of candle wax, never quite cleaned away from previous funerals, and he simply and without thinking felt sorry for his father, as one feels sorry for a dog run over in the
street. Then his eyes grew moist, and when he gazed over all the blackness at the onlookers on the curb they looked like colorful sprinkled flowers, and the thought that it was he, Ulrich, who was seeing this, and not the man who had always lived here and who, moreover, loved ceremony so much more than he did, was so peculiar that it seemed downright impossible that his father should miss seeing himself leaving the world, which he had, on the whole, regarded as a good world. Deeply moved as he was, however, Ulrich could not help noticing that the director or undertaker who was leading this Catholic funeral procession to the cemetery and keeping it in good order was a tall, muscular Jew in his thirties: graced with a long blond mustache, carrying papers in his pocket like a courier, he dashed up and down, now straightening a horse’s harness, now whispering some instruction to the band. This reminded Ulrich further that his father’s body
had not been in the house on the last day but had been brought back to it only just before the funeral, in accordance with the old gentleman’s testamentary last wish, inspired by the free spirit of humanistic inquiry, to put his body at the disposal of science; after which anatomical intervention it was only natural to assume that the old gentleman had been hurriedly sewn up again. Behind those shiny glass panes that reflected Ulrich’s image, then, at the center of this great, beautiful, solemn pageantry, was an untidily recobbled object. ‘With or without his decorations?’ Ulrich wondered in dismay. He had forgotten about it and had no idea whether his father had been dressed again in the lab before the closed coffin was returned to the house. And what about Agathe’s garter? It could have been found—and he could imagine the jokes of the medical students. It was all extremely embarrassing, and so the protestations of the present again fragmented his
feeling into myriad details, after it had for a moment almost rounded itself out into the smooth shell of a living dream. All he could feel now was the absurdity, the confused wavering nature of human order, and of himself.

“Now I’m all alone in the world,” he thought. “A mooring rope has snapped—up I go!” This echo of his first sensation on receiving the news of his father’s death now once more expressed his feelings as he walked on between the walls of people.
A LETTER FROM CLARISSE ARRIVES

Ulrich had not left his address with anyone, but Clarisse had it from Walter, who knew it as well as he knew his own childhood. She wrote:

My darling—my duckling—my ling!

Do you know what a ling is? I can’t work it out. Could Walter be a weakling? [All the “lings” were heavily underlined.]

Do you think I was drunk when I came to you? I can’t get drunk. (Men get drunk before I do. An amazing fact.)
But I don’t know what I said to you; I can’t remember. I’m afraid you imagine I said things I never said. I never said them.

But this is supposed to be a letter—in a minute! But first: You know how dreams open up. You know how, when you’re dreaming, sometimes: you’ve been there before, you’ve talked with that person already, or—it’s like finding your memory again.

*Being awake means knowing I’ve been awake.*

(I have sleepmates.)

Do you still remember who Moosbrugger is? There’s something I have to tell you:

*Suddenly, there was his name again.*

Those three musical syllables.

But music is fakery. I mean, when it’s by itself. Music by itself is for aesthetes or something like that; no vitality. But music combined with vision, that makes the walls
shake and the life of those to come rise up out of the grave of the present. Those three musical syllables, I didn’t just hear them, I saw them. They *loomed up* in my memory! Then suddenly you know: Where these appear, there’s something more. Why, I once wrote your Count a letter about Moosbrugger—how could I possibly have forgotten that! Now I hear-see a world in which the things stand still and the people move around, just as you’ve always known it, but in sound that’s visible! I don’t know how to describe it exactly, because only three syllables have shown up so far. Can you understand that? It may be too soon to talk about it.

I told Walter: “I must meet Moosbrugger!”

Walter asked: ‘Who’s Moosbrugger?”

I told him: “Ulo’s friend the murderer.”
We were reading the paper; it was morning, time for Walter to go to the office. Remember how we used to read the paper together, the three of us? (You have a. poor memory, you won’t remember!) So I had just unfolded the part of the paper Walter had handed me, one arm left, one right: suddenly I feel hard wood, I’m nailed to the Cross. I ask Walter: “Wasn’t it only yesterday that there was something in the paper about a train wreck near Budweis?”

“Yes,” he says. “Why do you ask? A minor accident, one person killed, or two.”

After a while I say: “Because there’s been an accident in America too. Where’s Pennsylvania?”

He doesn’t know. “In America,” he says.

I say: “Those engineers never have a head-on collision on purpose!”
He looks at me. I could tell he didn’t understand. “Of course not,” he says.

I ask him when Siegmund’s coming. He’s not sure.

So there you are: of course the engineers don’t deliberately drive their locomotives into each other head-on; *but why eke do they do it?* I’ll tell you why. That monstrous network of tracks, switches, and signals that covers the whole globe drains our conscience of all its power. Because if we had the strength to check ourselves just once more, to go over everything we had to do once more, we would do what was necessary every time and avoid the disaster. *The disaster is that we halt before the next-to-last step!*

Of course we can’t expect Walter to realize this at once. I think that I’m capable of achieving this immense power of conscience, and I had to shut my eyes so Walter wouldn’t see the lightning flash in them.
For all these reasons I regard it as my duty to get to know Moosbrugger.

You know my brother Siegmund is a doctor. He’ll help me.

I was waiting for him.

Last Sunday he came.

When he’s introduced to someone he says: “But I’m neither... nor musical.” That’s his sort of joke. Just because his name is Siegmund he doesn’t want to be thought to be either a Jew or musical. He was conceived in a Wagnerian ecstasy. You can’t get him to give a sensible answer to anything. All the time I was talking to him he only muttered some nonsense or other. He threw a rock at a bird, he bored holes in the snow with his stick. He wanted to shovel out a path too; he often comes to work in our garden, because, as he says, he doesn’t like staying home with his wife and children. Funny that you’ve never met him. “You two
have the *Fleurs du mal* and a vegetable garden!” he says. I pulled his ears and punched him in the ribs, but it did no good whatsoever.

Then we went indoors to Walter, who of course was sitting at the piano, and Siegmund had his jacket under his arm and his hands were all dirty.

“Siegmund,” I said to him in front of Walter, “when do you understand a piece of music?”

He grinned and answered: “Absolutely never.”

“When you *play it inside yourself,*’ I said. “When do you understand another human being? When you feel with him. *Feel with him.*” That’s a great mystery, Ulrich! You have to be like him: not by putting yourself *into him* but by taking him *out* into yourself! We redeem *outward:* that’s the *strong*
way! We fall in with people’s actions, but we fill them out and rise above them.

Sorry to be writing so much about this. But the trains collide because our conscience doesn’t take that final step. Worlds don’t materialize unless we pull them. More of this another time. The man of genius is duty bound to attack! He has the mysterious power required. But Siegmund, the coward, looked at his watch and mentioned supper, because he had to go home. You know, Siegmund always tries to find the balance between the blasé attitude of the seasoned physician who has no very high opinion of the ability of his profession, and the blasé attitude of the contemporary person who has transcended the intellectual and already rediscovered the hygiene of the simple life and gardening. But Walter shouted: “Oh, for God’s sake, why are you two talking such nonsense? What do you want with this Moosbrugger anyway?” And that was a help.
Because then Siegmund said: “He’s neither insane nor a criminal, that’s true. But what if Clarisse has a notion that she can do something for him? I’m a doctor, and I have to let the hospital chaplain imagine the same sort of thing! Redeem him, she says! Well, why not let her at least see him?”

He brushed off his trousers, adopted an air of serenity, and washed his hands; we worked it all out over supper.

Now we’ve already been to see Dr. Friedenthal; he’s the deputy medical officer Siegmund knows. Siegmund said straight out that he’d take the responsibility for bringing me in under some sort of false pretenses, as a writer who would like to see the man.

But that was a mistake, because when it was put to him so openly, Dr. Friedenthal could only refuse. “Even if you were Selma Lagerlof I’d be delighted to see you, of
course, as I am in any case, but here we recognize only a scientific interest.”

It was rather fun to be called a writer. I looked him straight in the eye and said: “In this situation I count for more than Selma Lagerlof, because I’m not doing it for ‘research.’”

He looked at me, and then he said: “The only thing I can suggest is for you to bring a letter of introduction from your embassy to the superintendent of the clinic.” He took me for a foreign writer, not realizing that I was Siegmund’s sister.

We finally agreed that I would not be coming to see Moosbrugger the psychiatric patient but Moosbrugger the prisoner. Siegmund got me a letter of introduction from a charitable organization and a permit from the District Court. Afterward Siegmund told me that Dr. Friedenthal regards psychiatry as a science that’s half art, and called
him the ringmaster of a demons’ circus. I rather liked that.

What I liked best was that the clinic is housed in an old monastery. We had to wait in the corridor, and the lecture hall is in a chapel. It has huge Gothic windows, and I could see inside from across the courtyard. The patients are dressed in white, and they sit up on the dais with the professor. And the professor bends over their chairs in a friendly way. I thought: “Maybe they’ll bring Moosbrugger in now.” I felt like flying into the lecture hall through that tall window. You’ll say I can’t fly: jump through the window, then? But I’d never have jumped; that was not how I felt at all.

I hope you’ll be coming back soon. One can never express things. Least of all in a letter.

This was signed, heavily underlined, “Clarisse.”
Ulrich says: ‘When two men or women have to share a room for any length of time when traveling—in a sleeping car or a crowded hotel—they’re often apt to strike up an odd sort of friendship. Everyone has his own way of using mouthwash or bending over to take off his shoes or bending his leg when he gets into bed. Clothes and underwear are basically the same, yet they reveal to the eye innumerable little individual differences. At first—probably because of the hypertensive individualism of our current way of life—there’s a resistance like a faint revulsion that keeps the other person at arm’s length, guarding against any invasion into one’s own
personality. Once that is overcome a communal life develops, which reveals its unusual origin like a scar. At this point many people behave more cheerfully than usual; most become more innocuous; many more talkative; almost all more friendly. The personality is changed; one might almost say that under the skin it has been exchanged for a less idiosyncratic one: the Me is displaced by the beginnings—clearly uneasy and perceived as a diminution, and yet irresistible—of a We.”

Agathe replies: “This revulsion from closeness affects women especially. I’ve never learned to feel at ease with women myself.”

“You’ll find it between a man and a woman too,” Ulrich says. “But there it’s covered up by the obligatory rituals of love, which immediately claim all attention. But more often than you might think, those involved wake suddenly from their trance and
find—with amazement, irony, or panic, depending on their individual temperament—some totally alien being ensconced at their side; indeed, some people experience this even after many years. Then they can’t tell which is more natural: their bond with others or the self’s bruised recoil from that bond into the illusion of its uniqueness—both impulses are in our nature, after all. And they’re both entangled with the idea of the family. Life within the family is not a full life: Young people feel robbed, diminished, not fully at home with themselves within the circle of the family. Look at elderly, unmarried daughters: they’ve been sucked dry by the family, drained of their blood; they’ve become quite peculiar hybrids of the Me and the We.”

Clarisse’s letter came as a disturbance to Ulrich. The manic outbursts in it bother him much less than the steady and quasi-rational working out of some obviously
demented scheme deep within her. He has told himself that after his return he will have to talk to Walter about it, and since then he has deliberately been speaking of other things.

Agathe, stretched out on the couch with one knee drawn up, eagerly picks up what he has just said: “You yourself are explaining, with what you’re saying, why I had to marry again!”

“And yet there is also something in the so-called sanctity of the family, in the entering into one another, serving one another, the selfless movement within a closed circle...,” Ulrich continues, taking no notice, and Agathe wonders at the way his words so often move away from her again just when they have been so close. “Usually this collective self is only a collective egotist, and then a strong family feeling is the most insufferable thing imaginable. Still, I can also imagine this unconditional leaping into the breach
for one another, this fighting shoulder-to-shoulder and licking each other’s wounds, as an instinctual feeling of satisfaction rooted deep in the beginnings of the human race, and even marked in herd animals...,” she hears him say, without being able to make much of it. Nor can she do more with his next statement: “This condition is subject to rapid degeneration, as it happens, like all ancient conditions whose origin has been lost,” and it is only when he ends by saying, “and would presumably have to require that the individuals involved be something quite special if the group they form is not to become some pointless caricature!” that she again feels comfortable with him and tries, as she looks at him, to keep her eyes from blinking so that he won’t meanwhile disappear, because it’s so amazing that he is sitting there saying things that vanish high into the air and then suddenly drop down again like a rubber ball caught in the branches of a tree.
Brother and sister had met in the late afternoon in the drawing room; many days had already passed since the funeral.

This long room was not only decorated in the Biedermeier taste, it was furnished with genuine pieces of the period. Between the windows hung tall rectangular mirrors in plain gilt frames, and the stiff, sober chairs were ranged along the walls, so that the empty floor seemed to have flooded the room with the darkened gleam of its parquet and filled a shallow basin, into which one hesitantly set foot. At the edge of this salon’s elegant barrenness—for the study where Ulrich had settled down on the first morning was set aside for him—about where in a quarried-out niche the tiled stove stood like a severe pillar, wearing a vase on its head (and also a lone candlestick, precisely in the middle of its front, on a shelf running around the stove at waist height), Agathe had created a very personal peninsula for herself.
She had had a couch moved here, with a rug beside it, whose ancient reddish blue, in common with the couch’s Turkish pattern that repeated itself in infinite meaninglessness, constituted a voluptuous challenge to the subtle grays and sober, unassertive lineaments that were at home in this room by ancestral decree. She had further outraged that chaste and well-bred decree by rescuing a large-leaved man-sized plant complete with tub from the funeral decorations and installing it at the head of the couch, as a “grove,” on the other side from the tall, bright floor lamp that would enable her to read in comfort while lying down, and which, in that classicizing setting, had the effect of a searchlight or an antenna pole. This salon, with its coffered ceiling, pilasters, and slender glass cabinets, had not changed much in a hundred years, for it was seldom used and had never really been drawn into the lives of its more recent owners. In their
before father’s’ day the walls now painted a pale gray might have been covered in fine fabrics, and the upholstery on the chairs had probably looked different too; but Agathe had known this salon as it now was since childhood, without even knowing whether it was her great-grandparents who had furnished it like this or strangers. She had grown up in this house, and the only association she had was the memory that she had always entered this room with the awe that is instilled into children about something they might easily damage or dirty.

But now she had laid aside the last symbol of the past, the mourning she had worn, and put on her lounging pajamas again, and was lying on the rebelliously intruding couch, where since early morning she had been reading all kinds of books, good and bad, whatever she could get her hands on, interrupting herself from time to time to eat or fall asleep; now that the day spent in this
fashion was fading into evening, she gazed through the darkening room at the pale curtains that, already quite immersed in twilight, ballooned at the windows like sails, which made her feel that she was voyaging through that stiffly dainty room within the harsh corona of her lamp and had only just come to a halt. So her brother had found her, taking in her well-lit encampment at a glance, for he, too, remembered this salon and could even tell her that the original owner was supposed to have been a rich merchant whose fortunes declined, so that their great-grandfather, an imperial notary, had been in a position to acquire the attractive property at a price well within his means. Ulrich knew all sorts of other things as well about this room, which he had looked over thoroughly; his sister was especially impressed to hear that in their grandparents’ day such formal decor had been seen as particularly natural. This was not easy for her to
comprehend, since it looked to her like something spawned in a geometry class, and it took a while before she could begin to grasp the outlook of a time so over-saturated with the swirling aggressiveness of the Baroque that its own leaning toward symmetry and somewhat unbending forms was veiled by the tender illusion of being truer to nature in being pure, unadorned, and rational. But when she finally succeeded in grasping this shift of ideas, with the help of all the details Ulrich could supply, she was delighted to know so much about things that every experience in her life up until then had taught her to despise; and when her brother wanted to know what she was reading, she quickly rolled over on top of her supply of books, even though she defiantly said that she enjoyed trashy reading just as much as good.

Ulrich had worked all morning and then gone out. His hope of concentrating, of
gaining the new impetus he had expected from the interruption of his customary life, had up to now not been fulfilled; it was outweighed by the distractions resulting from his new circumstances. Only after the funeral had there been a change, when his relations with the outside world, which had begun so actively, had been cut off at a stroke. The brother and sister had been the center of sympathetic attention for a few days, if only as a kind of representation of their father, and had felt the connections attendant upon their position; but apart from Walters old father they knew no one in town they would have felt like visiting, and in consideration of their mourning no one invited them. Only Professor Schwung had appeared not only at the funeral but again the following day to inquire whether his late friend had not left a manuscript on the problem of diminished responsibility, which one might hope to see published posthumously.
The brusque transition from a constantly seething commotion to the leaden stillness that had followed produced something like a physical shock. Besides, they were still sleeping on camp beds up in the attic, in the rooms they had occupied as children—there were no guest rooms in the house—surrounded by the sparse odds and ends left over from the nursery, their bareness suggesting that of a padded cell, a bareness that, with the insipid sheen of the oilcloth on the tables or the linoleum on the floor—on whose desert the box of building blocks had once spewed forth its rigid ideas of architecture—invaded their dreams. These memories, as senseless and as endless as the life for which they were supposed to have been a preparation, made it a relief that their bedrooms were at least adjacent, separated only by a clothes and storage room; and because the bathroom was on die floor below, they were much in each others company
soon after they got up, meeting on the empty stairs and throughout the empty house, having to show consideration for one another and deal together with all the problems of that unfamiliar household with which they had suddenly been entrusted. In this way they also felt the inevitable comedy of this coexistence, as intimate as it was unexpec-
ted: it resembled the adventurous comedy of a shipwreck that had stranded them back on the lonely island of their childhood, and so, after those first few days, over the course of which they had had no control, they strove for independence, although both did so out of altruism more than selfishness.

This was why Ulrich had been up before Agathe had built her peninsula in the drawing room, and had slipped quietly into the study to take up his interrupted mathematical investigation, really more as a way of passing time than with the intention of getting it done. But to his considerable
astonishment he all but finished in one morning—except for insignificant details—the work he had left lying untouched for months. He had been helped in this unexpected solution by one of those random ideas of which one might say, not that they turn up only when one has stopped expecting them, but rather that the startling way they flash into the mind is like another sudden recognition—that of the beloved who had always been just another girl among one’s friends until the moment when the lover is suddenly amazed that he could ever have put her on the same level as the rest. Such insights are never purely intellectual, but involve an element of passion as well, and Ulrich felt as though he should at this moment have been finished with it and free; indeed, since he could see neither reason nor purpose in it, he had the impression of having finished prematurely, and the leftover energy swept him off into a reverie. He glimpsed the
possibility of applying the idea that had solved his problem to other, far more complex problems, and playfully let his imagination stretch the outlines of such a theory. In these moments of happy relaxation he was even tempted to consider Professor Schwung’s insinuation that he should return to his career and find the path that leads to success and influence. But when, after a few minutes of intellectual pleasure, he soberly considered what the consequences would be if he were to yield to his ambition and now, as a straggler, take up an academic career, he felt for the first time that he was too old to start anything like that. Since his boyhood he had never felt that the half-impersonal concept of “age” had any independent meaning, any more than he had known the thought: This is something you are no longer able to do!

When Ulrich was telling this to his sister afterward, late that afternoon, he
happened to use the word "destiny," and it caught her attention. She wanted to know what "destiny" was.

"Something halfway between 'my toothache' and 'King Lear's daughters,' " Ulrich answered. "I'm not the sort of person who goes in for that word too much."

"But for young people it is part of the song of life; they want to have a destiny but don't know what it is."

"In times to come, when more is known, the word 'destiny' will probably have acquired a statistical meaning," Ulrich responded.

Agathe was twenty-seven. Young enough to have retained some of those hollow, sentimental concepts young people develop first; old enough to already have intimations of the other content that reality pours into them.
“Growing old is probably a destiny in itself!” she answered, but was far from pleased with her answer, which expressed her youthful sadness in a way that seemed to her inane.

But her brother did not notice this, and offered an example: “When I became a mathematician,” he said, “I wanted to achieve something in my field and gave it all I had, even though I regarded it only as preliminary to something else. And my first papers—imperfect beginner’s work though they were—really did contain ideas that were new at the time, but either remained unnoticed or even met with resistance, though everything else I did was well received. Well, I suppose you could call it destiny that I soon lost patience with having to keep hammering at that wedge.”

“Wedge?” Agathe interrupted, as though the mere sound of such a masculine,
workmanlike term could mean nothing but trouble. “Why do you call it a wedge?”

“Because it was only my first move; I wanted to drive the wedge further, but then I lost patience. And today, as I completed what may well be the last piece of work that reaches back to that time, I realized that I might actually have had some justification in seeing myself as the leader of a new school of thought, if I’d had better luck then, or shown more persistence.”

“You could still make up for it!” Agathe said. “After all, a man doesn’t get too old to do things, the way a woman does.”

“No,” Ulrich replied. “I don’t want to go back to that! It’s surprising, but true, that objectively—historically, or in the development of science itself—it would have made no difference. I may have been ten years ahead of my time, but others got there without me, even if more slowly or by other
means. The most I could have done was to lead them there more quickly, but it remains a question whether such a change in my life would have been enough to give me a fresh impetus that would take me beyond that goal. So there you have a bit of what one calls personal destiny, but what it finally amounts to is something remarkably impersonal.

“Anyway,” he went on, “it happens that the older I get, the more often I see something I used to hate that subsequently and in roundabout ways takes the same direction as my own road, so that I suddenly can no longer dismiss its right to exist; or it happens that I begin to see what’s wrong with ideas or events I used to get excited about. So in the long run it hardly seems to matter whether one gets excited or to what cause one commits one’s existence. It all arrives at the same goal; everything serves an evolution that is both unfathomable and inescapable.”
“That used to be ascribed to God’s working in mysterious ways,” Agathe remarked, frowning, with the tone of one speaking from her own experience and not exactly impressed. Ulrich remembered that she had been educated in a convent. She lay on her sofa, as he sat at its foot; she wore her pajama trousers tied at the ankle, and the floor lamp shone on them both in such a way that a large leaf of light formed on the floor, on which they floated in darkness.

“Nowadays,” he said, “destiny gives rather the impression of being some overarching movement of a mass; one is engulfed by it and rolled along.” He remembered having been struck once before by the idea that these days every truth enters the world divided into its half-truths, and yet this nebulous and slippery process might yield a greater total achievement than if everyone had gone about earnestly trying to accomplish the whole task by himself. He had once even
come out with this idea, which lay like a barb in his self-esteem and yet was not without the possibility of greatness, and concluded, tongue-in-cheek, that it meant one could do anything one pleased! Actually, nothing could have been further from his intention than this conclusion, especially now, when his destiny seemed to have set him down and left him with nothing more to do; and at this moment so dangerous to his ambition, when he had been so curiously driven to end, with this belated piece of work, the last thing that had still tied him to his past—precisely at this moment when he felt personally quite bare, what he felt instead of a falling off was this new tension that had begun when he had left his home. He had no name for it, but for the present one could say that a younger person, akin to him, was looking to him for guidance; one could also just as well call it something else. He saw with amazing clarity the radiant mat of bright gold against the
black-green of the room, with the delicate lozenges of Agathe’s clown costume on it, and himself, and the super-lucidly outlined happenstance, cut from the darkness, of their being together.

“Can you say that again?” Agathe asked.

“What we still refer to as a personal destiny,” Ulrich said, “is being displaced by collective processes that can finally be expressed in statistical terms.”

Agathe thought this over and had to laugh. “I don’t understand it, of course, but wouldn’t it be lovely to be dissolved by statistics?” she said. “It’s been such a long time since love could do it!”

This suddenly led Ulrich to tell his sister what had happened to him when, after finishing his work, he had left the house and walked to the center of town, in order to somehow fill the void left in him by the completion of his paper. He had not intended to
speak of it; it seemed too personal a matter. For whenever his travels took him to cities to which he was not connected by business of any kind, he particularly enjoyed the feeling of solitude this gave him, and he had rarely felt this so keenly as he did now. He noticed the colors of the streetcars, the automobiles, shop windows, and archways, the shapes of church towers, the faces and the façades, and even though they all had the usual European resemblances, his gaze flew over them like an insect that has strayed into a field bright with unfamiliar colors and cannot, try as it will, find a place to settle on. Such aimless, purposeless strolling through a town vitally absorbed in itself, the keenness of perception increasing in proportion as the strangeness of the surroundings intensifies, heightened still further by the connection that it is not oneself that matters but only this mass of faces, these movements wrenched loose from the body to become armies of arms, legs, or
teeth, to all of which the future belongs—all this can evoke the feeling that being a whole and inviolate strolling human being is positively antisocial and criminal. But if one lets oneself go even further in this fashion, this feeling may also unexpectedly produce a physical well-being and irresponsibility amounting to folly, as if the body were no longer part of a world where the sensual self is enclosed in strands of nerves and blood vessels but belongs to a world bathed in somnolent sweetness. These were the words that Ulrich used to describe to his sister what might perhaps have been the result of a state of mind without goal or ambition, or the result of a diminished ability to maintain an illusory individuality, or perhaps nothing more than that “primal myth of the gods,” that “double face of nature,” that “giving” and “taking vision,” which he was after all pursuing like a hunter.
Now he was waiting curiously to see if Agathe would show by some sign that she understood, that she, too, was familiar with such impressions, but when this did not happen he explained it again: “It’s like a slight split in one’s consciousness. One feels enfolded, embraced, pierced to the heart by a sense of involuntary dependence; but at the same time one is still alert and capable of making critical judgments, and even ready to start a fight with these people and their stuffy presumptuousness. It’s as though there were two relatively independent strata of life within us that normally keep each other profoundly in balance. And we were speaking of destiny: it’s as if we had two destinies—one that’s all superficial bustle, which takes life over, and one that’s motionless and meaningful, which we never find out about.”

Now Agathe, who had been listening for a long time without stirring, said out of the blue: “That’s like kissing Hagauer!”
Laughing, she had propped herself up on one elbow, her legs still stretched out full length on the couch. And she added: “Of course, it wasn’t as beautiful as the way you describe it!”

Ulrich was laughing too. It was not really clear why they were laughing. Somehow this laughter had come upon them from the air, or from the house, or from the traces of bewilderment and uneasiness left behind by the solemnities of the last few days, which had touched so uselessly on the Beyond; or from the uncommon pleasure they found in their conversation. For every human custom that has reached an extreme of cultivation already bears within itself the seeds of change, and every excitement that surpasses the ordinary soon mists over with a breath of sorrow, absurdity, and satiety.

In this fashion and in such a round-about way they finally end up, as if for relaxation, talking about less demanding matters,
about Me and Us and Family, and arriving at the discovery, fluctuating between mockery and astonishment, that the two of them constitute a family. And while Ulrich speaks of the desire for community—once more with the zeal of a man out to mortify his own nature, without knowing whether it is directed against his true nature or his assumed nature—Agathe is listening as his words come close to her and retreat again, and what he notices, looking at her lying quite defenseless in that bright island of light and in her whimsical costume, is that for some time now he has been searching for something about her that would repel him, as he regrettably tends to do, but he has not found anything, and for this he is thankful with a pure and simple affection that he otherwise never feels. And he is thoroughly delighted by the conversation. But when it is over, Agathe asks him casually: “Now, are
you actually for what you call the ‘family’ or are you against it?”

Ulrich answers that this is beside the point, because he was talking about an indecision on the part of the world, not his personal indecision.

Agathe thinks it over.

Finally, she says abruptly: “I have no way of judging that. But I wish I could be entirely at one and at peace with myself, and also...well, somehow be able to live accordingly. Wouldn’t you like to try that too?”
AGATHE WHEN SHE CAN’T TALK TO ULRICH

The moment Agathe got on the train and began the unexpected journey to her father something had happened that bore every resemblance to a sudden rupture, and the two fragments into which the moment of departure exploded flew as far apart as if they had never belonged together. Her husband had seen her off, had raised his hat and held it, that stiff, round, black hat that grew visibly smaller and smaller, in the gesture appropriate to leave-taking, aslant in the air, as her train began to move, so that it seemed to Agathe that the station was rolling backward as fast as the train was rolling forward. At
this moment, though an instant earlier she had still been expecting to be away from home no longer than circumstances absolutely required, she made the decision never to return, and her mind became agitated like a heart that realizes suddenly that it has escaped a danger of which it had been wholly unaware.

When Agathe thought it over afterward, she was by no means completely satisfied. What troubled her about her attitude was that its form reminded her of a curious illness she had had as a child, soon after she had begun going to school. For more than a year she had suffered from a not inconsiderable fever that neither rose nor subsided, and she had grown so thin and frail that it worried the doctors, who could not determine the cause. Nor was this illness ever explained later. Actually, Agathe had rather enjoyed seeing the great physicians from the University, who at first entered her room so
full of dignity and wisdom, visibly lose some of their confidence from week to week; and although she obediently swallowed all the medicines prescribed for her and really would have liked to get well, because it was expected of her, she was still pleased to see that the doctors could not bring this about with their remedies and felt herself in an unearthly or at least an extraordinary condition, as her physical self-diminished. That the grownups' world had no power over her as long as she was sick made her feel proud, though she had no idea how her little body had brought this about. But in the end it recovered of its own accord, and just as mysteriously, too.

Almost all she knew about it today was what the servants had told her later: they maintained that she had been bewitched by a beggar woman who came often to the house but had once been rudely turned away from the door. Agathe had never been able to find
out how much truth there was in this story, for although the servants freely dropped hints, they could never be pinned down to explanations and were obviously frightened of violating a strict ban her father was supposed to have issued. Her own memory of that time held only a single, though indeed remarkably lively, image, in which she saw her father in front of her, lashing out in a raging fury at a suspicious-looking woman, the flat of his hand repeatedly making contact with her cheek. It was the only time in her life she had seen that small, usually painfully proper man of reason so utterly changed and beside himself; but to the best of her recollection this had happened not before but during her illness, for she thought she remembered lying in bed, and this bed was not in her nursery but on the floor below, “with the grownups,” in one of the rooms where the servants would not have been allowed to let the beggar woman in, even if she had
been no stranger to the kitchen and below stairs. Actually, Agathe believed this incident must have occurred rather toward the end of her illness and that she had suddenly recovered a few days later, roused from her bed by a remarkable impatience that ended this illness as unexpectedly as it had begun.

Of course, she could not tell how far these memories stemmed from facts or whether they were fantasies born of the fever. “Probably the only curious thing about it is the way these images have stayed floating in my mind somewhere between reality and illusion,” she thought moodily, “without my finding anything unusual about it.”

The jolting of the taxi that was driving them over badly paved streets prevented a conversation. Ulrich had suggested taking advantage of the dry winter weather for an outing, and even had an idea where to go, though it was not a specific destination so much as an advance into a half-remembered
country of the mind. Now they found themselves in a car that was to take them to the edge of town. “I’m sure that’s the only odd thing about it!” Agathe kept saying to herself. This was how she had learned her lessons in school, so that she never knew whether she was stupid or bright, willing or unwilling: she had a facility for coming up with the answers that were demanded of her without ever seeing the point of the questions, from which she felt protected by a deep-seated indifference. After she recovered from her illness she liked going to school as much as before, and because one of the doctors had hit upon the idea that it might help to remove her from the solitary life in her father’s house and give her more company of her own age, she had been placed in a convent school. There, and in the secondary school she was sent on to, she was regarded as cheerful and docile. Whenever she was told that something was necessary or true she
accommodated herself to it, and she willingly accepted everything required of her, because it seemed the least trouble and it would have seemed foolish to her to do anything against an established system that had no relevance to herself but obviously belonged to a world ordained by father’s and teachers. However, she did not believe a word of what she was learning, and since despite her apparent docility she was no model pupil and, wherever her desires ran counter to her convictions, calmly did as she pleased, she enjoyed the respect of her schoolmates and even that admiring affection won in school by those who know how to make things easy for themselves. It could even be that her mysterious illness had been such an arrangement, for with this one exception she had really always been in good health and hardly ever high-strung. “In short, an idle, good-for-nothing character!” she concluded uncertainly. She remembered how much more vigorously
than herself her friends had often mutinied against the strict discipline of the convent, and with what moral indignation they had justified their offenses against the regulations; yet as far as she had been in a position to observe, the very girls who had been most passionate in rebelling against details had eventually succeeded admirably in coming to terms with the whole; they developed into well-situated women who brought up their children not very differently from the way they had been brought up themselves. And so, although dissatisfied with herself as she was, she was not convinced that it was better to have an active and a good character.

Agathe despised the emancipation of women just as she disdained the female’s need for a brood in a nest supplied by the male. She remembered with pleasure the time when she had first felt her breasts tightening her dress and had borne her burning lips through the cooling air of the streets. But
the fussy erotic busyness of the female sex, which emerges from the guise of girlhood like a round knee from pink tulle, had aroused scorn in her for as long as she could remember. When she asked herself what her real convictions were, a feeling told her that she was destined to experience something extraordinary and of a rare order—even then, when she knew as good as nothing of the world and did not believe the little she had been taught. And it had always seemed to her like a mysterious but active response, corresponding to this impression, to let things go as they had to, without overestimating their importance.

Out of the corner of her eye Agathe glanced at Ulrich, sitting gravely upright, rocking to and fro in the jolting cab, and recalled how hard it had been on their first evening together to make him see why she had not simply run away from her husband on their wedding night, although she didn’t
like him. She had been so tremendously in awe of her big brother while she was awaiting his arrival, but now she smiled as she secretly recalled her impression of Hagauers thick lips in those first months, every time they rounded amorously under the bristles of his mustache; his entire face would be drawn in thick-skinned folds toward the corners of his mouth, and she would feel, as if satiated: Oh, what an ugly man he is! She had even suffered his mild pedagogic vanity and kindliness as a merely physical disgust, more outward than inward. After the first surprise was over, she had now and then been unfaithful to him. “If you can call it that,” she thought, “when an inexperienced young thing whose sensuality is dormant instantly responds to the advances of a man who is not her husband as if they were thunderclaps rattling her door!” But she had shown little talent for unfaithfulness; lovers, once she had got to know them a little, were no more
masterful to her than husbands, and it soon seemed to her that she could take the ritual masks of African tribal dancers as seriously as the love masks put on by European men. Not that she never lost her head; but even in the first attempts to repeat the experience the magic was gone. The world of acted-out fantasies, the theatricality of love, left her unenchanted. These stage directions for the soul, mostly formulated by men, which all came to the conclusion that the rigors of life now and then entitled one to an hour of weakness—with some subcategories of weakening: letting go, going faint, being taken, giving oneself, surrendering, going crazy, and so on—all struck her as smarmy exaggeration, since she had at no time ever felt herself other than weak in a world so superbly constructed by the strength of men.

The philosophy Agathe acquired in this way was simply that of the female person who refuses to be taken in but who
automatically observes what the male person is trying to put over on her. Of course, it was no philosophy at all, only a defiantly hidden disappointment, still mingled with a restrained readiness for some unknown release that possibly increased even as her outward defiance lessened. Since Agathe was well-read but not by nature given to theorizing, she often had occasion to wonder, in comparing her own experiences with the ideals in books and plays, that she had never fallen prey to the snares of her seducers, like a wild animal in a trap (which would have accorded with the Don Juanish self-image a man in those days assumed when he and a woman had an affair); nor had her married life, in accord with another fashion, turned into a Strindbergian battle of the sexes in which the imprisoned woman used her cunning and powerlessness to torment her despotic but inept overlord to death. In fact, her relations with Hagauer, in contrast with her deeper
feelings about him, had always remained quite good. On their first evening together Ulrich had used strong terms for these relations, such as panic, shock, rape, which completely missed the mark. She was sorry, Agathe thought, rebellious even as she remembered this, but she could not pretend to be an angel; the fact was that everything about the marriage had taken a perfectly natural course. Her father had supported the man’s suit with sensible reasons, she herself had decided to marry again; all right, then, it was done, one had to put up with whatever was involved. It was neither especially wonderful nor overly unpleasant! Even now she was sorry to be hurting Hagauer deliberately, though she absolutely wanted to do just that! She had not wanted love, she had thought it would work out somehow, he was after all a good man.

Well, perhaps it was rather that he was one of those people who always do the good
thing; they themselves have no goodness in them, Agathe thought. It seems that goodness disappears from the human being to the same extent that it is embodied in goodwill or good deeds! How had Ulrich put it? A stream that turns factory wheels loses its gradient. Yes, he had said that too, but that wasn’t what she was looking for. Now she had it: “It seems really that it’s only the people who don’t do much good who are able to preserve their goodness intact!” But the instant she recalled this sentence, which must have sounded so illuminating when Ulrich said it, it sounded to her like total nonsense. One could not detach it from its now-forgotten context. She tried to reshuffle the words and replace them with similar ones, but that only proved that the first version was the right one, for the others were like words spoken into the wind: nothing was left of them. So that was the way Ulrich had said it. “But how can one call people good who
behave badly?” she thought. “That’s really nonsense!” But she knew: while Ulrich was saying this, though it had no more real substance when he did so, it had been wonderful! Wonderful wasn’t the word for it: she had felt almost ill with joy when she heard him say it. Such sayings illuminated her entire life. This one, for instance, had come up during their last long talk, after the funeral and after Hagauer had left; suddenly she had realized how carelessly she had always behaved, like the time she had simply thought things would “somehow” work out with Hagauer, because he was “a good person.” Ulrich often said things that filled her momentarily with joy or misery, although one could not “preserve” those moments. When was it, for example, that Ulrich had said that under certain circumstances it might be possible for him to love a thief but never a person who was honest from habit? At the moment she couldn’t quite recall, but then
realized with delight that it hadn’t been Ulrich but she herself who had said it. As a matter of fact, much of what he said she had been thinking herself, only without words; all on her own, the way she used to be, she would never have made such bold assertions.

Up to now Agathe had been feeling perfectly comfortable between the joggings and joltings as the cab drove over bumpy suburban streets, leaving them incapable of speech, wrapped as they were in a network of mechanical vibrations, and whenever she had used her husband’s name in her thoughts, it was as a mere term of reference to a period and its events. But now, for no particular reason, an infinite horror slowly came over her: Hagauer had actually been there with her, in the flesh! The way in which she had tried up to now to be fair to him disappeared, and her throat tightened with bitterness.

He had arrived on the morning of the funeral and had affectionately insisted, late
as he was, on seeing his father-in-law, had gone to the autopsy lab and delayed the closing of the coffin. In a tactful, honorable, undemonstrative fashion, he had been truly moved. After the funeral Agathe had excused herself on grounds of fatigue, and Ulrich had to take his brother-in-law out to lunch. As he told her afterward, Hagauer’s constant company had made Ulrich as frantic as a tight collar, and for that reason he had done everything to get him to leave as soon as possible. Hagauer had intended to go to the capital for an educators’ conference and there devote another day to calling on people at the Ministry and some sightseeing, but he had reserved the two days prior to this to spend with his wife as an attentive husband and to go into the matter of her inheritance. But Ulrich, in collusion with his sister, had made up a story that made it seem impossible for Hagauer to stay at the house, and told him he had booked a room for him
at the best hotel in town. As expected, this made Hagauer hesitant: the hotel would be inconvenient and expensive, and he would in all decency have to pay for it himself; instead, he could allot two days to his calls and sightseeing in the capital, and if he traveled at night save the cost of the hotel. So Hagauer expressed fulsome regrets at being unable to take advantage of Ulrich’s thoughtfulness, and finally revealed his plan, unalterable by now, to leave that very evening. All that was left to discuss was the question of the inheritance, and this made Agathe smile again, because at her instigation Ulrich had told her husband that the will could not be read for a few days yet. Agathe would be here, after all, he was told, to look after his interests, and he would also receive a proper legal statement. As for whatever concerned furniture, mementos, and the like, Ulrich, as a bachelor, would make no claims to anything his sister might happen to want.
Finally, he had asked Hagauer whether he would agree in case they decided to sell the house, which was of no use to them, without committing himself, of course, since none of them had yet seen the will; and Hagauer had agreed, without committing himself, of course, that he could see no objection for the moment, though he must of course reserve the right to determine his position in the light of the actual conditions. Agathe had suggested all this to her brother, and he had passed it on because it meant nothing to him one way or the other, and he wanted to be rid of Hagauer.

Suddenly Agathe felt miserable again, for after they had managed this so well, her husband had after all come to her room, together with her brother, to say goodbye to her. Agathe had behaved as coldly as she could and said that there was no way of telling when she would be returning home. Knowing him as she did, she could tell at
once that he had not been prepared for this and resented the fact that his decision to leave right away was now casting him in the role of the unfeeling husband; in retrospect he was suddenly offended at having been expected to stay at a hotel and by the cool reception accorded him. But since he was a man who did everything according to plan he said nothing, decided to have it out with his wife when the time came, and kissed her, after he had picked up his hat, dutifully on the lips.

And this kiss, which Ulrich had seen, now seemed to demolish Agathe. “How could it happen,” she asked herself in consternation, “that I stood this man for so long? But then, haven’t I put up with things all my life without resisting?” She furiously reproached herself: “If I were any good at all, things could never have gone this far!”

Agathe turned her face away from Ulrich, whom she had been watching, and
stared out the window. Low suburban buildings, icy streets, muffled-up people—images of an ugly wilderness rolling past, holding up to her the wasteland of the life into which she felt she had fecklessly allowed herself to drift. She was no longer sitting upright but had let herself slide down into the cab’s musty-smelling upholstery; it was easier to look out the window in this position, and she remained in this ungraceful posture, in which she was rudely jolted and shaken to the very bowels. This body of hers, being tossed about like a bundle of rags, gave her an uncanny feeling, for it was the only thing she owned. Sometimes, when as a schoolgirl she awakened in the gray light of dawn, she had felt as though she were drifting into the future inside her body as if inside the hull of a wooden skiff. Now she was just about twice as old as she had been then, and the light in the cab was equally dim. But she still could not picture her life, had no idea what it ought
to be. Men were a complement to one’s body, but they were no spiritual fulfillment; one took them as they took oneself. Her body told her that in only a few years it would begin to lose its beauty, which meant losing the feelings that, because they arise directly out of its self-assurance, can only barely be expressed in words or thoughts. Then it would be all over, without anything having ever been there. It occurred to her that Ulrich had spoken in a similar vein about the futility of his athletics, and while she doggedly kept her face turned away to the window, she planned to make him talk about it.
FURTHER COURSE OF THE EXCURSION TO THE SWEDISH RAMPARTS.
THE MORALITY OF THE NEXT STEP

Brother and sister had left the cab at the last, low, and already quite rural-looking houses on the edge of the town and set off along a wide, furrowed country road that rose steadily uphill. The frozen earth of the wheel tracks crumbled beneath their tread. Their shoes were soon covered with the miserable gray of this parquet for carters and peasants, in sharp contrast with their smart city clothes, and although it was not cold, a cutting wind blowing toward them from the top of the hill made their cheeks glow, and the
glazed brittleness of their lips made it hard to talk.

The memory of Hagauer drove Agathe to explain herself to her brother. She was convinced that he could not possibly understand her bad marriage from any point of view, not even in the simplest of social terms. The words were already there within her, but she could not make up her mind to overcome the resistance of the climb, the cold, and the wind lashing her face. Ulrich was striding ahead, in a broad track left by a dragging brake, which they were using as their path; looking at his lean, broad-shouldered form, she hesitated. She had always imagined him hard, unyielding, a bit wild, perhaps only because of the critical remarks she had heard from her father and occasionally also from Hagauer; thinking of her brother, estranged and escaped from the family, had made her ashamed of her own subservience. “He was right not to bother about me!” she thought,
and her dismay at having continually submitted to demeaning situations returned. But in fact she was full of those same tempestuous, conflicting feelings that had made her break out with those wild lines of poetry between the doorposts of her father’s death chamber. She caught up with Ulrich, which left her out of breath, and suddenly questions such as this workaday road had probably never heard before rang out, and the wind was torn to ribbons by words whose sounds no other wind had ever carried in these rural hills.

“You surely remember...,” she exclaimed, and named several well-known instances from literature: “You didn’t tell me whether you could forgive a thief, but do you mean you’d regard these murderers as good people?”

“Of course!” Ulrich shouted back. “No—wait. Perhaps they’re just potentially good people, valuable people. They still are,
even afterward, as criminals. But they don’t stay good!”

“Then why do you still like them after their crime? Surely not because of their earlier potentiality but because you still find them attractive?”

“But that’s always the way it is,” Ulrich said. “It’s the person who gives character to the deed; it doesn’t happen the other way round. We separate good and evil, but in our hearts we know they’re a whole!”

Agathe’s wind-whipped cheeks flushed an even brighter red because the passion of her questions, which words both revealed and hid, had forced her to resort to books for examples. The misuse of “cultural problems” is so extreme that one could feel them out of place wherever the wind blows and trees stand, as though human culture did not include all of nature’s manifestations! But she had struggled bravely, linked her arm
through her brother’s, and now replied, close to his ear so as not to have to raise her voice anymore and with a flicker of bravado in her face: “I suppose that’s why we execute bad men but cordially serve them a hearty breakfast first.”

Ulrich, sensing some of the agitation at his side, leaned down to speak in his sister’s ear, though in a normal voice: “Everyone likes to think that he couldn’t do anything evil, because he himself is good.”

With these words they had reached the top, where the road no longer climbed but cut across a rolling, treeless plateau. The wind had suddenly dropped and it was no longer cold, but in this pleasant stillness the conversation stopped as if severed, and would not start up again.

“What on earth got you onto Dostoyevsky and Stendhal in the middle of that gale?” Ulrich asked a while later. “If
anybody had seen us they’d have thought we were crazy.”

Agathe laughed. “They wouldn’t have understood us anymore than the cries of the birds....Anyway, you were talking to me the other day about Moosbrugger.”

They walked on.

After a while, Agathe said: “I don’t like him at all!”

“And I’d nearly forgotten him,” Ulrich replied.

After they had again walked on in silence, Agathe stopped. “Tell me,” she asked. “You’ve surely done some irresponsible things yourself. I remember, for instance, that you were in the hospital once with a bullet wound. You certainly don’t always look before you leap...?”
“What a lot of questions you’re asking today!” Ulrich said. “What do you expect me to say to that?”

“Are you never sorry for anything you do?” Agathe asked quickly. “I have the impression that you never regret anything. You even said something like that once.”

“Good God,” Ulrich answered, beginning to walk on again. “There’s a plus in every minus. Maybe I did say something like that, but you don’t have to take it so literally.”

“A plus in every minus?”

“Some good in everything bad. Or at least in much of the bad. A human minus-variant is likely to contain an unrecognized plus-variant—that’s probably what I meant to say. Having something to regret may be just the thing to give you the strength to do something far better than you might ever have done otherwise. It’s never what one
does that counts, but only what one does next!”

“Suppose you’ve killed someone: what can you do next?”

Ulrich shrugged his shoulders. He was tempted to answer, for the sake of the argument: “It might enable me to write a poem that would enrich the inner life of thousands of people, or to come up with a great invention!” But he checked himself. “That would never happen,” he thought. “Only a lunatic could imagine it. Or an eighteen-year-old aesthete. God knows why, but those are ideas that contradict the laws of nature. On the other hand,” he conceded, “it did work that way for primitive man. He killed because human sacrifice was a great religious poem!”

He said neither the one thing nor the other aloud, but Agathe went on: “You may regard my objections as silly, but the first
time I heard you say that what matters isn’t the step one takes but always the next step after that, I thought: So if a person could fly inwardly, fly morally, as it were, and could keep flying at high speed from one improvement to the next, then he would know no remorse! I was madly envious of you!”

“That’s nonsense!” Ulrich said emphatically. “What I said was that one false step doesn’t matter, only the next step after that. But then what matters after the next step? Evidently the one that follows after that. And after the nth step, the n-plus-one step! Such a person would have to live without ever coming to an end or to a decision, indeed without achieving reality. And yet it is still true that what counts is always only the next step. The truth is, we have no proper method of dealing with this unending series. Dear Agathe,” he said abruptly, “I sometimes regret my entire life.”
“But that’s just what you can’t do!” his sister said.

“And why not? Why not that in particular?”

“I have never really done anything,” Agathe replied, “and so I’ve always had time to regret the little I have done. I’m sure you don’t know what that’s like: such a dim state of mind! The shadows come, and what was has power over me. It’s present in the smallest detail, and I can forget nothing and understand nothing. It’s an unpleasant state of mind....” Her tone was unemotional, quite unassuming. Ulrich had in fact never known this backwash of life, since his own had always been oriented toward expansion, and it merely reminded him that his sister had several times already expressed dissatisfaction with herself in strong terms. But he failed to question her because they had meanwhile reached a hilltop that he had chosen as their destination and stepped toward its edge. It
was a huge mound associated by legend with a Swedish siege in the Thirty Years’ War because it looked like a fortification, even though it was far too big for that: a green rampart of nature, without bush or tree, that broke off to a high, bright rock face on the side overlooking the town. A low, empty world of hills surrounded this mound; no village, no house was to be seen, only the shadows of clouds and gray pastures. Once again Ulrich felt the spell of this place, which he remembered from his youth: the town was still lying there, far below in the distance, anxiously huddled around a few churches that looked like hens herding their chicks, so that one suddenly felt like leaping into their midst with one bound and laying about one, or scooping them up in the grip of a giant hand.

“What a glorious feeling it must have been for those Swedish adventurers to reach such a place after trotting relentlessly for
weeks, and then from their saddles catch sight of their quarry,” he said to his sister after telling her the story of the place. “It is only at such moments that the weight of life, the burden of our secret grievance—that we must all die, that it’s all been so brief and probably for nothing—is ever really lifted from us.”

“What moments do you mean?”

Ulrich did not know what to answer. He did not want to answer at all. He remembered that as a young man he had always felt the need in this place to clench his teeth and keep silent. Finally, he replied: “Those romantic moments when events run away with us—the senseless moments!” He felt as if his head were a hollow nut on his neck, full of old saws like “Death be not proud” or “I care for nobody, no, not I,” and with them the faded fortissimo of those years when there was not yet a boundary between life’s expectations and life itself. He thought:
“What single-minded and happy experiences have I had since then? None.”

Agathe responded: “I’ve always acted senselessly, and it only makes one unhappy.”

She had walked ahead, to the very edge. Her ears were deaf to her brother’s words; she did not understand them, and saw a somber, barren landscape before her whose sadness harmonized with her own. When she turned around she said: “It’s a place to kill oneself,” and smiled. “The emptiness in my head could melt with sweet peace into the emptiness of this view!” She took a few steps back to Ulrich. “All my life,” she went on, “I’ve been reproached with having no willpower, with loving nothing, respecting nothing; in short, for being a person with no real will to live. Papa used to scold me for it, and Hagauer blamed me for it. So now I wish you would tell me, for God’s sake, tell me at long last, in which moments does something in life strike us as necessary?”
‘When one turns over in bed!’ Ulrich said gruffly.

“What does that mean?”

“Excuse the mundane example,” he said. “But it’s a fact: You’re in an uncomfortable position; you incessantly think of changing it and decide on one move and then another, without doing anything; finally, you give up; and then all at once you’ve turned over! One really should say you’ve been turned over. That’s the one pattern we act on, whether in a fit of passion or after long reflection.” He did not look at her as he spoke; he was answering himself. He still had the feeling: Here I stood and longed for something that has never been satisfied.

Agathe smiled again, but the smile twisted her mouth as if in pain. She returned to where she had been standing and stared silently into the romantic distance. Her fur coat made a dark outline against the sky, and
her slender form presented a sharp contrast to the broad silence of the landscape and the shadows of the clouds flying over it. Looking at her, Ulrich had an indescribably strong sense that something was happening. He was almost ashamed to be standing there in the company of a woman instead of beside a saddled horse. And although he was perfectly aware that the cause of this was the tranquil image emanating at this moment from his sister, he had the impression that something was happening, not to him, but somewhere in the world, and he was missing it. He felt he was being ridiculous. And yet there had been something true in his blurting out that he regretted the way he had lived his life. He sometimes longed to be wholly involved in events as in a wrestling match, even if they were meaningless or criminal, as long as they were valid, absolute, without the everlasting tentativeness they have when a person is superior to his experiences. “Something an end
in itself, authentic," Ulrich thought, seriously looking for the right expression, and, unawares, his thoughts stopped pursuing imaginary events and focused on the sight that Agathe herself now presented, as nothing but the mirror of her self. So brother and sister stood for quite a while, apart and solitary, immobilized by a hesitancy filled with conflicting feelings. Most curious of all, perhaps, was that it never occurred to Ulrich that something had indeed already happened when, at Agathe’s behest and in his own desire to get rid of him, he had palmed off on his unsuspecting brother-in-law the lie that there was a sealed testament that could not be opened for several days, and had assured him, also against his better knowledge, that Agathe would look after his interests: something Hagauer would subsequently refer to as “aiding and abetting.”

Eventually they did move away from this spot, where each had been sunk in
thought, and walked on together without having talked things out. The wind had freshened again, and because Agathe seemed fatigued, Ulrich suggested stopping to rest at a shepherd’s cottage he knew of nearby. They soon found the stone cabin, and they had to duck their heads as they went in, while the shepherd’s wife, staring, fended them off in embarrassment. In the mixture of German and Slavic that prevailed in this part of the country and that he still vaguely remembered, Ulrich asked if they might come in for a while to warm themselves and eat their provisions indoors, and supported this request with a tip so generous that the involuntary hostess broke out into horrified lamentations that her wretched poverty did not enable her to offer better hospitality to such “fine gentry.” She wiped off the greasy table by the window, fanned a fire of twigs on the hearth, and put on some goat’s milk to heat. Agathe had immediately squeezed past the
table to the window without paying any attention to these efforts, as if it were a matter of course that one would find shelter somewhere, no matter where. She looked out through the dim little square of four panes at the landscape here, on the far side of the rampart, which without the wide extent of the view they had had from the top was more reminiscent of what a swimmer sees, surrounded by green crests. Though it was not yet evening, the day had passed its zenith and the light was fading.

Suddenly Agathe asked: “Why don’t you ever talk to me seriously?”

How could Ulrich have found a better answer to this other than to glance up at her with an air of innocence and surprise? He was busy laying out ham, sausage, and boiled eggs on a piece of paper between himself and his sister.
But Agathe continued: “If one accidentally bumps into you it hurts, and one feels a shock at the terrific difference. But when I try to ask you something crucial you dissolve into thin air!”

She did not touch the food he pushed toward her—indeed, in her aversion to winding up the day with a rural picnic, her back was so straight that she was not even touching the table. And now something-recurred that was like their climb up the country road. Ulrich shoved aside the mugs of goat’s milk that had just been brought to the table from the stove and were emitting a very disagreeable smell to noses unaccustomed to it; the faint nausea it produced in him had a sobering, stimulating effect such as comes from a sudden rush of bitterness.

“I’ve always spoken seriously to you,” he retorted. “If you don’t like what I say, it’s not my fault; what you don’t like in my responses is the morality of our time.” He
suddenly realized that he wanted to explain to his sister as completely as possible all she would have to know in order to understand herself, and to some extent her brother as well. And with the firmness of a man who will brook no idle interruptions, he launched on a lengthy speech.

“The morality of our time, whatever else may be claimed, is that of achievement. Five more or less fraudulent bankruptcies are acceptable provided the fifth leads to a time of prosperity and patronage. Success can cause everything else to be forgotten. When you reach the point where your money helps win elections and buys paintings, the State is prepared to look the other way too. There are unwritten rules: if you donate to church, charities, and political parties, it needs to be no more than one tenth of the outlay required for someone to demonstrate his goodwill by patronizing the arts. And even success still has its limits; one cannot yet
acquire everything in every way; some principles of the Crown, the aristocracy, and society can still to some extent restrain the social climber. On the other hand, the State, for its own supra-personal person, quite openly countenances the principle that one may rob, steal, and murder if it will provide power, civilization, and glory. Of course, I’m not saying that all this is acknowledged even in theory; on the contrary, the theory of it is quite obscure. I just wanted to sum up the most mundane facts for you. The moral argumentation is just one more means to an end, a weapon used in much the same way as lies. This is the world that men have made, and it would make me want to be a woman—if only women did not love men!

“Nowadays we call good whatever gives us the illusion that it will get us somewhere, but this is precisely what you just called the flying man without remorse, and what I’ve called a problem we have no method for
solving. As a scientifically trained person I feel in every situation that my knowledge is incomplete, no more than a pointer, and that perhaps tomorrow I will have new knowledge that will cause me to think differently. On the other hand, even a person wholly governed by his feelings, ‘a person on the way up’ as you have depicted him, will see everything he does as a step upward, from which he is raised to the next step. So there is something in our minds and in our souls, a morality of the next-step’—but is that simply the morality of the five bankruptcies, is the entrepreneurial morality of our time so deeply rooted in our inner life? Or is there only the illusion of a connection? Or is the morality of the careerists a monstrosity prematurely born from deeper currents? At this point I really don’t know the answer!”

Ulrich’s short pause for breath was only rhetorical, for he intended to develop his views further. Agathe, however, who had so
far been listening with the curiously passive alertness that was sometimes characteristic of her, switched the conversation onto a totally different track with the simple remark that she wasn’t interested in this answer because all she wanted to know was where Ulrich himself stood; she was not in a position to grasp what everyone might think.

“But if you expect me to accomplish anything in any form whatsoever, I’d rather have no principles at all,” she added.

“Thank God for that!” Ulrich said. “It’s always a pleasure for me, every time I look at your youth, beauty, and strength, to hear from you that you have no energy at all! Our era is dripping with the energy of action. It’s not interested in ideas, only in deeds. This fearful activity stems from the single fact that people have nothing to do. Inwardly, I mean. But even outwardly, in the last analysis, everyone spends his whole life repeating the same thing over and over: he gets into
some occupation and then goes on with it. I think this brings us back to the question you raised before, out there in the open air. It’s so simple to have the energy to act, and so hard to make any sense of it! Almost nobody understands that these days. That’s why our men of action look like men bowling; they manage to knock down their nine pins with all the gestures of a Napoleon. It wouldn’t even surprise me to see them ending up by assaulting each other in a frenzy, because of their inability to comprehend why all action is inadequate “ He had spoken energetically at first but lapsed again, first into pensiveness, then into silence for a while. At last he just glanced up with a smile and contented himself with saying: “You say that if I expect any moral effort from you, you are bound to disappoint me. I say that if you expect any moral counsel from me, I am bound to disappoint you. I think that we have nothing definite to demand of one another—all of us, I
mean; we really shouldn’t demand action from one another; we should create the conditions that make action possible; that’s how I feel about it.”

“But how is that to be done?” Agathe said. She realized that Ulrich had abandoned the big pronouncements he had begun with and had drifted into something closer to himself, but even this was too general for her taste. She had, as we know, no use for general analysis and regarded every effort that extended beyond her own skin, as it were, as more or less hopeless; she was sure of this for her own part, and believed it was probably true of the general assertions of others too. Still, she understood Ulrich quite well. She noticed that as he sat there with his head down, speaking softly against the energy of action, her brother kept absentmindedly carving notches and lines into the table with his pocketknife, and all the sinews of his hand were tense. The unthinking but almost
impassioned motion of his hand, and the frank way he had spoken of Agathe’s youth and beauty, made for an absurd duet above the orchestra of the other words; nor did she try to give it a meaning other than that she was sitting here watching.

“What’s to be done?” Ulrich replied in the same tone as before. “At our cousin’s I once proposed to Count Leinsdorf that he should found a World Secretariat for Precision and Soul, so that even the people who don’t go to church would know what they had to do. Naturally, I only said it in fun, for while we created science a long time ago for truth, asking for something similar to cope with everything else would still appear so foolish today as to be embarrassing. And yet everything the two of us have been talking about so far would logically call for such a secretariat!” He had dropped the speech and leaned back against his bench. “I suppose
I’m dissolving into thin air again if I add: But how would that turn out today?”

Since Agathe did not reply, there was a silence. After a while Ulrich said: “Anyway, I sometimes think that I can’t really stand believing that myself! When I saw you before, standing on the rampart,” he added in an undertone, “I suddenly had a wild urge to do something! I don’t know why. I really have done some rash things sometimes. The magic lay in the fact that when it was over, there was something more besides me. Sometimes I’m inclined to think that a person could be happy even as a result of a crime, because it gives him a certain ballast and perhaps keeps him on a steadier course.”

This time, too, his sister did not answer right away. He looked at her quietly, perhaps even expectantly, but without re-experiencing the surge he had just described, indeed without thinking of anything at all. After a
little while, she asked him: “Would you be angry with me if I committed a crime?”

“What do you expect me to say to that?” Ulrich said; he had bent over his knife again.

“Is there no answer?”

“No; nowadays there is no real answer.”

At this point Agathe said: “I’d like to kill Hagauer.”

Ulrich forced himself not to look up. The words had entered his ear lightly and softly, but when they had passed they left behind something like broad wheel marks in his mind. He had instantly forgotten her tone; he would have had to see her face to know how to take her words, but he did not want to accord them even that much importance.

“Fine,” he said. “Why shouldn’t you? Is there anyone left today who hasn’t wanted to do something of the land? Do it, if you really
can! It’s just as if you had said: 1 would like to love him for his faults!’  “Now he straightened up again and looked his sister in the face. It was stubborn and surprisingly excited. Keeping his eyes on her, he said slowly:

“There’s something wrong here, you see; on this frontier between what goes on inside us and what goes on outside, some kind of communication is missing these days, and they adapt to each other only with tremendous losses. One might almost say that our evil desires are the dark side of the life we lead in reality, and the life we lead in reality is the dark side of our good desires. Imagine if you actually did it: it wouldn’t at all be what you meant, and you’d be horribly disappointed, to say the least....”

“Perhaps I could suddenly be a different person—you admitted that yourself!” Agathe interrupted him.
As Ulrich at this moment looked around, he was reminded that they were not alone; two people were listening to their conversation. The old woman—hardly over forty, perhaps, but her rags and the traces of her humble life made her look older—had sat down sociably near the stove, and sitting beside her was the shepherd, who had come home to his hut during their conversation without their noticing him, absorbed in themselves as they were. The two old people sat with their hands on their knees and listened, or so it appeared, in wonder and with pride to the conversation that filled their hut, greatly pleased even though they did not understand a single word. They saw that the milk went undrunk, the sausage uneaten; it was all a spectacle and, for all anyone knew, an edifying one. They were not even whispering to each other. Ulrich’s glance dipped into their wide-open eyes, and he smiled at them in embarrassment, but of
the two only the woman smiled back, while the man maintained his serious, reverential propriety.

“We must eat” Ulrich said to his sister in English. ‘They’re wondering about us.”

She obediently toyed with some bread and meat, and he for his part ate resolutely and even drank a little of the milk. Meanwhile Agathe went on, aloud and unembarrassed: “The idea of actually hurting him is repugnant to me when I come to think of it. So maybe I don’t want to kill him. But I do want to wipe him out! Tear him into little pieces, pound them in a mortar, flush it down the drain; that’s what I’d like to do! Root out everything that’s happened!”

“This is a funny way for us to be talking,” Ulrich remarked.

Agathe was silent for a while. But then she said: “But you promised me the first day you’d stand by me against Hagauer!”
“Of course I will. But not like that.”

Again she was silent. Then she said suddenly: “If you bought or rented a car we could drive to my house by way of Iglau and come back the longer way around, through Tabor, I think. It would never occur to anyone that we’d been there in the night.”

“And the servants? Fortunately, I can’t drive!” Ulrich laughed, but then he shook his head in annoyance. “Such up-to-date ideas!”

“So you say,” Agathe answered. Pensively, she pushed a bit of bacon back and forth on her plate with a fingernail, and it looked as though the fingernail, which had a greasy spot from the bacon, was doing it on its own. “But you’ve also said that the virtues of society are vices to the saint!”

“But I didn’t say that the vices of society are virtues to the saint!” Ulrich pointed out. He laughed, caught hold of Agathe’s hand, and cleaned it with his handkerchief.
“You always take everything back!” Agathe scolded him with a dissatisfied smile, the blood rushing to her face as she tried to free her finger.

The two old people by the stove, still watching exactly as before, now smiled broadly in echo.

“When you talk with me first one way, then another,” Agathe said in a low but impassioned voice, “it’s as if I were seeing myself in a splintered mirror. With you, one never sees oneself from head to toe!”

“No,” Ulrich answered without letting go of her hand. “One never sees oneself as a whole nowadays, and one never moves as a whole— that’s just it!”

Agathe gave in and suddenly stopped withdrawing her hand. “I’m certainly the opposite of holy,” she said softly. “I may have been worse than a kept woman with my indifference. And I’m certainly not spoiling for
action, and maybe I’ll never be able to kill anyone. But when you first said that about the saint—and it was quite a while ago—it made me see something ‘as a whole.’” She bowed her head, in thought or possibly to hide her face. “I saw a saint—maybe a figure on a fountain. To tell the truth, maybe I didn’t see anything at all, but I felt something that has to be expressed this way. The water flowed, and what the saint did also came flowing over the rim, as if he were a fountain gently brimming over in all directions. That’s how one ought to be, I think; then one would always be doing what was right and yet it wouldn’t matter at all what one did.”

“Agathe sees herself standing in the world overflowing with holiness and trembling for her sins, and sees with incredulity how the snakes and rhinoceroses, mountains and ravines, silent and even smaller than she
is, lie down at her feet,” he said, gently teasing her. “But what of Hagauer?”

“That’s just it. He doesn’t fit in. He has to go.”

“Now I have something to tell you,” her brother said. “Every time I’ve had to take part in anything with other people, something of genuine social concern, I’ve been like a man who steps outside the theater before the final act for a breath of fresh air, sees the great dark void with all those stars, and walks away, abandoning hat, coat, and play.”

Agathe gave him a searching look. It was and wasn’t an adequate answer.

Ulrich met her gaze. “You, too, are often plagued by a sense that there’s always a ‘dislike’ before there’s a ‘like,’ “ he said, and thought: “Is she really like me?” Again he thought: “Perhaps the way a pastel resembles a woodcut.” He regarded himself as
the more stable. And she was more beautiful than he. Such a pleasing beauty! He shifted his grip from her finger to her whole hand, a warm, long hand full of life, which up to now he had held in his own only long enough for a greeting. His young sister was upset, and while there were no actual tears in her eyes, he saw a moist shimmer there.

“In a few days you’ll be leaving me too,” she said, “and how can I cope with everything then?”

“We can stay together; you can follow me.”

“How do you suppose that would work?” Agathe asked, with the little thoughtful furrow on her forehead.

“I don’t suppose at all; it’s the first I’ve thought of it.”

He stood up and gave the sheepherders some more money, “for the carved-up table.”
Through a haze Agathe saw the country folk grinning, bobbing, and saying something about how glad they were, in short, incomprehensible words. As she went past them, she felt their four hospitable eyes, staring with naked emotion at her face, and realized that she and Ulrich had been taken for lovers who had quarreled and made up.

“They took us for lovers!” she said. Impetuously she slid her arm in his, and a wave of joy welled up in her. “You must give me a kiss!” she demanded, laughing, and pressed her arm in her brothers as they stood on the threshold of the hut and the low door opened into the darkness of evening.
For the rest of Ulrich’s stay little more was said about Hagauer; nor for a long time did they again refer to the idea that they should make their reunion permanent and take up life together. Nevertheless, the fire that had flamed up in Agathe’s unrestrained desire to do away with her husband still smoldered under the ashes. It spread out in conversations that reached no end and yet burst out again; perhaps one should say: Agathe’s feelings were seeking another possibility of burning freely.

She usually began such conversations with a definite, personal question, the inner form of which was: “May I, or may I not...?”
The lawlessness of her nature had until now rested on the sad and dispirited principle that “I’m allowed to do anything, but I don’t want to anyway,” and so his young sister’s questions sometimes seemed to Ulrich, not inappropriately, like the questions of a child, which are as warm as the little hands of these helpless beings.

His own answers were different in kind, though no less characteristic: he always enjoyed sharing the yield of his experience and his reflections, and as was his custom expressed himself in a fashion as frank as it was intellectually enterprising. He always arrived quickly at the “moral of the story” his sister was talking about, summed things up in formulas, liked to use himself for illustration, and managed in this fashion to tell Agathe a great deal about himself, especially about his earlier, more eventful life. Agathe told him nothing about herself, but she admired his ability to speak about his own life
like that, and his way of subjecting every point she raised to moral scrutiny suited her very well. For morality is nothing more than an ordering that embraces both the soul and things, so it is not strange that young people, whose zeal for life has not yet been blunted on every side, talk about it a good deal. But with a man of Ulrich’s age and experience some explanation is called for, because men talk of morality only in their working lives, if it happens to be part of their professional jargon; otherwise, the word has been swallowed by the business of living and never manages to regain its freedom. So when Ulrich spoke of morality it was a sign of some profound disorder, which attracted Agathe because it corresponded to something in herself. She was ashamed, now that she heard what complicated preconditions would have to be met, of her naive proclamation that she intended to live “in complete harmony” with herself, and yet she was impatient for her
brother to come more quickly to a conclusion; for it often seemed to her that everything he said brought him closer to it, and with greater precision the further he went, but he always stopped at the last step, just at the threshold, where, every time, he gave up the attempt.

The locus of this deflection and of these last steps—and their paralyzing effect did not escape Ulrich—can most generally be indicated by noting that every proposition in European morality leads to such a point, which one cannot get beyond, so that a person taking stock of himself has first the gestures of wading in shallows, as long as he feels firm convictions underfoot, succeeded by the sudden gestures of horribly drowning when he goes a little farther, as though the solid ground of life had abruptly fallen off from the shallows into a completely imponderable abyss. This had a particular way of manifesting itself as well when brother and
sister were talking: Ulrich could speak calmly and clearly on any subject he brought up, so long as his reason was involved, and Agathe felt a similar eagerness in listening; but when they stopped and fell silent, a much greater tension came over their faces. And so it happened once that they were carried across the frontier they had hitherto unconsciously respected. Ulrich had maintained that “the only basic characteristic of our morality is that its commandments contradict each other. The most moral of all propositions is: The exception proves the rule!” He had apparently been moved to this assertion only by his distaste for a system that claims to be unyielding, but in practice must yield to every deflection, which makes it the opposite of a precise procedure that first bases itself on experience and then derives the general law from these observations. He was of course aware of the distinction between natural and moral laws, that the
first are derived from observing amoral nature, while the second have to be imposed on less stubborn human nature; but being of the opinion that something about this opposition was today no longer accurate, he had been just about to say that the moral system was intellectually a hundred years behind the times, which was why it was so hard to adapt it to changed conditions. But before he could get that far with his explanation Agathe interrupted him with an answer that seemed very simple, but for the moment took him aback.

“Isn’t it good to be good?” she asked her brother, with a gleam in her eye like the one she’d had when she was fiddling with her father’s medals, which presumably not everybody would have considered good.

“You’re right,” he replied eagerly. “One really has to formulate some such proposition if one wants to feel the original meaning
again! But children still like being ‘good’ as if it were some tidbit....”

“And being ‘bad’ as well,” Agathe added.

“But does being good have any part in the passions of adults?” Ulrich asked. “It certainly is part of their principles. Not that they are good—they would regard that as childish—but that their behavior is good. A good person is one who has good principles and who does good things: it’s an open secret that he can be quite disgusting as well.”

“See Hagauer,” Agathe volunteered.

“There’s an absurd paradox inherent in those good people,” Ulrich said. “They turn a condition into an imperative, a state of grace into a norm, a state of being into a purpose! In a whole lifetime this household of good people never serves up anything but leftovers, while keeping up a rumor that these are the scraps from a great feast day that was celebrated once. It’s true that from
time to time a few virtues come back into fashion, but as soon as that happens they lose their freshness again.”

“Didn’t you once say that the same act may be either good or bad, depending on circumstances?” Agathe asked.

Ulrich agreed. That was his theory, that moral values were not absolutes but functional concepts. But when we moralize or generalize we separate them out from their natural context: “And that is presumably the point where something goes wrong on the path to virtue.”

“Otherwise, how could virtuous people be so dreary,” Agathe added, “when their intention to be good ought to be the most delightful, challenging, and enjoyable thing anyone could imagine!”
Her brother hesitated, but suddenly he let slip a remark that was soon to bring them into a most unusual relationship.

“Our morality,” he declared, “is the crystallization of an inner movement that is completely different from it. Not one thing we say is right! Take any statement, like the one that just occurred to me: ‘Prison is a place for repentance.’ It’s something we can say with the best conscience in the world, but no one takes it literally, because it would mean hellfire for the prisoners! So how is one to take it? Surely few people know what repentance is, but everybody can tell you where it should reign. Or imagine that something is uplifting—how did that ever get to be part of our morals? When did we ever lie with our faces in the dust, so that it was bliss to be uplifted? Or try to imagine literally being seized by an idea—the moment you were to feel such a thing physically you’d have crossed the border into insanity! Every
word demands to be taken literally, otherwise it decays into a lie; but one can’t take words literally, or the world would turn into a madhouse! Some kind of grand intoxication rises out of this as a dim memory, and one sometimes wonders whether everything we experience may not be fragmented pieces torn from some ancient entity that was once put together wrong.”

The conversation in which this remark occurred took place in the library-study, and while Ulrich sat over several books he had taken along on his trip, his sister was rummaging through the legal and philosophical books, a bequest of which she was the co-inheritor and out of which she picked the notions that led to her questions. Since their outing the pair had rarely left the house. This was how they spent most of their time. Sometimes they strolled in the garden, where winter had peeled the leaves from the bare shrubbery, exposing the earth beneath,
swollen with rain. The sight was agonizing. The air was pallid, like something left too long under water. The garden was not large. The paths soon turned back upon themselves. The state of mind induced in both of them by walking on these paths eddied in circles, as a rising current does behind a dam. When they returned to the house the rooms were dark and sheltered, and the windows resembled deep lighting shafts through which the day arrived with all the brittle delicacy of thinnest ivory.

Now, after Ulrich’s last, vehement words, Agathe descended from the library ladder on which she had been sitting and put her arms around his shoulders without a word. It was an unaccustomed show of tenderness, for apart from the two kisses, the first on the evening of their first encounter and the other a few days ago when they had set out on their way home from the shepherd’s hut, the siblings’ natural reserve had
released itself in nothing more than words or little acts of attentiveness, and on both those occasions, too, the effect of the intimate contact had been concealed by its unexpectedness and exuberance. But this time Ulrich was instantly reminded of the still-warm garter that his sister had given the deceased as a parting gift instead of a flood of words. The thought shot through his head: “She certainly must have a lover; but she doesn’t seem too attached to him, otherwise she wouldn’t be staying on here so calmly.” Clearly, she was a woman, who had led her life as a woman independently of him and would go on doing so. His shoulder felt the beauty of her arm from the distribution of its resting weight, and on the side turned toward his sister he had a shadowy sense of the nearness of her blond armpit and the outline of her breast. So as not to go on sitting there in mute surrender to that quiet embrace, he placed his hand over her fingers close to his
neck, with this contact drowning out the other.

“You know, it’s rather childish, talking the way we do,” he said, not without some ill humor. “The world is full of energetic resolution, and here we sit in luxuriant idleness, talking about the sweetness of being good and the theoretical pots we could fill with it.”

Agathe freed her fingers but let her hand go back to its place. “What’s that you’ve been reading all this time?” she asked.

“You know what it is,” he said. “You’ve been looking at the book behind my back often enough!”

“But I don’t know what to make of it.”

He could not bring himself to talk about it. Agathe, who had drawn up a chair, was crouching behind him and had simply nestled her face peacefully in his hair as though she were napping. Ulrich was
strangely reminded of the moment when his enemy Arnheim had thrown an arm around him and the unregulated current of physical contact with another being had invaded him as through a breach. But this time his own nature did not repel the alien one; on the contrary, something in him advanced toward her, something that had been buried under the rubble of mistrust and resentment that fills the heart of a man who has lived a fairly long time. Agathe’s relationship to him, which hovered between sister and wife, stranger and friend, without being equitable to any one of them, was not even based on a far-reaching accord between their thoughts or feelings, as he had often told himself, yet it was in complete accord—as he was now almost astonished to note—with the fact, which had crystallized after relatively few days full of countless impressions not easy to review in a moment, that Agathe’s mouth was bedded on his hair with no further
claim, and that his hair was becoming warm and moist from her breath. This was as spiritual as it was physical, for when Agathe repeated her question Ulrich was overcome with a seriousness such as he had not felt since the credulous days of his youth; and before this cloud of imponderable seriousness fled again, a cloud that extended from the space behind his back to the book before him, on which his thoughts were resting, he had given an answer that astonished him more for the total absence of irony in its tone than for its meaning:

“I’m instructing myself about the ways of the holy life.”

He stood up; not to move away from his sister but in order to be able to see her better from a few steps away.

“You needn’t laugh,” he said. “I’m not religious; I’m studying the road to holiness
to see if it might also be possible to drive a car on it!"

"I only laughed," she replied, "because I’m so curious to hear what you’re going to say. The books you brought along are new to me, but I have a feeling that I would find them not entirely incomprehensible."

"You understand that?" her brother asked, already convinced that she did understand. "One may be caught up in the most intense feeling, when suddenly one’s eye is seized by the play of some godforsaken, man-forsaken thing and one simply can’t tear oneself away. Suddenly one feels borne up by its puny existence like a feather floating weightlessly and powerlessly on the wind."

"Except for the intense feeling you make such a point of, I think I know what you mean," Agathe said, and could not help smiling at the almost ferocious glare of
embarrassment on her brothers face, not at all in keeping with the tenderness of his words. “One sometimes forgets to see and to hear, and is struck completely dumb. And yet it’s precisely in minutes like these that one feels one has come to oneself for a moment.”

“I would say,” Ulrich went on eagerly, “that it’s like looking out over a wide shimmering sheet of water—so bright it seems like darkness to the eye, and on the far bank things don’t seem to be standing on solid ground but float in the air with a delicately exaggerated distinctness that’s almost painful and hallucinatory. The impression one gets is as much of intensification as of loss. One feels linked with everything but can’t get close to anything. You stand here, and the world stands there, overly subjective and overly objective, but both almost painfully clear, and what separates and unites these normally fused elements is a blazing darkness, an overflowing and extinction, a
swinging in and out. You swim like a fish in water or a bird in air, but there’s no riverbank and no branch, only this floating!” Ulrich had slipped into poetry, but the fire and firmness of his language stood out in relief against its tender and airy meaning like metal. He seemed to have cast off the caution that usually controlled him, and Agathe looked at him astonished, but also with an uneasy gladness.

“So you think,” she asked, “that there’s something behind it? More than a ‘fit,’ or whatever hateful, placating words are used?”

“I should say I do!” He sat down again at his earlier place and leafed through the books that lay there, while Agathe got up to make room for him. Then he opened one of them, with the words: “This is how the saints describe it,” and read aloud:

“ ‘During those days I was exceeding restless. Now I sat awhile, now I wandered
back and forth through the house. It was like a torment, and yet it can be called more a sweetness than a torment, for there was no vexation in it, only a strange, quite supernatural contentment. I had transcended all my faculties and reached the obscure power. There I heard without sound, there I saw without light.

And my heart became bottomless, my spirit formless, and my nature immaterial.””

It seemed to them both that this description resembled the restlessness with which they themselves had been driven through house and garden, and Agathe in particular was surprised that the saints also called their hearts bottomless and their spirits formless. But Ulrich seemed to be caught up again in his irony.

He explained: “The saints say: Once I was imprisoned, then I was drawn out of myself and immersed in God without
knowledge. The emperors out hunting, as we read about them in our storybooks, describe it differently: They tell how a stag appeared to them with a cross between its antlers, causing the murderous spear to drop from their hands; and then they built a chapel on the spot so they could get on with their hunting. The rich, clever ladies in whose circles I move will answer immediately, if you should ask them about it, that the last artist who painted such experiences was van Gogh. Or perhaps instead of a painter they might mention Rilke’s poetry, but in general they prefer van Gogh, who is a superb investment and who cut his ear off because his painting didn’t do enough when measured against the rapture of things. But the great majority of our people will say, on the contrary, that cutting your ear off is not a German way of expressing deep feelings; a German way is that unmistakable vacuousness of the elevated gaze one experiences on a mountaintop. For
them the essence of human sublimity lies in solitude, pretty little flowers, and murmuring little brooks; and yet even in that bovine exaltation, with its undigested delight in nature, there lurks the misunderstood last echo of a mysterious other life. So when all is said and done, there must be something of the sort, or it must have existed at some time!"

"Then you shouldn’t make fun of it," Agathe objected, grim with curiosity and radiant with impatience.

"I only make fun of it because I love it," Ulrich said curtly.
In the following days there were always many books on the table, some of which he had brought from home, others that he had bought since, and he would either talk extemporaneously or cite a passage, one of many he had marked with little slips of paper, to prove a point or quote the exact wording. The books before him were mostly lives of the mystics, their writings, or scholarly works about them, and he usually deflected the conversation from them by saying: “Now let’s take a good hard look and see what’s really going on here.” This was a cautious
attitude he was not prepared to give up easily, and so he said to her once:

“If you could read right through all these accounts that men and women of past centuries have left us, describing their state of divine rapture, you would find much truth and reality in among the printed words, and yet the statements made of these words would go wholly against the grain of your present-day mind.” And he went on: “They speak of an overflowing radiance. Of an infinite expanse, a boundless opulence of light. Of an overarching oneness of all things and all the soul’s energies. Of an awesome and indescribable uplifting of the heart. Of insights coming so swiftly that it’s all simultaneous and like drops of fire falling into the world. And then again they speak of a forgetting and no longer understanding, even of everything falling utterly away. They speak of an immense serenity far removed from all passion. Of growing mute. A vanishing of
thoughts and intentions. A blindness in which they see clearly, a clarity in which they are dead and supernaturally alive. They call it a shedding of their being, and yet they claim to be more fully alive than ever. Aren’t these the same sensations, however veiled by the difficulty of expressing them, still experienced today when the heart—’greedy and gorged,’ as they say!—stumbles by chance into those Utopian regions situated somewhere and nowhere between infinite tenderness and infinite loneliness?"

As he paused briefly to think, Agathe’s voice joined in: “It’s what you once called two layers that overlie each other within us.”

“I did? When?”

“When you walked aimlessly into town and felt as though you were dissolving into it, although at the same time you didn’t like the place. I told you that this happens to me often.”
“Oh yes! You even said ‘Hagauer!’” Ulrich exclaimed. “And we laughed—now I remember. But we didn’t really mean it. Anyway, it’s not the only time I talked to you about the land of vision that gives and the kind that receives, about the male and female principles, the hermaphroditism of the primal imagination and so on—I can say a lot about these things. As if my mouth were as far away from me as the moon, which is also always on hand for confidential chats in the night! But what these believers have to say about their souls’ adventures,” he went on, mingling the bitterness of his words with objectivity and even admiration, “is sometimes written with the force and the ruthless analytic conviction of a Stendhal. But only”—he limited this—”as long as they stick to the phenomena and their judgment doesn’t enter in, which is corrupted by their flattering conviction that they’ve been singled out by God to have direct experience of Him. For
from that moment on, of course, they no longer speak of their perceptions, which are so hard to describe and have no nouns or verbs, but begin to speak in sentences with subject and object, because they believe in their soul and in God as in the two doorposts between which the miraculous will blossom. And so they arrive at these statements about the soul being drawn out of the body and absorbed into the Lord, or say that the Lord penetrates them like a lover. They are caught, engulfed, dazzled, swept away, raped by God, or else their soul opens to Him, enters into Him, tastes of Him, embraces Him with love and hears Him speak. The earthly model for this is unmistakable, and these descriptions no longer resemble tremendous discoveries but rather a series of fairly predictable images with which an erotic poet decks out his subject, about which only one opinion is permissible. For a person like me, anyway, brought up to maintain
reserve, these accounts stretch me on the rack, for the elect, even as they assure me that God has spoken to them, or that they have understood the speech of trees and animals, neglect to tell me what it was that was imparted to them; or if they do, it comes out as purely personal details, or a rehash of the Clerical News. It’s an everlasting pity that no trained scientists have visions!” he ended his lengthy reply.

“Do you think they could?” Agathe was testing him.

Ulrich hesitated for an instant. Then he answered like a believer: “I don’t know; maybe it could happen to me!” When he heard himself saying these words he smiled, as if to mitigate them.

Agathe smiled too; she now seemed to have the answer she had been hankering after, and her face reflected the small moment of letdown that follows the sudden
cessation of a tension. Perhaps she now raised an objection only because she wanted to spur her brother on.

“You know,” she said, “that I was raised in a very strict convent school. So I have the most scandalous urge to* caricature anyone I hear talking about pious ideals. Our teachers wore a habit whose two colors formed a cross, as a sort of enforced reminder of one of the sublimest thoughts we were supposed to have before us all day long; but we never once thought it; we just called the good sisters the cross-spiders, because of the way they looked and their silky way of talking. That’s why, while you were reading aloud, I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry.”

“Do you know what that proves?” Ulrich exclaimed. “Just that the power for good which is somehow present in us eats its way instantly through the walls if it gets locked into solid form, and immediately uses that as a bolt hole to evil! It reminds me of the time
I was in the army and upheld throne and altar with my brother officers; never in my life have I heard such loose talk about both as I did in our circle! All emotions refuse to be chained, and some refuse absolutely. I’m convinced your good nuns believed what they preached to you, but faith mustn’t ever be more than an hour old! That’s the point!”

Although in his haste Ulrich had not expressed himself to his satisfaction, Agathe understood that the faith of those nuns who had taken away the pleasure of faith for her was merely a “bottled” variety, preserved in glass jars, so to speak, in its natural condition and not deprived of any of its qualities of faith but still not fresh; indeed, in some imponderable way it had changed into a different condition from its original one, which now hovered momentarily before this truant and rebellious pupil of holiness as a kind of intimation.
This, with everything else they had been saying about morality, was one of the gripping doubts her brother had implanted in her mind, and also part of that inner reawakening she had been feeling ever since, without rightly knowing what it was. For the attitude of indifference she made such a point of displaying outwardly and encouraging inwardly had not always ruled her life. Something had once happened that had caused her need for self-punishment to spring directly out of a deep depression, which made her appear to herself as unworthy because she believed she had not been granted the ability to keep faith with lofty emotions, and she had despised herself for her heart’s sloth ever since.

This episode lay between her life as a young girl in her father’s house and her incomprehensible marriage to Hagauer, and was so narrowly circumscribed that even Ulrich, for all his sympathy, had forgotten to
ask about it. What had happened is soon told: At the age of eighteen Agathe had married a man only slightly older than herself, and on a trip that began with their wedding and ended in his death, he was snatched away from her within a few weeks, before they had even had time to think about choosing a place to live, by a fatal disease he had caught on their travels. The doctors called it typhus, and Agathe repeated the word after them, finding in it a semblance of order, for that was the side of the event polished smooth for the uses of the world; but on the unpolished side, it was different: until then Agathe had lived with her father, whom everyone respected, so that she reluctantly regarded herself as to blame for not loving him; and the uncertain waiting at school to become herself, through the mistrust it awakened in her mind, had not helped to stabilize her relationship to the world either. Later, on the other hand, when with
suddenly aroused vivacity she had united with her childhood playmate to overcome in a matter of months all the obstacles put in the way of such a youthful marriage (even though their families had no objections to each other), she had all at once no longer been isolated and had thereby become herself. This could well be called love; but there are lovers who stare at love as into the sun and merely become blinded by it, and there are lovers who seem to discover life for the first time with astonishment when it is illuminated by love. Agathe was one of the latter kind; she had not even had time to find out whether it was her husband she loved or something else, when something struck that was called, in the language of the un-illuminated world, an infectious disease. With primal suddenness horror irrupted upon them from the alien regions of life—a struggle, a flickering, an extinction; a visitation upon two human beings clinging to each other and
the disappearance of an innocent world in vomiting, excrement, and fear.

Agathe had never faced up to this event that had annihilated her feelings. Bewildered with despair, she had lain on her knees at the dying man’s bedside and persuaded herself that she could conjure up the power that had enabled her as a child to overcome her own illness. When his decline continued nevertheless, and his consciousness was already gone, she kept staring into the vacant face, in that hotel room far from home, unable to understand; she had held the dying body in her arms without considering the danger and without considering the realities being attended to by an indignant nurse. She had done nothing but murmur for hours into his fading ear: “You can’t, you can’t, you can’t!” But when it was all over she had stood up in amazement, and without thinking or believing anything in particular, acting simply from a solitary nature’s stubbornness and
capacity to dream, she had from that moment on inwardly treated this empty astonishment at what had happened as though it were not final. We see the onset of something similar in everyone who cannot bring himself to believe bad news, or finds a way to soften the irrevocable, but Agathe’s attitude was unique in the force and extent of this reaction, which marked the sudden outburst of her disdain for the world. Since then she had conscientiously assimilated anything new as something less actual than extremely uncertain, an attitude greatly facilitated by the mistrust with which she had always confronted reality; the past, on the other hand, was petrified by the blow she had suffered, and eroded by time much more slowly than usually happens with memories. But it had none of the swirl of dreams, the one-sidedness or the skewed sense of proportion that brings the doctor on the scene. On the contrary, Agathe went on living in perfect
lucidity, quietly virtuous and merely a little bored, slightly inclined to that reluctance about life that was really like the fever she had suffered so willingly as a child. In her memory, which in any case never let its impressions dissolve into generalizations, every hour of what had been and still was fearful remained vivid, like a corpse under a white sheet; despite all the anguish of remembering so exactly, it made her happy, for it had the effect of a secret, belated indication that all was not yet over, and it preserved in her, despite the decay of her emotional life, a vague but high-minded tension. In truth, all it meant was that she had again lost the sense of meaning in her life and had consciously put herself in a state of mind that did not suit her years; for only old people live by dwelling on the experiences and achievements of a time that is gone and remain untouched by the present. But at the age Agathe was then, fortunately, while resolves
are made for eternity a single year feels like half an eternity, and so it was only to be expected that after a time a repressed nature and a fettered imagination would violently free themselves. The details of how it happened are of no consequence in themselves; a man whose advances would in other circumstances never have succeeded in disturbing her equilibrium succeeded, and became her lover, but this attempt at reliving something ended, after a brief period of manic hope, in passionate disenchantment. Agathe now felt herself cast out by both her real life and her unreal life, and unworthy of her own high hopes. She was one of those intense people who can keep themselves motionless and in reserve for a long time, until at some point they suddenly fall prey to total confusion; and so, in her disappointment, she soon took another rash step, which was, in short, to punish herself in a way opposite to the way she had sinned, condemning
herself to share her life with a man who inspired in her a mild aversion. And this man whom she had picked out as a penance was Gottlieb Hagauer.

“It was certainly both unfair to him and inconsiderate,” Agathe admitted to herself—and it must be admitted that this was the first time she had ever faced up to it, because fairness and consideration are not virtues in high favor with the young. Still, her self-punishment in this marriage was not inconsiderable either, and Agathe now gave it some more thought. She had strayed far from their conversation, and Ulrich, too, was leafing through his books for something and seemed to have forgotten the conversation. “In earlier centuries,” she thought, “a person in my state of mind would have entered a convent,” and the fact that she had got married instead was not without an innocently comical side, which had previously escaped her. This comedy, which she had then been
too young to notice, was simply that of the present day, which satisfies its need for a refuge from the world at worst in some tourist accommodation but usually in an Alpine hotel, and even strives to furnish its prisons tastefully. It expresses the profound European need not to overdo anything. No European any longer scourges himself, smears himself with ashes, cuts out his tongue, really takes part in things or totally withdraws from society, swoons with passion, breaks people on the wheel or impales them, but everyone sometimes feels the need to do so, so that it’s hard to say which is more to be avoided: wanting to do it or not doing it. Why should an ascetic, of all people, starve himself? It only gives him disturbing fantasies. A sensible asceticism consists of an aversion to eating while being constantly well nourished. Such an asceticism promises longevity and offers the mind a freedom that is unattainable so long as it remains enslaved
to the body in passionate rebellion. Such bitterly humorous reflections, which she had learned from her brother, were now doing Agathe a world of good, for they dissected the “tragic”—a rigid belief that in her inexperience she had long assumed to be a duty—into irony and a passion that had neither name nor aim, and for that reason alone were not bracketed with what she had experienced previously.

It was in this way above all that she had begun to realize, ever since being with her brother, that something was happening to the great split she had suffered between irresponsible living and a spectral fantasy life; there was a movement of release and of recombining what had been released. Now, for instance, in this silence between herself and her brother, which was deepened by the presence of books and memories, she thought of the description Ulrich had given her of his wandering aimlessly into town,
and of how the town had entered him as he entered it. It reminded her very exactly of the few weeks of her happiness. And it had also been right for her to laugh, wildly and for no reason, when he told her about it, because it struck her that there was something of this turning of the world inside out, this delicious and funny inversion he was speaking of, even in Hagauer’s thick lips when they pursed for a kiss. It made her shudder, of course, but there is a shudder, she thought, even in the bright light of noon, and it made her feel that somehow there was still hope for her. Some mere nothing, some break that had always lain between past and present, had recently vanished. She glanced around covertly. The room she was in had formed part of the space in which her fate had taken shape: it was the first time since her arrival that this had occurred to her. For it was here that she had met with her childhood friend when her father was out, and they made the great
decision to love each other; here, too, she had sometimes received her “unworthy” suitor, standing at the window hiding tears of rage or desperation, and here, finally, Hagauer’s courting had run its course, with her father’s blessing. After having been for so long merely the unnoticed other side of events, the furniture and walls, the peculiarly confined light, now became in this moment of recognition strangely tangible, and the quixotic things that had occurred here assumed a physical and completely unambiguous pastness, as if they were ashes or burned charcoal. What remained, and became almost unbearably powerful, was that funny, shadowy sense of things done with—that strange tickling one feels when confronted with old traces, dried to dust, of one’s self—which, the moment one feels it, one can neither grasp nor banish.

Agathe made sure that Ulrich was not paying attention, and carefully opened the
top of her dress, where she kept next to her skin the locket with the tiny picture that she had never taken off through the years. She went to the window and pretended to look out. Cautiously, she snapped open the sharp edge of the tiny golden scallop and gazed furtively at her dead love. He had full lips and soft, thick hair, and the cocky expression of the twenty-one-year-old flashed out at her from a face still half in its eggshell. For a long time she did not know what she thought, but then suddenly the thought came: “My God, a twenty-one-year-old!”

What do such youngsters talk about with each other? What meaning do they give to their concerns? How funny and arrogant they often are! How the intensity of their ideas misleads them about the worth of those ideas! Curious, Agathe unwrapped from the tissue paper of memory some sayings that she—thank goodness for her cleverness—had preserved in it. My God, that was almost
worth saying, she thought, but she could not really be sure of even that unless she also recalled the garden in which it had been spoken, with the strange flowers whose names she did not know, the butterflies that settled on them like weary drunkards, and the light that flowed over their faces as if heaven and earth were dissolved in it. By that measure she was today an old, experienced woman, even though not that many years had passed. With some confusion she noted the incongruity that she, at twenty-seven, still loved the boy of twenty-one: he had grown much too young for her! She asked herself: ‘What feelings would I have to have if, at my age, this boyish man were really to be the most important thing in the world to me?’ They would certainly have been odd feelings, but she was not even able to imagine them clearly. It all dissolved into nothing.
Agathe recognized in a great upsurge of feeling that the one proud passion of her life had been a mistake, and the heart of this error consisted of a fiery mist she could neither touch nor grasp, no matter whether one were to say that faith could not live more than an hour, or something else. It was always this that her brother had been talking about since they had been together, and it was always herself he was speaking of, even though he hedged it about in his intellectual fashion and his diplomacy was much too slow for her impatience. They kept coming back to the same conversation, and Agathe herself blazed with desire that his flame should not diminish.

When she now spoke to Ulrich he had not even noticed how long the interruption had lasted. But whoever has not already picked up the clues to what was going on between this brother and sister should lay this account aside, for it depicts an
adventure of which he will never be able to approve: a journey to the edge of the possible, which led past—and perhaps not always past—the dangers of the impossible and unnatural, even of the repugnant: a “borderline case,” as Ulrich later called it, of limited and special validity, reminiscent of the freedom with which mathematics sometimes resorts to the absurd in order to arrive at the truth. He and Agathe happened upon a path that had much in common with the business of those possessed by God, but they walked it without piety, without believing in God or the soul, nor even in the beyond or in reincarnation. They had come upon it as people of this world, and pursued it as such—this was what was remarkable about it. Though at the moment Agathe spoke again Ulrich was still absorbed in his books and the problems they set him, he had not for an instant forgotten their conversation, which had broken off at the moment of her resistance to the
devoutness of her teachers and his own insistence on “precise visions,” and he immediately answered:

“There’s no need to be a saint to experience something of the land! You could be sitting on a fallen tree or a bench in the mountains, watching a herd of grazing cows, and experience something amounting to being transported into another life! You lose yourself and at the same time suddenly find yourself—you talked about it yourself!”

“But what actually happens?” Agathe asked.

“To know that, you first have to decide what is normal, sister human,” Ulrich joked, trying to brake the much too rapid rush of the idea. “What’s normal is that a herd of cattle means nothing to us but grazing beef. Or else a subject for a painting, with background. Or it hardly registers at all. Herds of cattle beside mountain paths are part of the
mountain paths, and we would only notice what we experience when we see them if a big electric clock or an apartment house were to stand there in their place. For the rest, we wonder whether to get up or stay put; we’re bothered by the flies swarming around the cattle; we wonder whether there’s a bull in the herd; we wonder where the path goes from here—there are any number of minor deliberations, worries, calculations, and observations that make up the paper, as it were, that has the picture of the cows on it. We have no awareness of the paper, only of the cows!”

“And suddenly the paper tears!” Agathe broke in.

“Right. That is, some tissue of habit in us tears. There’s no longer something edible grazing out there, or something paintable; nothing blocks your way. You can’t even form the word ‘grazing,’ because a host of purposeful, practical connotations go along
with it, which you have suddenly lost. What is left on the pictorial plane might best be called an ocean swell of sensations that rises and falls, breathes and shimmers, as though it filled your whole field of view without a horizon. Of course, there are still countless individual perceptions contained within it: colors, horns, movements, smells, and all the details of reality; but none of them are acknowledged any longer, even if they should still be recognized. Let me put it this way: the details no longer have their egoism, which they use to capture our attention, but they’re all linked with each other in a familiar, literally Inward’ way. And of course the pictorial plane’ is no longer there either; but everything somehow flows over into you, all boundaries gone.”

Again Agathe picked up the description eagerly. “So instead of the egoism of the details, you only need to say the egoism of human beings,” she exclaimed, “and you’ve got
what is so hard to put into words. ‘Love thy neighbor!’ doesn’t mean love him on the basis of what you both are; it characterizes a dream state!”

“All moral propositions,” Ulrich agreed, “characterize a sort of dream state that has already flown the coop of rules in which we tether it.”

“Then there’s really no such thing as good and evil, but only faith—or doubt!” cried Agathe, to whom a self-supporting primal condition of faith now seemed so close, as did its disappearance from the morality her brother had spoken of when he said that faith could not live past the hour.

“Yes, the moment one slips away from a life of inessentials, everything enters into a new relationship with everything else,” Ulrich agreed. “I would almost go so far as to say into a non-relationship. For it’s an entirely unknown one, of which we have no
experience, and all other relationships are blotted out. But despite its obscurity, this one is so distinct that its existence is undeniable. It’s strong, but impalpably strong. One might put it this way: ordinarily, we look at something, and our gaze is like a fine wire or a taut thread with two supports—one being the eye and the other what it sees, and there’s some such great support structure for every second that passes; but at this particular second, on the contrary, it is rather as though something painfully sweet were pulling our eye beams apart.

“One possesses nothing in the world, one holds on to nothing, one is not held by anything,” Agathe said. “It’s all like a tall tree on which not a leaf is stirring. And in that condition one could not do anything mean.”

“They say that nothing can happen in that condition which is not in harmony with it,” Ulrich added. “A desire to ‘belong to’ it is the only basis, the loving vocation, and the
sole form of all acting and thinking that have their place in it. It is something infinitely serene and all-encompassing, and everything that happens in it adds to its quietly growing significance; or it doesn’t add to it, in which case it’s a bad thing, but nothing bad can happen, because if it did the stillness and clarity would be torn and the marvelous condition would end.” Ulrich gave his sister a probing look she was not meant to notice; he had a nagging feeling that it was about time to stop. But Agathe’s face was impassive; she was thinking of things long past.

“It makes me wonder at myself,” she answered, “but there really was a brief period when I was untouched by envy, malice, vanity, greed, and things like that. It seems incredible now, but it seems to me that they had all suddenly disappeared, not only out of my heart but out of the world! In that state it isn’t only oneself who can’t behave badly; the others can’t either. A good person makes
everything that touches him good, no matter what others may do to him; the instant it enters his sphere it becomes transformed.”

“No,” Ulrich cut in, “not quite. On the contrary, put that way, this would be one of the oldest misconceptions. A good person doesn’t make the world good in any way; he has no effect on it whatsoever; all he does is separate himself from it.”

“But he stays right in the midst of it, doesn’t he?”

“He stays right in its midst, but he feels as if the space were being drawn out of things, or something or other imaginary were happening; it’s hard to say.”

“All the same, I have the idea that a ‘high-hearted’ person—the word just occurred to me!—never comes in contact with anything base. It may be nonsense, but it does happen.”
“It may happen,” Ulrich replied, “but the opposite happens too! Or do you suppose that the soldiers who crucified Jesus didn’t feel they were doing something base? And they were God’s instrument! Incidentally, the mystics themselves testify to the existence of bad feelings—they complain about falling from the state of grace and then enduring unspeakable misery, knowing fear, pain, shame, and perhaps even hatred. Only when the quiet burning begins again do remorse, anger, fear, and misery turn into bliss. It’s so hard to know what to make of all this!”

“When were you that much in love?” Agathe asked abruptly.

“Me? Oh...I’ve already told you about that: I fled a thousand miles away from the woman I loved, and once I felt safe from any possibility of really embracing her, I howled for her like a dog at the moon!”
Now Agathe confided to him the story of her love. She was excited. Her last question had snapped from her like an overly tightened violin string, and the rest followed in the same vein. She was trembling inwardly as she revealed what had been concealed for many years.

But her brother was not particularly moved. “Memories usually age along with people,” he pointed out, “and with time the most passionate experiences take on a comic perspective, as though one were seeing them at the end of ninety-nine doors opened in succession. Still, sometimes certain memories that were tied to strong emotions don’t age, but keep a tight grip on whole layers of one’s being. That was your case. There are such points in almost everyone, which distort the psychic balance a little. One’s behavior flows over them like a river over an invisible boulder—in your case this was very strong, so that it almost amounted to a dam.
But you’ve freed yourself after all; you’re moving again!”

He said this with the calm of an almost professional opinion; how easily he was diverted! Agathe was unhappy. Stubbornly she said: “Of course I’m in motion, but that’s not what I’m talking about! I want to know where I almost got to back then.” She was irritated too, without meaning to be, but simply because her excitement had to express itself somehow. She went on talking, nevertheless, in her original direction and was quite dizzy between the tenderness of her words and the irritation behind them. She was talking about that peculiar condition of heightened receptivity and sensitivity that brings about a rising and falling tide of impressions and creates the feeling of being connected with all things as in the gentle mirror of a sheet of water, giving and receiving without will: that miraculous feeling of the lifting of all bounds, the boundlessness of
the outer and inner that love and mysticism have in common. Agathe did not, of course, put it in such terms, which already contain an explanation; she was merely making passionate fragments of her memories into a sequence. But even Ulrich, although he had often thought about it, could not offer any explanation of these experiences; indeed, he did not even know whether he should attempt to deal with such an experience in its own way or according to the usual procedures of rationality; both came naturally to him, but not to the obvious passion of his sister. And so what he said in reply was merely a mediation, a kind of testing of the possibilities. He pointed out how in the exalted state they were speaking of, thought and the moral sense went hand in hand, so that each thought was felt as happiness, event, and gift, and neither lost itself in the storerooms of the brain nor formed attachments to feelings of appropriation and power, of retention
and observation; thus in the head no less than in the heart the delight of self-possession is replaced by a boundless self-giving and bonding.

“Once in a lifetime,” Agathe replied with passionate decisiveness, “everything one does is done for someone else. One sees the sun shining for him. He is everywhere, oneself nowhere. But there is no egoism a deux, because the same thing must be happening with the other person. In the end, they hardly exist for each other anymore, and what’s left is a world for nothing but couples, a world consisting of appreciation, devotion, friendship, and selflessness!”

In the darkness of the room her face glowed with eagerness like a rose standing in the shade.

“Let’s be a little more sober again,” Ulrich gently proposed. “There can be too much fakery in these matters.” There was
nothing wrong with that either, she thought. Perhaps it was the irritation, still not quite gone, that somewhat dampened her delight over the reality he was invoking. But this vague trembling of the borderline was a not unpleasant feeling.

Ulrich began by speaking of the mischief of interpreting the kind of experiences they were talking about not as if what was going on in them was merely a peculiar change in thinking, but as if superhuman thinking was taking the place of the ordinary kind. Whether one called it divine illumination or, in the modern fashion, merely intuition, he considered it the main hindrance to real understanding. In his opinion, nothing was to be gained by yielding to notions that would not stand up under careful investigation. That would only be like Icarus’s wax wings, which melted with the altitude, he exclaimed. If one wished to fly other than in dreams, one must master it on metal wings.
He paused for a moment, then went on, pointing to his books: “Here you have testimony, Christian, Judaic, Indian, Chinese, some separated by more than a thousand years. Yet one recognizes in all of them the same uniform structure of inner movement, divergent from the ordinary. Almost the only way they differ from each other comes from the various didactic superstructures of theology and cosmic wisdom under whose protective roof they have taken shelter. We therefore may assume the existence of a certain alternative and uncommon condition of great importance, which man is capable of achieving and which has deeper origins than religions.

“Oh the other hand,” he added, qualifying what he had said, “the churches, that is, civilized communities of religious people, have always treated this condition with the kind of mistrust a bureaucrat feels for the spirit of private enterprise. They’ve never
accepted this riotous experience without reservations; on the contrary, they’ve directed great and apparently justified efforts toward replacing it with a properly regulated and intelligible morality. So the history of this alternative condition resembles a progressive denial and dilution, something like the draining of a swamp.

“And when confessional authority over the spirit and its vocabulary became outmoded, our condition understandably came to be regarded as nothing more than a chimera. Why should bourgeois culture, in replacing the old religious culture, be more religious than its predecessor? Bourgeois culture has reduced this other condition to the status of a dog fetching intuitions. There are hordes of people today who find fault with rationality and would like us to believe that in their wisest moments they were doing their thinking with the help of some special, supra-rational faculty. That’s the final public
vestige of it all, itself totally rationalistic. What’s left of the drained swamp is rubbish! And so, except for its uses in poetry, this old condition is excusable only in uneducated people in the first weeks of a love affair, as a temporary aberration, like green leaves that every so often sprout posthumously from the wood of beds and lecterns; but if it threatens to revert to its original luxuriant growth, it is unmercifully dug up and rooted out!”

Ulrich had been talking for about as long as it takes a surgeon to wash his arms and hands so as not to carry any germs into the field of operation, and also with all the patience, concentration, and even-handedness it paradoxically takes to cope with the excitement attendant on the task ahead. But after he had completely disinfected himself he almost yearned for a little fever or infection—after all, he did not love sobriety for its own sake. Agathe was sitting on the library ladder, and even when her brother fell silent
she gave no sign of participation. She gazed out into the endless oceanic gray of the sky and listened to the silence just as she had been listening to the words. So Ulrich took up the thread again, with a slight obstinacy that he barely managed to mask by his light-hearted tone.

“Let’s get back to our bench on the mountain, with that herd of cows,” he suggested. “Imagine some high bureaucrat sitting there in his brand-new leather shorts with ‘Grüss Gott’ embroidered on his green suspenders. He represents ‘real life’ on vacation. Of course, this temporarily alters his consciousness of his existence. When he looks at the herd of cows he neither counts them, classifies them, nor estimates the weight on the hoof of the animals grazing before him; he forgives his enemies and thinks indulgently of his family. For him the herd has been transformed from a practical object into a moral one, as it were. He may also, of
course, be estimating and counting a little and not forgiving a whole lot, but then at least it is bathed in woodland murmurs, purling brooks, and sunshine. In a word, what otherwise forms the content of his life seems ‘far away’ and ‘not all that important.’

“It’s a holiday mood,” Agathe agreed mechanically.

“Exactly! If he regards his non-vacation life as not all that important,’ it means only as long as his vacation lasts. So that is the truth today: a man has two modes of existence, of consciousness, and of thought, and saves himself from being frightened to death by ghosts—which this prospect would of necessity induce—by regarding one condition as a vacation from the other, an interruption, a rest, or anything else he thinks he can re-cognize. Mysticism, on the other hand, would be connected with the intention of going on vacation permanently. Our high
official is bound to regard such an idea as disgraceful and instantly feel—as in fact he always does toward the end of his vacation—that *real* life lies in his tidy office. And do we feel any differently? Whether something needs to be straightened out or not will always eventually decide whether one takes it completely seriously, and here these experiences have not had much luck, for over thousands of years they have never got beyond their primordial disorder and incompleteness. And for this we have the ready label of Mania—religious mania, *eroto-mania*, take your choice. You can be assured that in our day even most religious people are so infected with the scientific way of thinking that they don’t trust themselves to look into what is burning in their inmost hearts but are always ready to speak of this ardor in medical terms as a mania, even though officially they take a different line!”
Agathe gave her brother a look in which something crackled like fire in the rain. “So now you’ve managed to maneuver us out of it!” she accused him, when he didn’t go on.

“You’re right,” he admitted. “But what’s peculiar is that though we’ve covered it all up like a suspect well, some remaining drop of this unholy holy water burns a hole in all our ideals. None of our ideals is quite right, none of them makes us happy: they all point to something that’s not there—we’ve said enough about that today. Our civilization is a temple of what would be called unsecured mania, but it is also its asylum, and we don’t know if we are suffering from an excess or a deficiency.”

“Perhaps you’ve never dared surrender yourself to it all the way,” Agathe said wistfully, and climbed down from her ladder; for they were supposed to be busy sorting their father’s papers and had let themselves be distracted from what had gradually become a
pressing task, first by the books and then by their conversation. Now they went back to checking the dispositions and notes referring to the division of their inheritance, for the day of reckoning with Hagauer was imminent. But before they had seriously settled down to this, Agathe straightened up from her papers and asked him once more: “Just how much do you yourself believe everything you’ve been telling me?”

Ulrich answered without looking up. “Suppose that while your heart had turned away from the world, there was a dangerous bull among the herd. Try to believe absolutely that the deadly disease you were telling me about would have taken another course if you had not allowed your feelings to slacken for a single instant.” Then he raised his head and pointed to the papers he had been sorting: “And law, justice, fair play? Do you really think they’re entirely superfluous?”
“So just how much do you believe?” Agathe reiterated.

“Yes and no,” Ulrich said.

“That means no,” Agathe concluded.

Here chance intervened in their talk. As Ulrich, who neither felt inclined to resume the discussion nor was calm enough to get on with the business at hand, rounded up the scattered papers, something fell to the floor. It was a loose bundle of all lands of things that had inadvertently been pulled out with the will from a corner of the desk drawer where it might have lain for decades without its owner knowing. Ulrich looked at it distractedly as he picked it up and recognized his father’s handwriting on several pages; but it was not the script of his old age but that of his prime. Ulrich took a closer look and saw that in addition to written pages there were playing cards, snapshots, and all sorts of odds and ends, and quickly realized
what he had found. It was the desk’s “poison drawer.” Here were painstakingly recorded jokes, mostly dirty; nude photographs; postcards, to be sent sealed, of buxom dairy maids whose panties could be opened behind; packs of cards that looked quite normal but showed some awful things when held up to the light; mannequins that voided all sorts of stuff when pressed on the belly; and more of the same. The old gentleman had undoubtedly long since forgotten the things lying in that drawer, or he would certainly have destroyed them in good time. They obviously dated from those mid-life years when quite a few aging bachelors and widowers warm themselves with such obscenities, but Ulrich blushed at this exposure of his father’s unguarded fantasies, now released from the flesh by death. Their relevance to the discussion just broken off was instantly clear to him. Nevertheless, his first impulse was to destroy this evidence before
Agathe could see it. But she had already noticed that something unusual had fallen into his hands, so he changed his mind and asked her to come over.

He was going to wait and hear what she would say. Suddenly the realization possessed him again that she was, after all, a woman who must have had her experiences, a point he had totally lost sight of while they were deep in conversation. But her face gave no sign of what she was thinking; she looked at her father’s illicit relics seriously and calmly, at times smiling openly, though not animatedly. So Ulrich, despite his resolve, began.

“Those are the dregs of mysticism!” he said wryly. “The strict moral admonitions of the will in the same drawer as this swill!”

He had stood up and was pacing back and forth in the room. And once he had
begun to talk, his sisters silence spurred him on.

"You asked me what I believe," he began. "I believe that all our moral injunctions are concessions to a society of savages.

"I believe none of them are right.

"There's a different meaning glittering behind them. An alchemist's fire.

"I believe that nothing is ever done with.

"I believe that nothing is in balance but that everything is trying to raise itself on the fulcrum of everything else.

"That's what I believe. It was born with me, or I with it."

He had stood still after each of these sentences, for he spoke softly and had somehow or other to give emphasis to his credo.
Now his eye was caught by the classical busts atop the bookshelves; he saw a plaster Minerva, a Socrates; he remembered that Goethe had kept an over-lifesize plaster head of Juno in his study. This predilection seemed alarmingly distant to him; what had once been an idea in full bloom had since withered into a dead classicism. Turned into the rearguard dogmatism of rights and duties of his father’s contemporaries. All in vain.

“The morality that has been handed down to us,” he said, “is like being sent out on a swaying high wire over an abyss, with no other advice than: ‘Hold yourself as stiff as you can!’

“I seem, without having had a say in the matter, to have been born with another kind of morality.

“You asked me what I believe. I believe there are valid reasons you can use to prove
to me a thousand times that something is good or beautiful, and it will leave me indifferent; the only mark I shall go by is whether its presence makes me rise or sink.

"Whether it rouses me to life or not.

"Whether it’s only my tongue and my brain that speak of it, or the radiant shiver in my fingertips.

"But I can’t prove anything, either.

"And I’m even convinced that a person who yields to this is lost. He stumbles into twilight. Into fog and nonsense. Into unarticulated boredom.

"If you take the unequivocal out of our life, what’s left is a sheep-fold without a wolf.

"I believe that bottomless vulgarity can even be the good angel that protects us.

"And so, I don’t believe!"
“And above all, I don’t believe in the domestication of evil by good as the characteristic of our hodgepodge civilization. I find that repugnant.

“So I believe and don’t believe!

“But maybe I believe that the time is coming when people will on the one hand be very intelligent, and on the other hand be mystics. Maybe our morality is already splitting into these two components. I might also say into mathematics and mysticism. Into practical improvements and unknown adventure!”

He had not been so openly excited about anything in years. The “maybe”s in his speech did not trouble him; they seemed only natural.

Agathe had meanwhile knelt down before the stove; she had the bundle of pictures and papers on the floor beside her. She looked at everything once more, piece by
piece, before pushing it into the fire. She was not entirely unsusceptible to the vulgar sensuality of the obscenities she was looking at. She felt her body being aroused by them. This seemed to her to have as little to do with herself as the feeling of being on a deserted heath and somewhere a rabbit scutters past. She did not know whether she would be ashamed to tell her brother this, but she was profoundly fatigued and did not want to talk anymore. Nor did she listen to what he was saying; her heart had by now been too shaken by these ups and downs, and could no longer keep up. Others had always known better than she what was right; she thought about this, but she did so, perhaps because she was ashamed, with a secret defiance. To walk a forbidden or secret path: in that she felt superior to Ulrich. She heard him time and again cautiously taking back everything he had let himself be carried away into
saying, and his words beat like big drops of joy and sadness against her ear.
Forty-eight hours later Ulrich was standing in his abandoned house. It was early in the morning. The house was meticulously tidy, dusted and polished; his books and papers lay on the tables precisely as he had left them at his hasty departure, carefully preserved by his servant, open or bristling with markers that had become incomprehensible, this or that paper still with a pencil stuck between the pages. But everything had cooled off and hardened like the contents of a melting pot under which one has forgotten to stoke the
fire. Painfully disillusioned, Ulrich stared blankly at these traces of a vanished hour, matrix of the intense excitement and ideas that had filled it. He felt repelled beyond words at this encounter with his own debris. “It spreads through the doors and the rest of the house all the way down to those idiotic antlers in the hall. What a life I’ve been leading this last year!” He shut his eyes where he stood, so as not to have to see it. “What a good thing she’ll soon be following me,” he thought. “We’ll change everything!” Then he was tempted after all to visualize the last hours he had spent here; it seemed to him that he had been away for a very long time, and he wanted to compare.

Clarisse: that was nothing. But before and after: the strange turmoil in which he had hurried home, and then that nocturnal melting of the world! “Like iron softening under some great pressure,” he mused. “It begins to flow, and yet it is still iron. A man
forces his way into the world,” he thought, “but it suddenly closes in around him, and everything looks different. No more connections. No road on which he came and which he must pursue. Something shimmering enveloping him on the spot where a moment ago he had seen a goal, or actually the sober void that lies before every goal.” Ulrich kept his eyes closed. Slowly, as a shadow, his feeling returned. It happened as if it were returning to the spot where he had stood then and was again standing now, this feeling that was more out there in the room than in his consciousness—it was really neither a feeling nor a thought, but some uncanny process. If one were as overstimulated and lonely as he had been then, one could indeed believe that the essence of the world was turning itself inside out; and suddenly it dawned on him—how was it possible that it was happening only now?—and lay there like a peaceful backward glance, that even then his feelings
had announced the encounter with his sister, because from that moment on his spirit had been guided by strange forces, until... but before he could think “yesterday,” Ulrich turned away, awakened as abruptly and palpably from his memories as if he had bumped against some solid edge. There was something here he was not yet ready to think about.

He went over to his desk and without taking off his coat looked through the mail lying there. He was disappointed not to find a telegram from his sister, although he had no reason to expect one. A huge pile of condolence mail lay intermingled with scientific communications and booksellers’ catalogs. Two letters had come from Bonadea; both so thick that he did not bother to open them. There was also an urgent request from Count Leinsdorf that he come to see him, and two fluting notes from Diotima, also inviting him to put in an appearance immediately upon
his return; perused more closely, one of them, the later one, revealed unofficial overtones of a very warm, wistful, almost tender cast. Ulrich turned to the telephone messages that had come during his absence: General Stumm von Bordwehr, Section Chief Tuzzi, Count Leinsdorf’s private secretary (twice), several calls from a lady who would not leave her name, probably Bonadea; Bank Director Leo Fischel; and, for the rest, business calls. While Ulrich was reading all this, still standing at his desk, the phone rang, and when he lifted the receiver a voice said: “War Ministry, Culture and Education, Corporal Hirsch,” clearly taken aback at finding itself unexpectedly ricocheting off Ulrich’s own voice, but hastening to explain that His Excellency the General had given orders to ring Ulrich every morning at ten, and that His Excellency would speak to him right away.
Five minutes later Stumm was assuring him that he had to attend some “supremely important meetings” that very morning, but absolutely had to speak to Ulrich first. When Ulrich asked what about, and why it could not be taken care of over the phone, Stumm sighed into the receiver and proclaimed “news, worries, problems,” but could not be made to say anything more specific. Twenty minutes later a War Ministry carriage drew up at the gate and General Stumm entered the house, followed by an orderly with a large leather briefcase slung from his shoulder. Ulrich, who well remembered this receptacle for the General’s intellectual problems from the battle plans and ledger pages of Great Ideas, raised his eyebrows interrogatively. Stumm von Bordwehr smiled, sent the orderly back to the carriage, unbuttoned his tunic to get out the little key for the security lock, which he wore on a fine chain around his neck, unlocked the case, and
wordlessly exhumed its sole contents, two loaves of regulation army bread.

“Our new bread,” he declared after a dramatic pause. “I’ve brought you some for a taste!”

“How nice of you,” Ulrich said, “bringing me bread after I’ve spent a night traveling, instead of letting me get some sleep.”

“If you have some schnapps in the house, which one may assume,” the General retorted, “then there’s no better breakfast than bread and schnapps after a sleepless night. You once told me that our regulation bread was the only thing you liked about the Emperor’s service, and I’ll go so far as to say that the Austrian Army beats any other army in the world at making bread, especially since our Commissariat brought out this new loaf, Model 1914! So I brought you one, though that’s not the only reason. The other is that I always do this now on principle. Not
that I have to spend every minute at my desk, or account for every step I take out of the room, you understand, but you know that our General Staff isn’t called the Jesuit Corps for nothing, and there’s always talk when a man is out of the office a lot; also my chief, His Excellency von Frost, may not, perhaps, have a completely accurate idea of the scope of the mind—the civilian mind, I mean—and that’s why for some time now I’ve been taking along this official bag and an orderly whenever I want to go out for a bit; and since I don’t want the orderly to think that the bag is empty, I always put two loaves of bread in it.”

Ulrich could not help laughing, and the General cheerfully joined in.

“You seem to be less enchanted with the great ideas of mankind than you were?” Ulrich asked.
“Everyone is less enchanted with them,” Stumm declared while he sliced the bread with his pocketknife. “The new slogan that’s been handed out is ‘Action!’ “

“You’ll have to explain that to me.”

“That’s what I came for. You’re not the true man of action.”

“I’m not?”

“No.”

“Well, I don’t know about that.”

“Maybe I don’t either. But that’s what they say.”

‘Who’s ‘they’?”

“Arnheim, for one.”

“You’re on good terms with Arnheim?”

“Well, of course. We get along famously. If he weren’t such a highbrow we could be on a first-name basis by now!”
“Are you involved with the oil fields too?”

To gain time, the General drank some of the schnapps Ulrich had had brought in and chewed on the bread. “Great taste,” he brought out laboriously, and kept on chewing.

“Of course you’re involved with the oil fields!” Ulrich burst out, suddenly seeing the light. “It’s a problem that concerns your naval branch because it needs fuel for its ships, and if Arnheim wants the drilling fields he’ll have to concede a favorable price for you. Besides, Galicia is deployment territory and a buffer against Russia, so you have to provide special safeguards in case of war for the oil supply he wants to develop there. So his munitions works will supply you with the cannons you want! Why didn’t I see this before? You’re positively born for each other!”
The General had taken the precaution of munching on a second piece of bread, but now he could contain himself no longer, and making strenuous efforts to gulp down the whole mouthful at once, he said: “It’s easy for you to talk so glibly about an accommodation; you’ve no idea what a skinflint he is! Sorry—I mean, you have no idea,” he amended himself, “what moral dignity he brings to a business deal like this. I never dreamed, for example, that ten pennies per ton per railway mile is an ethical problem you have to read up on in Goethe or the history of philosophy.”

“You’re conducting these negotiations?”

The General took another gulp of schnapps. “I never said that negotiations were going on! You could call it an exchange of views, if you like.”

“And you’re empowered to conduct them?”
“Nobody’s empowered! We’re talking, that’s all. Surely one can talk now and then about something besides the Parallel Campaign? And if anyone were empowered, it certainly wouldn’t be me; that’s no job for the Culture and Education Department, it’s a matter for the higher-ups, even the Chiefs of Staff. If I had anything at all to do with it, it would be only as a kind of technical adviser on civilian intellectual questions, an interpreter, so to speak, because of Arnheim being so educated.”

“And because you’re always running into him, thanks to me and Diotima! My dear Stumm, if you want me to go on being your stalking horse, you’ll have to tell me the truth!”

But Stumm had had time to prepare himself for this. ‘Why are you asking, if you know it already?’ he countered indignantly. “Do you think you can nail me down and that
I don’t know that Arnheim takes you into his confidence?”

“I don’t know a thing!”

“But you’ve just been telling me that you do know.”

“I know about the oil fields.”

“And then you said that we have a common interest with Arnheim in those oil fields. Give me your word of honor that you know this, then I can tell you everything.” Stumm von Bordwehr seized Ulrich’s reluctant hand, looked him in the eye, and then said slyly:

“All right, since you’re giving me your word of honor that you knew everything already, I give you mine that you know all there is. Agreed? There isn’t anything more. Arnheim is trying to use us, and we him. I sometimes have the most complicated spiritual conflicts over Diotima!” he exclaimed.
“But you mustn’t say a word to anyone; it’s a military secret!” The General waxed cheerful. “Do you know, incidentally, what a military secret is?” he went on. “A few years ago, when they were mobilizing in Bosnia, the War Ministry wanted to ax me. I was still a colonel then, and they gave me the command of a territorial battalion; of course, I could have been given a brigade, but since I’m supposed to be Cavalry, and since they wanted to ax me, they sent me to a battalion. And since you need money to fight a war, once I got there they sent me the battalion cashbox too. Did you ever see one of those in your time in the army? It looks like a cross between a coffin and a corn crib; it’s made of heavy wood with iron bands all around, like the gate to a fortress. It has three locks, and three officers carry the keys to them, one each, so that no one can unlock it by himself: the commander and his two co-cashbox-key-unlockers. Well, when I got there we
congregated as if for a prayer meeting, and one after the other we each opened a lock and reverently took out the bundles of banknotes. I felt like a high priest with two acolytes, only instead of reading the Gospel we read out the figures from the official ledger. When we were done we closed up the box, put the iron bands back on, and locked the locks, the whole thing over again, except in reverse order. I had to say something I can’t remember now, and that was the end of the ceremony. Or so I thought, and so you’d have thought, and I was full of respect for the unflagging foresight of the military administration in wartime! But I had a fox terrier in those days, the predecessor to the one I have now; there was no regulation against it. He was a clever little beast, but he couldn’t see a hole without starting to dig like mad. So as I was going out I noticed that Spot—that was his name; he was English—was busying himself with the cashbox, and there was no
getting him away from it. Well, you keep hearing stories about faithful dogs uncovering the darkest conspiracies, and war was almost upon us too, so I thought to myself, Let’s see what’s up with Spot. And what do you suppose was the matter with Spot? You must remember that Ordnance doesn’t provide the field battalions with the very latest supplies, so our cashbox was a venerable antique, but who would ever have thought that while the three of us were locking up in front, it had a hole in the back, near the bottom, wide enough to put your arm through? There’d been a knot in the wood there, which had fallen out in some previous war. But what was to be done? The whole Bosnian scare was just over when the relief troops we had applied for came, and until then we could go through our ceremony every week, except that I had to leave Spot home so he wouldn’t give our secret away. So
you see, that’s what a military secret sometimes looks like!”

“Hmm...it seems to me you’re still not quite so open as that cashbox of yours,” Ulrich commented. “Are you fellows really closing the deal or not?”

“I don’t know. I give you my word of honor as an officer on the General Staff: it hasn’t come to that yet.”

“And Leinsdorf?”

“He hasn’t the faintest idea, of course. Besides, he wouldn’t have anything to do with Arnheim. I hear he’s still terribly angry about the demonstration—you remember, you were there too. He’s now dead set against the Germans.”

“Tuzzi?” Ulrich asked, continuing the cross-examination.

“He’s the last man we’d want to find out anything! He would ruin the scheme at once.
Of course we all want peace, but we military men have a different way of serving it than the bureaucrats.”

“And Diotima?”

“Oh, my dear fellow, please! This is altogether a man’s affair; she couldn’t think of such things even with gloves on! I certainly can’t bring myself to burden her with the truth. And I can see why Arnheim wouldn’t tell her anything about it. He talks such a lot and so beautifully, it might well be a pleasure for him to hold his tongue about something for once. Like taking a dose of bitters for the stomach, I imagine.”

“Do you realize that you’ve turned into a rogue?” Ulrich asked, and raised his glass. “Here’s to your health!”

“No, not a rogue,” the General defended himself. “I’m a member of a ministerial council. At a meeting everyone proposes what he would like and thinks right, and in
the end something comes out that no one really wanted, the so-called outcome. I don’t know if you follow me—I can’t express it any better.”

“Of course I follow you. But the way you’re all treating Diotima is disgraceful, just the same.”

“I’d be sorry to think so,” Stumm said. “But a hangman, you know, is a disreputable fellow, no question about it; yet the rope manufacturer who supplies the prison with the rope can be a member of the Ethical Society. You don’t take that sufficiently into account.”

“You got that from Arnheim!”

“Could be. I don’t know. One’s mind gets so complicated nowadays,” the General complained sincerely.

“And where do I come in?”
“Well, you see, I was thinking, here you are, a former army officer…”

“Never mind. But what has this to do with being, or not being, a ‘man of action’?” Ulrich asked, affronted.

“Man of action?” the General echoed, mystified.

“You began everything by saying I wasn’t a man of action.”

“Oh, that. That’s got nothing at all to do with it; I just happened to start with it. I mean, Arnheim doesn’t exactly think of you as a man of action; he once said so. You have nothing to do, he says, and that puts ideas into your head. Or words to that effect.”

“Idle ideas, you mean? Ideas that can’t be ‘introduced in spheres of power’? Ideas for their own sake? In short, true and independent ideas! Is that it? Or possibly the ideas of an unworldly aesthete’?”
‘Well,” Stumm von Bordwehr agreed diplomatically, “something like that.”

“Like what? What do you think is more dangerous to the life of the mind—dreams or oil fields? There’s no need to stuff your mouth with bread; stop it! I couldn’t care less what Arnheim thinks of me. But you started off by saying, ‘Arnheim, for one.’ So who else is there who doesn’t see me as enough of a man of action?”

“Well, you know,” Stumm affirmed, “quite a few. I told you that ‘Action!’ is now the great rallying cry.”

“What does that mean?”

“I don’t really know either. Old man Leinsdorf said: ‘Something has to be done!’ That’s how it started.”

“And Diotima?”

“Diotima calls it a New Spirit. So now lots of people on the Council are saying that.
I wonder if you know what it’s like, that dizzy feeling in your stomach when a beautiful woman has such a head on her shoulders?"

“I’ll take your word for it,” Ulrich conceded, refusing to let Stumm wriggle out of it. “But now I’d like to hear what Diotima has to say about this New Spirit.”

“It’s what people are saying,” Stumm answered. “The people on the Council are saying that the times are getting a New Spirit. Not right away, but in a few years; unless something unexpected happens sooner. And this New Spirit won’t have many ideas in it. Nor is it a time for feelings. Ideas and feelings—they’re more for people who have nothing to do. In short, it’s a spirit of action, that’s really all I know about it. But it has sometimes occurred to me,” the General added pensively, “to wonder if, in the end, that isn’t simply the military spirit?”
“An action has to make sense!” Ulrich claimed, and in all seriousness, far beyond this jesters’ motley conversation, his conscience reminded him of the first conversation he had had on that subject with Agathe, on the Swedish rampart.

But the General agreed. “That’s what I just said. If someone doesn’t have anything to do, and doesn’t know what to do with himself, he becomes energetic. Then he starts boozing, bawling, brawling, and bullying man and beast. On the other hand, you’ll have to admit that someone who knows exactly what he wants can be an intriguer. Just look at any of our youngsters on the General Staff, silently pressing his lips together and making a face like Moltke: In ten years he’ll have a general’s paunch under his tunic buttons—not a benign one, like mine, but a bellyful of poison. So it’s hard to decide how much sense any action can make.” He thought it over, and added: “If you know how
to get hold of it, there’s a great deal to be learned in the army—I’m more and more convinced of it as time goes on—but don’t you think the simplest thing would be if we could still find the Great Idea?”

“No,” Ulrich retorted. “That was nonsense.”

“All right, but in that case there’s really nothing left but action.” Stumm sighed. “It’s almost what I’ve been saying myself. Do you remember, by the way, my warning you once that all these excessive ideas only end up in homicide? That’s what we’ve got to prevent! But,” he wheedled, “what we need is someone to take over the leadership.”

“And what part have you had the kindness to assign to me in the matter?” Ulrich asked, yawning openly.

“Very well, I’m leaving,” Stumm assured him. “But now that we’ve had this heart-to-heart talk, if you wanted to be a true
comrade there is something important you could do. Things are not going too well between Diotima and Arnheim.”

“You don’t say!” His host showed some small signs of life.

“You’ll see for yourself; no need to take it from me. Besides, she confides in you more than in me.”

“She confides in you? Since when?”

“She seems to have got used to me a little,” the General said proudly.

“Congratulations.”

“Thanks. And you ought to look in on Leinsdorf again soon. On account of his anti-pathy to the Prussians.”

“I won’t do it.”

“Now look, I know you don’t like Arnheim. But you’ll have to do it anyway.”
“That’s not why. I have no intention of going back to Leinsdorf.”

“But why not? He’s such a fine old gentleman. Arrogant, and I can’t stand him, but he’s been splendid to you.”

“I’m getting out of this whole affair.”

“But Leinsdorf won’t let you go. Nor Diotima either. And I certainly won’t! You wouldn’t leave me all alone...?”

“I’m fed up with the whole stupid business.”

“You are, as always, supremely right. But what isn’t stupid? Look, without you, I’m pretty dumb. So will you go to Leinsdorf for my sake?”

“But what’s this about Diotima and Arnheim?”

“I won’t tell you; otherwise you won’t go to Diotima either!” Suddenly the General had an inspiration. “If you like, Leinsdorf
can get you an assistant to take care of whatever you don’t like. Or I can get you one from the War Ministry. Pull out as far as you like, but keep a guiding hand over me!”

“Let me get some sleep first,” Ulrich pleaded.

“I won’t go till you promise.”

“All right, I’ll sleep on it,” Ulrich conceded. “Don’t forget to put the bread of military science back in your bag.”
Toward evening his restlessness drove Ulrich to go out to Walter and Clarisse’s. On the way he tried to remember Clarisse’s letter, which he had either stowed away irretrievably in his luggage or lost, but he could recall nothing in detail except for a final sentence, “I hope you’ll be coming back soon,” and his general impression that he would really have to talk with Walter, a feeling tinged not only with regret and uneasiness but also with a certain malice. It was this fleeting and involuntary feeling, of no significance, that he now dwelled on instead of brushing it aside,
feeling rather like someone with vertigo who finds relief by getting himself down as low as he can.

When he turned the corner to the house, he saw Clarisse standing in the sun by the side wall where the espaliered peach tree was. She had her hands behind her and was leaning back against the yielding branches, gazing into the distance, oblivious to his approach. There was something self-forgetful and rigid in her attitude, but also something faintly theatrical, apparent only to the friend who knew her ways so well; she looked as if she were acting out a part in the significant drama of her own ideas and one of those ideas had taken hold of her, refusing to let go. He remembered her saying to him: “I want the child from you!” The words did not affect him as disagreeably now as they had at the time; he called out to her softly and waited.
But Clarisse was thinking: “This time Meingast is going through his transformation in our house.” He had undergone several rather remarkable transformations in his lifetime, and without reacting to Walters lengthy answer to his letter, he had, one day, turned the announcement of his coming into reality. Clarisse was convinced that the work he then immediately plunged into in their house had to do with a transformation. The thought of some Indian god who takes up his abode somewhere before each new purification mingled in her mind with the memory of creatures that choose a specific place to change into a pupa, and from this notion, which struck her as tremendously healthy and down-to-earth, she went on to take in the sensuous fragrance of peaches ripening on a sunny wall. The logical result of all this was that she was standing under the window in the glow of the sinking sun, while the prophet had withdrawn into the shadowy
cavern behind it. The day before, he had explained to her and Walter that in its original sense “knight” had meant boy, servant, squire, man-at-arms, and hero. Now she said to herself, “I am his knight!” and served him and safeguarded his labors: There was no need to say a word; she simply stood still, dazzled, and faced down the rays of the sun.

When Ulrich spoke to her she slowly turned her face toward the unexpected voice, and he discovered that something had changed. The eyes that looked toward him contained a chill such as the colors of a landscape radiate after the dying of day, and he instantly realized: She no longer wants anything from you! There was no trace anymore in her look of how she had wanted to “force him out of his block of stone,” of his having been a great devil or god, of wanting to escape with him through the hole in the music, of wanting to kill him if he would not love her. Not that he cared; it was doubtless a
quite ordinary little experience, this extinguished glow of self-interest in a gaze; still, it was like a small rent in the veil of life through which the indifferent void stares out, and it laid the basis for much that was to happen later.

Ulrich was told that Meingast was there, and understood.

They went quietly into the house to fetch Walter, and the three of them just as quietly came back out of doors again so as not to disturb the great man working. Through an open door Ulrich twice caught a glimpse of Meingast’s back. Meingast was housed in an empty room detached from the rest of the apartment but belonging to it; Clarisse and Walter had dug up an iron bedstead somewhere for him; a kitchen stool and a tin basin served as a washstand and bath, and in addition to these the room, with its uncurtained window, held only an old kitchen cupboard containing books, and a
small, unpainted deal table. Meingast sat at this table writing, and did not turn his head when they passed his door. All this Ulrich either saw for himself or found out from his friends, who had no scruples about providing much more primitive accommodations for the Master than they had themselves; on the contrary, for some reason, they seemed to take pride in his being content with it. It was touching, and it made things easy for them. Walter declared that if one went into this room in Meingast’s absence one felt the indescribable aura of a threadbare old glove that had been worn on a noble and forceful hand.

And in fact Meingast greatly enjoyed working in these surroundings, whose spartan simplicity flattered him. It made him feel his will forming the words on paper. And when in addition Clarisse was standing under his window, as she had been just then, or on the landing, or even if she was merely
sitting in her room—"wrapped in the cloak of invisible northern lights," as she had confided to him—his pleasure was enhanced by this ambitious disciple on whom he had such a paralyzing effect. Then ideas simply flowed from his pen, and his huge dark eyes above the sharp, quivering nose began to glow. What he intended to complete under these circumstances would be one of the most important sections of his new book, and one ought to be allowed to call it not a book but a call to arms for the spirit of a new breed of men! When he heard an unfamiliar male voice coming from where Clarisse was standing, he had broken off and cautiously peered out; he did not recognize Ulrich, though he dimly remembered him, but he found no reason in the footsteps coming up the stairs to shut his door or turn his head from his work. He wore a heavy wool cardigan under his jacket, showing his imperviousness to weather and people.
Ulrich was taken out for a walk and treated to ecstatic praise of the Master, who was meanwhile devoting himself to his work.

Walter said: “Being friends with a man like Meingast makes one realize how much one has suffered from antipathy to others! Associating with him, one feels...let me put it this way: everything seems painted in pure colors, without any grays at all!”

Clarisse said: “Being with him, one feels one has a destiny. There one stands, entirely oneself, fully illuminated.”

Walter added: “Today everything splits into hundreds of layers and becomes opaque and blurred—his mind is like glass!”

Ulrich’s reply to them was: “There are always scapegoats and bellwethers; and then there are sheep who need them!”

Walter flung back at him: “It was to be expected that such a man wouldn’t suit you!”
Clarisse cried out: “You once maintained that no one can live by ideas, remember? Well, Meingast can!”

Walter said more soberly: “Not that I always see eye-to-eye with him, of course...”

Clarisse broke in: “Listening to him, one feels shudders of light inside.”

Ulrich retorted: “A particularly fine head on a man usually means that he’s stupid; particularly deep philosophers are usually shallow thinkers; in literature, talents not much above average are usually regarded by their contemporaries as geniuses.”

What a curious phenomenon admiration is! In the life of individuals it occurs only in spasms, but it is firmly institutionalized in collective life. Walter would actually have found it more satisfying if he himself could have occupied Meingast’s place in his own and Clarisse’s esteem, and could not at all understand why this was not so; and yet
there was a certain slight advantage in it too. The emotion he was spared in this way was likewise credited to Meingast’s account, as when one adopts someone else’s child as one’s own. On the other hand, it was for this very reason that his admiration for Meingast was not really a pure and wholesome feeling, as Walter himself realized; it was rather an overcharged need to surrender himself to believing in him. There was something assiduous in this admiration; it was a “keyboard emotion,” raging without real conviction. Ulrich sensed this too. One of the elementary needs for passion, which life today breaks into fragments and jumbles to the point where they are unrecognizable, was here seeking a way back, for Walter praised Meingast with the ferocity of a theater audience that applauds far beyond the limits of its real opinion the commonplaces that are designed to arouse its need to applaud. He praised him out of one of those desperate urges to
admire, which normally find their outlet in festivals and celebrations, in great contemporaries or ideas and the honors bestowed on them, in situations where everyone involved joins in without anybody really knowing for whom or for what, while being inwardly prepared to be twice as mean as usual the next day in order to have nothing to reproach oneself for. This was how Ulrich thought about his friends, and he kept them on their toes by aiming barbed remarks at Meingast from time to time; for like everyone who knows better, he had been annoyed countless times by his contemporaries’ capacity for enthusiasms, which almost invariably fasten on the wrong object and so end up destroying even what indifference has let survive.

Dusk had already fallen by the time they had returned, still talking, to the house.

“This Meingast lives on our current confusion of intuition and faith,” Ulrich
finally said. “Almost everything that isn’t science can only be intuited, and for that you need passion and prudence. So a methodology for dealing with what we don’t know is almost the same as a methodology for life. But you two ‘believe’ the minute someone like Meingast comes along! And so does everyone. But this ‘belief is almost as much of a disaster as if you decided to plump your esteemed bodies down on a basket of eggs to hatch their unknown contents!”

They were standing at the foot of the stairs. And suddenly Ulrich realized why he had come here and was talking with them the way he used to. It did not surprise him when Walter answered:

“And the world is supposed to stand still until you’ve worked out your methodology?”

They evidently did not take him seriously because they did not realize how
desolate this area of faith was that stretches between the certainty of knowledge and the mists of intuition! Old ideas swarmed in his head, crowding so thickly they almost suffocated thought. But now he knew that it was no longer necessary to start all over again, like a carpet weaver whose mind has been blinded by a dream, and that this was the only reason he was here again. Everything had become so much simpler lately. The last two weeks had annulled everything that had gone before and had tied up the lines of his inner motions with a powerful knot.

Walter was expecting Ulrich to give him an answer that he could resent. He wanted to pay him back with interest! He had made up his mind to tell Ulrich that people like Mein- gast were saviors. “Salvation, after all, means the same thing as making one whole,” he thought. And: “Saviors may be wrong, but they make us whole again!” he intended to say. And he was going to add: “I don’t
suppose you have any idea what that means?” The resentment he felt toward Ulrich was like what he felt when he had to go to the dentist.

But Ulrich merely asked him distractedly just what Meingast had actually been writing and doing in the past few years.

“You see!” Walter said, disappointed. “You see, you don’t even know that much, but you disparage him!”

“Well,” Ulrich said lightly, “I don’t have to know; a few lines are sufficient!” He set his foot on the stairs. But Clarisse held him by the jacket and whispered: “Meingast isn’t even his real name!”

“Of course it isn’t; but is that a secret?”

“He turned into Meingast once, and now that he’s here with us he’s changing again!” Clarisse whispered intensely and mysteriously, and this whisper had
something in common with a blowtorch. Walter flung himself on it to put it out. “Clarisse!” he implored her. “Clarisse, stop this nonsense!”

Clarisse kept quiet and smiled. Ulrich went ahead up the stairs; he wanted at long last to see this messenger who had descended upon Walter and Clarisse’s domestic life from Zarathustra’s mountains. By the time they got upstairs, Walter was in a temper not only at him but at Meingast as well.

Meingast received his admirers in their dark apartment. He had seen them coming, and Clarisse immediately walked over to him where he stood against the gray windowpane, becoming a small pointed shadow beside his tall gaunt one. There was no introduction, or only a one-sided one in that Ulrich’s name was mentioned in order to refresh the Master’s memory. Then they were all silent. Ulrich, being curious to see how the situation would develop, positioned
himself at the other, unoccupied, window, and Walter made the surprising move of joining him there, probably for no better reason than, being subject to momentarily equal forces of repulsion, he was attracted by the stimulus of the brightness filtering into the room through the less obstructed window.

The calendar said March, but meteorology is not always dependable; it sometimes produces a premature June evening or a belated one, Clarisse thought. The darkness outside the window seemed to her like a summer night. Where the light of the gas lamps fell, the night was lacquered a bright yellow. The bushes nearby were a surging mass of black. Where they hung into the light they became green or whitish—there was no right word for it—scalloped into leaves and floating in the lamplight like laundry spread out in a gently running stream. A narrow iron ribbon on dwarflike posts—a mere
reminder and admonition to think of order—ran for a while along the edge of the lawn where the bushes stood, and then vanished in the darkness: Clarisse knew it came to an end there. There might at some time have been a plan to embellish the area with the suggestion of a garden, but it had soon been abandoned.

Clarisse moved close to Meingast, to see as far as possible up the road from his angle; her nose was flat against the windowpane, and their two bodies were touching hard and at as many points as if Clarisse had stretched out full length on the stairs, as she occasionally did. Her right arm had to give way, and was clasped at the elbow by Meingast’s long fingers as by the sinewy talons of an extremely absentminded eagle crumpling something like a silk handkerchief in its claws. Clarisse had for a while been watching a man who had something wrong with him, but she couldn’t make out what it was. His
gait was by turns hesitant and negligent; he gave the impression that something was wrapping itself around his will to walk, and every time he had torn through this he walked for a bit like anyone who was not hurrying but not stopping either. The rhythm of this irregular movement had caught Clarisses attention; as the man passed a streetlamp she tried to make out his features, which struck her as hollow and numb. When he passed the next-to-last streetlamp she decided that it was an insignificant, unpleasant, and furtive face, but as he approached the nearest lamppost, the one almost beneath her window, his face looked extremely pale, and it floated around on the light as the light floated around on the darkness, so that the thin iron post of the streetlamp looked very straight and aroused beside it, striking the eye with a more penetrating vivid green than it really warranted.
All four had gradually begun to observe this man, who thought himself unseen. He now noticed the bushes bathed in light, and they made him think of the scalloping of a woman’s petticoat, more luxurious than any he had ever seen, but one he would like to see. At this moment he was seized by his resolve. He stepped over the low railing, stood on the grass, which reminded him of the green wood shavings in a box of toy trees, stared for a while in bewilderment at his feet, was roused by his head as it cautiously looked around, and concealed himself in the shadows, as was his habit. People lured outdoors by the warm weather were returning home; their noise and their pleasure could be heard from far off. It filled the man with fear, and he sought comfort under the petticoat of leaves. Clarisse still had no idea what was the matter with him. He emerged whenever a group of people had passed by, their eyes blinded to the darkness by the
gaslight. Without lifting his feet, he shuffled toward the circle of light, like someone on a shallow bank who will not go into water over the soles of his shoes. Clarisse was struck by how pale the man was; his face was distorted into a white disk. She was overcome with pity for him. But he was making strange little movements that puzzled her for a long time, until, suddenly horrified, she had to grab hold of something; and since Meingast still had a grip on her arm, so that she could not move freely, she grabbed his wide trousers in her search for protection, pulling them taut over the Masters leg like a flag in a gale. So the two of them stood, without letting go.

Ulrich, thinking he was the first to have realized that the man under the windows was one of those sick people who through the abnormality of their sex lives attract the lively curiosity of the sexually normal, worried needlessly for a while about the effect this discovery might have on Clarisse, since she
was so unstable. Then he forgot about it, and would have been glad to know for himself what might actually be going on in such a person. The change, he thought, must have been so complete at the moment of stepping over the rail as to defy any attempt to describe it in detail. And as naturally as if it were an appropriate comparison, he was reminded of a singer who has just finished eating and drinking and then steps up to the piano, folds his hands over his stomach, and, opening his mouth to sing, is partly someone else and partly not. Ulrich also thought of His Grace Count Leinsdorf, who was able to switch into a religious-ethical circuit and into a bankers imperial man-of-the-world circuit. He was fascinated by the completeness of this transformation, which takes place inwardly but is confirmed outwardly by the world’s acceptance. He did not care how this man down there had got where he was in psychological terms, but he could not help
imagining his head gradually filling with tension, like a balloon filling with gas, probably, slowly and for days, but still swaying on the ropes that anchor it to terra firma until there is an inaudible command or some chance occurrence, or simply the set time finally runs its course, at which point anything at all would serve to let the ropes go, and the head, with no connection to the human world, floats off into the emptiness of the abnormal. And there the man actually stood in the shelter of the bushes with his sunken, ordinary face, lurking like a beast of prey. To carry out his purpose he really should have waited for the merrymakers to thin out so that the area might be safer for him. But the moment women passed by, alone in the interval between groups, or sometimes even protected within a group, dancing along and laughing gaily, they were no longer people to him but dolls playing some grotesque part in his consciousness. He was filled with the utter
ruthlessness of a killer, immune to their mortal fear; but at the same time he was himself suffering some minor torment at the thought that they might discover him and chase him off like a dog before he could reach the climax of insensibility, and his tongue quivered in his mouth with anxiety. He waited in a stupor, and gradually the last glimmer of twilight faded. Now a solitary woman neared his hiding place, but when he was still separated from her by the street-lamps, he could already see her detached from all her surroundings, bobbing up and down on the waves of light and darkness, a black lump dripping with light before she came closer. Ulrich, too, saw her, a shapeless middle-aged woman approaching. She had a body like a sack filled with gravel, and her expression was not congenial but domineering and cantankerous. But the gaunt pale man in the bushes knew how to get at her without her noticing until it was too late. The
dull motions of her eyes and her legs were probably already twitching in his flesh, and he was getting ready to assault her before she had a chance to defend herself, to assault her with the sight of him, which would take her by surprise and enter into her forever, however she might twist and turn. This excitement was whirling and turning in his knees, hands, and larynx, or so it seemed at least to Ulrich as he observed the man groping his way through the bushes where they were already in the half-light, getting ready to step out at the right moment and expose himself. Dazed, the miserable man, leaning into the last slight resistance of the twigs, glued his eyes on the ugly face now pitching up and down toward him in the full light, his breath panting obediently in time with the rhythm of the stranger. “Will she scream?” Ulrich thought. This coarse person was perfectly capable of flying into a rage instead of a panic, and going over to the attack; in
which case the demented coward would have to take to his heels, and his frustrated lust would plunge its knife into his own flesh, the squat handle first! But at this tense moment Ulrich heard the casual voices of two men coming down the road, and since he could hear them through the glass they must have penetrated the hissing excitement down below, for the man beneath the window cautiously dropped the nearly opened veil of twigs and withdrew soundlessly back into the midst of the darkness.

“What a swine!” Clarisse whispered to the friend beside her, energetically but not at all indignantly. Back before Meingast’s transformation he had often heard her use such terms, provoked by his free-and-easy ways with her, so the word might be considered historical. Clarisse assumed that Meingast would still remember it, despite his transformation, and it really did seem to her that his fingers stirred very faintly on her
arm in answer. There was nothing at all accidental about this evening; it was not even by chance that the man had chosen Clarisse’s window to stand under. She was firmly convinced that she had a baneful attraction for men who had something wrong with them; it had often proved to be so! Taken all in all, it was not so much that her ideas were confused as that they left out connections, or that they were saturated with affect in many places where other people have no such inner wellspring. Her conviction that she had been the one who had made it possible at the time for Meingast to remake himself was in itself not improbable; if one also considered how independently this change had taken its own course, because there had been no contact over distance and for years, and further how great a change it was—for it had made a prophet out of a superficial worldling—and finally how it was soon after Meingast’s departure that the love between Walter and
Clarisse had risen to that height of discord where it still remained, then even Clarisse’s notion that she and Walter would have had to take on the sins of the still untransformed Meingast to make his rise possible was no worse reasoning than any number of respected ideas people believe in today. This had given rise, however, to the relationship of knightly servitude that Clarisse felt toward the returned Master, and whenever she now spoke of his new “transformation” instead of simply a change, she was only giving fitting expression to the elevated state in which she had since found herself. The awareness of finding herself in a significant relationship could uplift Clarisse in the literal sense. One doesn’t quite know whether to paint saints with a cloud under their feet or whether they should be standing on nothing a fingers breadth above the ground, and this was exactly how it now stood with her, since Meingast had chosen her house in which to
accomplish his great work, which apparently was grounded in something quite profound. Clarisse was not in love with him as a woman; it was rather like a boy who admires a man: ecstatic when he manages to set his hat at the same angle as his idol, and filled with a secret ambition even to outdo him eventually.

Walter knew this. He could not hear what Clarisse was whispering to Meingast, nor could his eye make out any more of the pair than a heavily fused mass of shadow in the dim light of the window, but he could see through everything. He, too, had recognized what was wrong with the man in the bushes, and the silence that reigned in the room lay most heavily upon him. He managed to make out that Ulrich, who stood motionless beside him, was staring intently out the window, and he assumed that the two at the other window were doing the same. “Why doesn’t anyone break this silence?” he
thought. “Why doesn’t someone open the window and scare this monster off?” It occurred to him that they were obligated to call the police, but there was no telephone in the house, and he lacked the courage to undertake something that might make his companions look down on him. He had no desire whatever to be an “outraged bourgeois,” but he was just so exasperated! He could understand very well the “chivalric relationship” in which his wife stood to Meingast, for even in lovemaking it was impossible for her to imagine exaltation without effort: she derived her exaltation not from sensuality, only from ambition. He remembered how incredibly alive she could sometimes be in his arms, at a time when he had still been preoccupied with art; but except by such detours it was impossible to arouse her. “Perhaps ambition is all that really takes people out of themselves,” he reflected dubiously. It had not escaped him that Clarisse “stood watch” while
Meingast was working, in order to protect his ideas with her body, although she did not even know what these ideas were. Painfully, Walter regarded the lonely egotist in his bush; this wretch offered a warning example for the devastation that can be created in an all-too-isolated mind. That he knew exactly what Clarisse was feeling as she stood there watching tormented him. “She will be slightly excited, as if she had just run up a flight of stairs,” he thought. He himself felt a pressure in the scene that was before his eyes, as if something had been wrapped in a cocoon and was trying to break its envelope, and he felt how within this mysterious pressure, which Clarisse, too, was feeling, the will was aroused not merely to watch but right away, soon, somehow, to do something, to intervene in what was happening in order to set it free. Other people got their ideas from life, but whatever Clarisse experienced came, every time, from ideas: such an enviable
madness! And Walter was more inclined to the exaggerations of his wife, even if she was perhaps mentally ill, than to the way of thinking of his friend Ulrich, who fancied himself cautious and cool: somehow the more irrational was closer to him; perhaps it left him personally untouched, it appealed to his sympathy. In any event, many people prefer crazy ideas to difficult ones, and he even derived a certain satisfaction from Clarisse’s whispering with Meingast in the dark, while Ulrich was condemned to stand beside him as a mute shadow; it served Ulrich right to be beaten by Meingast. But from time to time Walter was tormented by the expectation that Clarisse would fling open the window or rush down the stairs to the bushes: then he detested both male shadows and their obscene silent watching, which made the situation for the poor little Prometheus he was shielding, who was so vulnerable to every temptation of the spirit,
more problematic from one minute to the next.

During this time the afflicted man’s shame and frustrated lust had fused into an all-pervasive disappointment that filled his gaunt body with its massive bitterness as he withdrew into his bushes. When he had reached the innermost darkness he collapsed, letting himself fall to the ground, and his head hung from his neck like a leaf. The world stood ready to punish him, and he saw his situation much as it would have appeared to the two passersby had they discovered him. But after this man had wept for himself for a while, dry-eyed, the original change came over him once again, this time mixed with even more vengefulness and spite. And again it miscarried. A girl passed by who might have been around fifteen and was obviously late coming from somewhere; she seemed lovely to him, a small, hastening ideal: the depraved man felt that he now
really ought to step out and speak to her in a friendly way, but this plunged him instantly into wild terror. His imagination, ready to conjure up anything that could even be suggested by a woman, became fearful and awkward when confronted with the natural possibility of admiring this defenseless little creature approaching in her beauty. The more she was suited to please his daylight self, the less pleasure she provided his shadow self, and he vainly tried to hate her, since he could not love her. So he stood uneasily at the borderline between shadow and light and exposed himself. When the child noticed his secret she had already passed by him and was about eight paces away; at first she had merely looked at the leaves moving without realizing what was going on, and when she did she could already feel secure enough not to be scared to death: her mouth did stay open for a while, but then she gave a loud scream and began to run; the scamp even
seemed to enjoy looking back, and the man felt himself humiliatingly abandoned. He wrathfully hoped that a drop of poison might somehow have fallen into her eyes and would later eat its way through her heart.

This relatively harmless and comical outcome relieved the spectators’ sense of humanity; this time they would indeed have intervened if the scene had not resolved itself as it did; and preoccupied with this, they hardly noticed how the business below did come to an end; they could only confirm that it had done so when they observed that the male “hyena,” as Walter put it, had suddenly disappeared. The man finally realized his intentions when a perfectly ordinary woman came along who looked at him aghast and with loathing, involuntarily shocked into stopping for a moment, and then tried to pretend that she had not seen anything. During this instant he felt himself, together with his roof of leaves and the whole topsy-turvy
world he had come from, sliding deep into the defenseless woman’s resisting gaze. That may have been how it happened, or perhaps it was some other way. Clarisse had not been paying attention. With a deep breath she raised herself from her half-crouching position; she and Meingast had let go of each other some time before. It seemed to her that she was suddenly landing on the wooden floor with the soles of her feet, and a whirlpool of inexpressible, horrible desire stilled itself in her body. She was firmly convinced that everything that had just occurred had a special meaning, minted just for her; and strange as it may sound, the repulsive scene left her with the impression that she was a bride who had just been serenaded. In her head, intentions were dancing helter-skelter, some ready to be carried out and others, new ones, just occurring to her.

“Funny!” Ulrich suddenly said into the darkness, the first of the four to break the
silence. ‘What an absurdly twisted notion it is to think how this fellow’s fun would have been spoiled if he only knew he was being watched the whole time!’

Meingast’s shadow detached itself from the nothingness and stood, a slender compression of darkness, facing in the direction of Ulrich’s voice.

“We attach far too much importance to sex,” the Master said. “These are in fact the goatlike caperings of our era’s will.” He said nothing further. But Clarisse, who had winced with annoyance at Ulrich’s words, felt borne forward by what Meingast said, although in this darkness there was no telling in what direction.
When Ulrich returned home from what he had experienced, even more dissatisfied than he had been before, he decided that he must not avoid a decision any longer, and tried to recall as best he could the "incident," as he euphemistically called what had happened in his last few hours with Agathe, only a few days after their deep discussion.

He was all packed and ready to leave on a sleeper that came through the town late, and so he and Agathe met for a final meal. They had agreed earlier that she would join him soon, and they somewhat uncertainly estimated this separation at from five days to two weeks.
At dinner Agathe said: “There’s something more we have to do before you leave.”

“What?” Ulrich asked.

“We have to change the will!”

Ulrich remembered looking at his sister without surprise; despite all their earlier talk he had assumed she was leading up to a joke. But Agathe was gazing down at her plate, with the familiar meditative wrinkle between her eyebrows. Slowly she said:

“He won’t keep as much of me between his fingers as would be left if a woolen thread had been burned away between them!”

Something must have been intensely at work in her in the last few days. Ulrich was about to tell her that he regarded such deliberations about how Hagauer’s interests could be injured as impermissible and did not want to hear any more about it. But at that
moment their father’s old servant came in with the next course, and they could only go on talking in veiled allusions.

“Aunt Malvina...,” Agathe said, smiling at her brother. “Do you remember Aunt Malvina? She had intended to leave everything she owned to our cousin; it was all arranged and everyone knew about it! Accordingly, all she was left in her parents’ will was the legal minimum she was entitled to, all the rest going to her brother, so that neither of the children, whose father was equally devoted to both of them, should inherit more than the other. You remember that, surely? The annuity that Agathe—Alexandra, our cousin, that is”—she corrected herself with a laugh—”had been receiving since her marriage was, for the time being, discounted against her legal share; it was a complicated arrangement, to give Aunt Malvina time to die....”
“I don’t understand you,” Ulrich muttered.

“Oh, but it’s perfectly simple! Aunt Malvina is dead, but before she died she lost all her money; she even had to be supported. Now, if Papa should for some reason have forgotten to revoke that provision in his will, Alexandra gets nothing at all, even if her marriage contract had stipulated joint ownership of property!”

“I don’t know about that; it seems very doubtful!” Ulrich said impulsively. “Besides, Father must have given certain assurances. He can’t possibly have made such provisions without talking it over with his son-in-law!”

He remembered saying this only too well, because he could not possibly keep silent while listening to his sister’s dangerous error. He could still see vividly in his mind the smile with which she had looked at him. “Isn’t it just like him?” she seemed to be
thinking. “One only has to present a case to him as if it weren’t flesh and blood but some abstraction, and one can lead him around by the nose.” And then she had asked curtly: “Is there any written evidence of such arrangements?” and answered herself: “I never heard anything about it, and if anyone knew about it, it would certainly be me. But of course Papa was strange about everything.”

Now the servant was back at the table, and she took advantage of Ulrich’s helplessness to add: “Verbal agreements can always be contested. But if the will was changed again after Aunt Malvina lost everything, then all signs point to this new codicil having been lost.”

Again Ulrich let himself be tempted to steer her right: “That still leaves the sizable automatic inheritance that can’t be taken away from children of one’s body.”
“But I’ve just told you that all of that was paid out during the father’s lifetime! After all, Alexandra was married twice.” They were alone for a moment, and Agathe hastened to add: “I’ve looked at that passage very carefully. Only a few words need to be changed to make it look as if my share had already been paid out to me in full. Who knows anything about it now? When Papa went back to leaving us equal shares after Aunt Malvina’s losses, he put it in a codicil that can be destroyed. Anyway, there’s nothing to have prevented me from having renounced my legal share in your favor for one reason or another.”

Ulrich looked at her dumbfounded and missed his opportunity to respond to her inventions as he felt obliged to do; by the time he was ready, they were no longer alone, and he had to resort to circumlocutions.

“One really shouldn’t,” he began hesitantly, “even think such things!”
“Why not?” Agatha retorted.

Such questions are simple as long as they are left alone, but the moment they rear their heads they are a monstrous serpent that had been curled up into a harmless blob. Ulrich remembered answering: “Even Nietzsche asks the ‘free spirits’ to observe certain external rules for the sake of a greater internal freedom!” He had said this with a smile, although he felt it was rather cowardly to hide behind someone else’s words.

“That’s a lame principle!” Agathe said, dismissing it out of hand. “That’s the principle behind my marriage!”

And Ulrich thought: “It really is a lame principle.” It seems that people who have new and revolutionary answers to particular problems make up for it by compromising on everything else, which enables them to lead highly moral lives in carpet slippers; all the more so as the attempt to keep everything
constant except what they are trying to change corresponds totally to the creative economy of thinking in which they feel at home. Even Ulrich had always regarded this more as a strict than as a slack procedure, but when he was having this talk with his sister he felt that she had struck home; he could no longer bear the indecision he had loved, and it seemed to him that it was precisely Agathe who had been given the mission of bringing him to this point. And while he was nevertheless propounding the “rule of the free spirits” to her, she laughed and asked him whether he didn’t notice that the moment he tried to formulate general principles a different man appeared in his place.

“And even though you are surely right to admire him, basically he doesn’t mean a thing to you!” she declared, giving her brother a willful and challenging look. Again he had no ready answer and said nothing, expecting an interruption at any moment, yet
he could not bring himself to drop the subject. This situation emboldened her.

“In the short time we’ve been together,” she went on, “you’ve given me such wonderful guidelines for my life, things I would never have dared think out for myself, but then you always end up wondering whether they’re really true! It seems to me that the truth the way you use it is only a way of mistreating people!”

She was amazed at her own daring in making such reproaches; her own life seemed so worthless to her that she surely ought to have kept quiet. But she drew her courage from Ulrich himself, and there was something so curiously feminine in her way of leaning on him while she attacked him that he felt it too.

“You don’t understand the desire to organize ideas in large, articulated masses,” Ulrich said. “The battle experiences of the
intellect are alien to you; all you see in them is columns marching in some land of formation, the impersonality of many feet stirring up the truth like a cloud of dust!”

“But didn’t you yourself describe to me, far more precisely and clearly than I ever could, the two states of mind in which you can live?” she answered.

A glowing cloud, with ever-changing outlines, flew across her face. She felt the desire to bring her brother to the point where he could no longer retreat. The thought made her feverish, but she did not yet know whether she would have enough courage to carry it through, and so she put off ending the meal.

Ulrich knew all this, he guessed it, but he had pulled himself together and taken up his position. He sat facing her, his eyes focused, absent, his mouth forced to utterance, and had the impression that he was not
really there but had remained somewhere behind himself, calling out to himself what he was saying:

“Suppose that, on a trip somewhere, I wanted to steal some stranger’s golden cigarette case—I ask you, isn’t that simply unthinkable? I don’t want to go into the question right now of whether a move such as you’re contemplating is or isn’t justifiable on grounds of intellectual freedom. For all I know, it may be in order to do Hagauer some injury. But imagine me in a hotel, neither penniless nor a professional thief, nor a mental defective with deformed head or body, nor the offspring of a hysterical mother or a drunkard father, nor confused or stigmatized by anything else in any way at all: yet I steal, nevertheless. I repeat: This couldn’t happen anywhere in the world! It’s simply impossible! It can be ruled out with absolute scientific certainty!”
Agathe burst out laughing. “But Ulo, what if one does it all the same?”

Ulrich himself had to laugh at this answer, which he had not anticipated. He leapt to his feet and pushed his chair back hastily in order not to encourage her by his concurrence. Agathe got up from the table.

“You cannot do this!” he pleaded with her.

“But Ulo,” she said, “do you think even in your dreams, or do you dream something that’s happening?”

This question reminded him of his argument, a few days before, that all moral demands pointed to a kind of dream state that had fled from them by the time they were fully postulated. But Agathe had already gone, after her last remark, into her father’s study, which now could be seen lamplit beyond two open doors; and Ulrich, who had not followed her, saw her standing in this
frame. She was holding a sheet of paper in the light, reading something. “Doesn’t she have any idea what it is she’s taking on herself?” he wondered. But on that whole key ring of contemporary notions, such as neurotic inferiority, mental deficiency, arrested development, and the like, none fit, and in the lovely picture she made while committing her crime there was no trace of greed or vengefulness or any other inner ugliness. And although with the aid of such concepts Ulrich could have seen even the actions of a criminal or a near psychotic as relatively controlled and civilized, because the distorted and displaced motives of ordinary life shimmer in their depths, his sister’s gently fierce determination, an inextricable blend of purity and criminality, left him momentarily speechless. He could not accept the idea that this person, quite openly engaged in committing a bad act, could be a bad person, while at the same time he had to watch how Agathe
took one paper after another out of the desk, read it, and laid it aside, seriously searching for a specific document. Her determination gave the impression of having descended from some other planet to the plane of everyday decision.

As he watched, Ulrich was also troubled by the question of why he had talked Hagauer into leaving in good faith. It seemed to him that he had behaved all along as the tool of his sister’s will, and to the very last his responses, even when he was disagreeing with her, had only encouraged her. Truth dealt cruelly with people, she had said. “Well put, but she has no idea what truth means!” Ulrich mused. “With the passing of the years it leaves one stiff and gouty, but in one’s youth it’s a life of hunting and sailing!” He had sat down again. Now he suddenly realized not only that Agathe had somehow got from him what she had said about truth, but that he had sketched out for her in advance
what she was doing next door. Had he not said that in the highest state of human awareness there was no such thing as good and evil, but only faith or doubt; that strict rules were contrary to the innermost nature of morality and that faith can never be more than an hour old; that in a state of faith one could never do anything base; that intuition was a more passionate state than truth? And Agathe was now on the point of abandoning the safe enclosure of morality and venturing out upon those boundless deeps where there is no decision other than whether one will rise or fall. She was doing this just as she had the other day when she took her father’s medals from his reluctant hand to exchange them for the imitations, and at this moment he loved her in spite of her lack of principle, with the remarkable feeling that it was his own thoughts that had gone from him to her and were now returning from her to him, poorer in deliberation but with that balsamic
scent of freedom about them like a creation of the wild. And while he was trembling with the strain of controlling himself, he cautiously made a suggestion:

“I’ll put off leaving for a day and sound out a notary or lawyer. Perhaps what you’re doing is terribly obvious!”

But Agathe had already ascertained that the notary her father had used was no longer alive. “There’s not a soul left who knows anything about this business,” she said. “Let it be!”

Ulrich saw that she had taken a piece of paper and was practicing imitating her father’s handwriting.

Fascinated, he had drawn closer and stood behind her. There in piles lay the papers on which his father’s hand had lived—one could still almost feel its movements—and here Agathe, with an actress’s mimicry, conjured up almost the same thing.
It was strange to see this happening. The purpose it was serving, the thought that it was a forgery, disappeared. And in truth Agathe had not given this any thought at all. An aura of justice with flames, not with logic, hovered about her. Goodness, decency, abiding by the law, as she had come to know it in people she knew, notably Professor Hagauer, had always seemed to her like removing a spot from a dress; while the wrongdoing that enveloped her at this moment was like the world drowning in the light of a rising sun. It seemed to her that right and wrong no longer constituted a general notion, a compromise devised to serve millions of people, but were a magical encounter between Me and You, the madness of original creation before there was anything to compare it to or anything to measure it by. She was really making Ulrich the present of a crime by putting herself in his hands, trusting him wholeheartedly to understand her rashness, as children do who
come up with the most unexpected ideas when they want to give someone a present and have nothing to give. And Ulrich guessed most of this. As his eyes followed her movements he felt a pleasure he had never known before, for it had in it something of the magical absurdity of yielding totally and without remonstrance, for once, to what another being was doing. Even when the thought intervened that this was causing harm to a third person, it flashed only for an instant, like an ax, and he quickly put his mind at rest, since what his sister was doing here was really not anyone else’s business; it was not at all certain that these attempts at copying someone’s handwriting would actually be used, and what Agathe was doing inside her own four walls was her own affair as long as it had no effect beyond them.

She now called out to her brother, turned around, and was surprised to find him standing behind her. She awoke. She
had written all she wanted to write and resolutely singed it over a candle flame in order to make the handwriting look old. She held out her free hand to Ulrich, who did not take it, but he was not able to withdraw entirely behind a somber frown either. She responded by saying: “Listen! If something is a contradiction, and you love both sides of it—really love it!—doesn’t that cancel it out, willy-nilly?”

“That’s much too frivolous a way of putting it,” Ulrich muttered. But Agathe knew how he would judge it in his “second thinking.” She took a clean sheet of paper and lightheartedly wrote, in the old-fashioned hand she was so good at imitating: “My bad daughter Agathe proffers no reason to change the above-ordained instructions to the disadvantage of my good son Ulo!” Not yet satisfied, she wrote on the second sheet: “My daughter Agathe is for some time longer to be educated by my good son Uli.”
So that was how it had happened, but now that Ulrich had reawakened it down to the last detail, he ended up with just as little knowledge of what to do about it as before.

He ought not to have left without first straightening things out, no doubt about that! And clearly the fashionable superstition that one shouldn’t take anything too seriously had played him a trick when it whispered to him to quit the field for a time and not give too much weight to the issue between them by emotional resistance. Heat can’t pass from the cooler to the hotter; the most violent extremes, left to themselves, eventually give rise to a new mediocrity; one could hardly take a train or walk in the street without a cocked gun if one could not trust the law of averages, which automatically reduces extreme possibilities to improbability. It was this European faith in empiricism that Ulrich was obeying when, despite all his scruples, he returned home. Deep down he
was even glad that Agathe had shown herself to be different.

Nevertheless, the matter could not be properly resolved other than by Ulrich’s now taking action, and as soon as possible, to make up for his negligence. He should have sent his sister an immediate special delivery letter or telegram, which should have stated in effect: “I won’t have anything to do with you unless you...!” But he had absolutely no intention of writing anything of the kind; at the moment he simply could not do it.

Besides, they had decided before that fateful incident that in the next few weeks they would try to live together or at least move in together, and this was what they had mainly talked about in the brief time remaining before his departure. They had agreed that for the moment it would be for “the time it will take to get the divorce,” so that Agathe would have a refuge and counsel. But now, in thinking about it, Ulrich also remembered an
earlier remark of his sisters about wanting “to kill Hagauer”; this “scheme” had evidently been working in her and taken on a new form. She had insisted vehemently on selling the family property at once, possibly also in the interest of making the inheritance evaporate, although it might seem advisable on other grounds as well. In any case, they had agreed to put the sale in the hands of a broker and had set their terms. And so Ulrich now had to give some thought as well to what was to become of his sister after he returned to his casually interim life, which he did not himself regard as real. It was impossible for her present situation to continue. Amazingly close though they had grown in so short a time—as though their fates were linked, even though this had arisen from all sorts of unconnected details; Agathe probably had a more quixotic view of it—they knew hardly anything of each other in the many and various superficialities on which a
shared life depends. When he thought of his sister objectively Ulrich could even perceive numerous unsolved problems, nor could he form a very clear idea of her past; his best guess was that she dealt most casually with everything that happened to her or through her, and that she lived rather vaguely and perhaps with fantasies that ran alongside her actual life; such an explanation would plausibly account for her having stayed so long with Hagauer and then broken with him so suddenly. And even the carelessness with which she treated the future fitted in with this view: she had left home, and that seemed to satisfy her for the present; and when questions arose about what should happen now, she avoided them. Nor was Ulrich himself capable of either picturing a life for her without a husband, in which she would hover around in vague expectations like a young girl, or imagining what the man would look like who would be right for his
sister; he had even told her so shortly before he left.

She had given him a startled look—perhaps she was clowning a bit, pretending to be startled—and then calmly countered with the question: “Can’t I just stay with you for the time being, without our having to decide everything?”

It was in this fashion, without anything more definite, that the idea of their moving in together had been ratified. But Ulrich realized that this experiment meant the end of the experiment of his “life on leave.” He did not want to think about the possible consequences, but that his life would henceforth be subject to certain restrictions was not unwelcome, and for the first time he again thought of the circle and especially the women of the Parallel Campaign. The idea of cutting himself off from everything, as part of his new life, seemed delightful. Just as it often takes only a trifling alteration in a
room to change its dull acoustics to a glorious resonance, so now in his imagination his little house was transformed into a shell within which one heard the roar of the city as a distant river.

And then, toward the end of that conversation, this other special little conversation had taken place:

“We’ll live like hermits,” Agathe had said with a bright smile, “but of course we’ll each be free to pursue any love affairs. For you, at any rate, there’s no obstacle!” she assured him.

“Do you realize,” Ulrich said by way of an answer, “that we shall be entering into the Millennium?”

“What’s that?”

“We’ve talked so much about the love that isn’t a stream flowing toward its goal but a state of being like the ocean. Now tell me
honestly: When they told you in school that the angels in heaven did nothing but bask in the presence of the Lord and sing His praises, were you able to imagine this blissful state of doing nothing and thinking nothing?"

“I always thought it must be rather boring, which is certainly due to my imperfection,” was Agathe’s answer.

“But after everything we’ve agreed on,” Ulrich explained, “you must now imagine this ocean as a state of motionlessness and detachment, filled with everlasting, crystal-clear events. In ages past, people tried to imagine such a life on earth. That is the Millennium, formed in our own image and yet like no world we know. That’s how we’ll live now! We shall cast off all self-seeking, we shall collect neither goods, nor knowledge, nor lovers, nor friends, nor principles, nor even ourselves! Our spirit will open up, dissolving boundaries toward man and beast,
spreading open in such a way that we can no longer remain us’ but will maintain our identities only by merging with all the world!”

This little interlude had been a joke. He had been sitting with paper and pencil, making notes and talking meanwhile with his sister about what she could expect from the sale of the house and the furniture. He was also still cross, and he himself did not know whether he was blaspheming or dreaming. And with all this they had not got around to talking seriously about the will.

It was probably because of these ambiguities in the way it had happened that Ulrich even now was far from feeling any active regret. There was much about his sister’s bold stroke that pleased him, though he was himself the defeated one; he had to admit that it suddenly brought the person living by the “rule of the free spirits,” to whom he had given far too much ease within himself, into grave conflict with that deep, undefined
person from whom real seriousness emanates. Nor did he want to dodge the consequences of this act by quickly making it good in the usual way; but then, there was no norm, and events had to be allowed to take their course.
Next morning Ulrich’s mind was no clearer, and late that afternoon he decided to lighten the serious mood that was oppressing him by looking up his cousin who was occupied with liberating the soul from civilization.

To his surprise he was received by Section Chief Tuzzi, who came to greet him even before Rachel had returned from Diotima’s room.

“My wife’s not feeling well today,” the seasoned husband said, with that unconscious tone of tenderness in his voice which regular monthly use has made into a formula
that exposes the domestic secret to the world. “I don’t know whether she’ll be up to a visit.” Though dressed to go out, he was quite willing to stay and keep Ulrich company.

Ulrich took the opportunity of inquiring about Arnheim.

“Arnheim’s been in England and is now in St. Petersburg,” Tuzzi told him. The effect of this trivial and predictable news on Ulrich, depressed as he was by his own experiences, was to make him feel as though world, fullness, and motion were rushing in upon him.

“A good thing too,” the diplomat added. “Let him travel here and there as much as he likes. It gives one a chance to make one’s observations and pick up some information.”

“So you still believe,” said Ulrich, amused, “that he’s on some pacifist mission for the Czar?”
“I believe it more than ever,” was the plain answer from the man who bore official responsibility for carrying out Austro-Hungarian policy. But suddenly Ulrich doubted whether Tuzzi was really so unsuspecting or was only pretending to be and pulling his leg; somewhat annoyed, he dropped Arnheim and asked: “I hear that ‘Action!’ has become the watchword since I left.”

As always when the Parallel Campaign came up, Tuzzi seemed to relish playing both the innocent and the shrewd insider. He shrugged and grinned.

“I’ll let my wife fill you in on that—you’ll hear all about it from her as soon as she’s able to see you!” But a moment later his little mustache began to twitch and the large dark eyes in the tanned face glistened with a vague distress. “You’re a man who has read all the books,” he said hesitantly. “Could you perhaps tell me what is meant by a man having soul?”
This was apparently something Tuzzi really wanted to talk about, and it was obviously his insecurity that was responsible for the impression that he was distressed. When Ulrich failed to respond immediately, he went on: “When we speak of someone as ‘a good soul’ we mean an honest, conscientious, dependable fellow—I have an administrator in my office like that—but what that amounts to, surely, is the virtues of an underling. Or there’s soul as a quality of women, meaning more or less that they cry more easily, or blush more easily, than men do....”

“Your wife has soul,” Ulrich corrected him, as gravely as if he were stating that she had raven-black hair.

A faint pallor rushed across Tuzzi’s face. “My wife has a mind,” he said slowly. “She is rightly regarded as a woman of some intellect. I like to tease her about it and tell her she’s an aesthete. That galls her. But that
isn’t soul....” He thought for a moment. “Have you ever been to a fortune-teller?” he asked. “They read the future in your palm, or from a hair of your head, sometimes amazingly on target. They have a gift for it, or tricks. But can you make any sense of somebody telling you, for instance, that there are signs that a time is coming when our souls will behold each other directly, so to speak, without the mediation of the senses? Let me say at once,” he added quickly, “that this is not to be understood only as a figure of speech, but if you’re not a good person, then no matter what you do, people today can feel it much more clearly than in earlier centuries, because this is an age of the awakening soul. Do you believe that?”

With Tuzzi, one never knew if his barbs were directed against himself or his listener, so Ulrich answered: “If I were you I’d just let it come to the test.”
“Don’t make jokes, my dear friend,” Tuzzi said plaintively. “It’s not decent when you’re safely on the sidelines. My wife expects me to take such propositions seriously even if I can’t subscribe to them, and I have to surrender without having a chance to defend myself. So in my hour of need I remembered that you’re one of those bookish people....”

“Both of these assertions come from Maeterlinck, if I’m not mistaken,” Ulrich said helpfully.

“Really? From...? Yes, I can see that. That’s the...? I see, that’s good; then perhaps he’s also the one who claims that there’s no such thing as truth—except for people in love! he says. If I am in love with a person, according to him, I participate directly in a secret truth more profound than the common kind. On the other hand, if we say something based on observation and a thorough knowledge of human nature, that’s
supposed to be worthless, of course. Is that another of this Mae—this man’s ideas?”

“I really don’t know. It might be. It’s what you would expect from him.”

“I imagined it came from Arnheim.”

“Arnheim has taken a lot from him, as he has from others—they’re both gifted eclectics.”

“Really? Then it’s all old stuff? But in that case can you tell me, for heaven’s sake, how it is possible to let that sort of thing be published nowadays?” Tuzzi asked. “When my wife says things like: ‘Reason doesn’t prove a thing; ideas don’t reach as far as the soul!’ or There’s a realm of wisdom and love far beyond your world of facts, and one only desecrates it with considered statements!’ I can understand what makes her talk like that: she’s a woman, that’s all, and this is her way of defending herself against a man’s logic! But how can a man say such things?”
Tuzzi edged his chair closer and laid a hand on Ulrich’s knee. “The truth swims like a fish in an invisible principle; the moment you lift it out, it’s dead.’ What do you make of that? Could it maybe have something to do with the difference between an ‘eroticist’ and a ‘sexualist’?”

Ulrich smiled. “Do you really want me to tell you?”

“I can’t wait to hear!”

“I don’t know how to begin.”

“There it is, you see! Men can’t bring themselves to utter such things. But if you had a soul, you would now simply be contemplating my soul and marveling at it. We would reach heights where there are no thoughts, no words, no deeds. Nothing but mysterious forces and a shattering silence! May a soul smoke?” he asked, and lit a cigarette, only then recalling his duty as host and offering one to Ulrich. At bottom he was
rather proud of now having read Arnheim’s books, and precisely because he still found them insufferable he was pleased with himself for having privately discovered the possible usefulness of their puffed-up style for the inscrutable workings of diplomacy. Nor would anyone else have wanted to do such hard labor for nothing, and anyone in his place would have continued making fun of it to his heart’s content, only to yield after a while to the temptation of trying out one quotation or another, or dressing up something that could not be stated clearly in any case in one of those annoyingly fuzzy new ideas. This is done reluctantly, because one still considers the new “costume” ridiculous, but one quickly gets used to it, and so the spirit of the times is imperceptibly transformed by its new terminology, and in specific cases Arnheim might in fact have gained a new admirer. Even Tuzzi was ready to concede that the call to unite soul and
commerce, despite any hostility to it on principle, could be thought of as a new psychology of economics, and all that kept him unshakably immune from Arnheim’s influence was actually Diotima herself. For between her and Arnheim at that time—unknown to anyone—a certain coolness had begun to gain ground, burdening everything Arnheim had ever said about the soul with the suspicion of being a mere evasion; with the result that his sayings were flung in Tuzzi’s face with more irritation than ever. Under these circumstances Tuzzi could be forgiven for assuming that his wife’s attachment to the stranger was still in the ascendant, though it was not the kind of love against which a husband could take steps, but a “state of love” or “loving state of mind” so far above all base suspicion that Diotima herself spoke openly of the ideas with which it inspired her, and had lately been insisting rather unrelentingly that Tuzzi take spiritual part in them.
He felt inordinately bewildered and vulnerable, surrounded as he was by this state that blinded him like sunlight coming from all sides at once without the sun itself having any fixed position to orient oneself by, so as to find shade and relief.

He heard Ulrich saying: “But let me offer this for your consideration: Within us there is usually a steady inflow and outflow of experiences. The states of excitation that form in us are aroused from outside and flow out of us again as actions or words. Think of it as a mechanical game. But then think of it being disturbed: The flow gets dammed up. The banks are flooded in some fashion. Occasionally it may be no more than a certain gassiness....”

“At least you talk sensibly, even if it’s all nonsense....” Tuzzi noted with approval. He could not quite grasp how all this was supposed to explain matters to him, but he had kept his poise, and even though he was
inwardly lost in misery, the tiny malicious smile still lingered proudly on his lips, ready for him to slip right back into it.

“What the physiologists say, I think,” Ulrich continued, “is that what we call conscious action is the result of the stimulus not just flowing in and out through a reflex arc but being forced into a detour. That makes the world we experience and the world in which we act, which seem to us one and the same, actually more like the water above and below a mill wheel, connected by a sort of dammed-up reservoir of consciousness, with the inflow and the outflow dependent on regulation of level, pressure, and so forth. Or in other words, if something goes wrong on one of the two levels—an estrangement from the world, say, or a disinclination to action—we could reasonably assume that a second, or higher, consciousness might be formed in this fashion. Or don’t you think so?”
“Me?” Tuzzi said. “I’d have to say it’s all the same to me. Let the professors work that out among themselves, if they think it important. But practically speaking”—he moodily stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray, then looked up in exasperation—”is it the people with two reservoirs or only one reservoir who run the world?”

“I thought you only wanted to know how I imagine such ideas might arise....”

“If that’s what you’ve been telling me, I’m afraid I don’t follow you,” Tuzzi said.

“But it’s very simple. You have no second reservoir—so you haven’t got the principle of wisdom and you don’t understand a word of what the people who have a soul are talking about. Do accept my congratulations!”

Ulrich had gradually become aware that he was expressing, in ignominious form and in curious company, ideas that might be not
at all unsuited to explain the feelings that obscurely stirred his own heart. The surmise that in a state of enhanced receptivity an overflowing and receding of experiences might arise that would connect the senses boundlessly and gently as a sheet of water with all creation called to mind his long talks with Agathe, and his face involuntarily took on an expression that was partly obdurate, partly forlorn. Tuzzi studied him from under his indolently raised eyelids and gathered from the form of Ulrich’s sarcasm that he himself was not the only person present who was “dammed up” in a manner not of his own choice.

Both of them hardly noticed how long Rachel was taking. She had been detained by Diotima, who had needed her help in quickly putting herself and her sickroom into an ordered state of suffering that would be informal, yet proper for receiving Ulrich. Now the maid brought a message that Ulrich
should not leave but be patient just a bit longer, and then hurried back to her mistress.

“All those quotations you cited are of course allegories,” Ulrich continued after this interruption, to make up to his host for having to keep him company. “A kind of butterfly language! And people like Arnheim give me the impression that they can guzzle themselves potbellied with this vaporous nectar of theirs! I mean...,” he hastened to add, remembering just in time that he must not include Diotima in the insult, “I have this impression about Arnheim in particular, just as he also paradoxically gives the impression that he carries his soul in his breast pocket like a wallet!”

Tuzzi put down his briefcase and gloves, which he had picked up when Rachel appeared, and said with some force: “Do you realize what this is? I mean, what you’ve explained to me so well. It’s nothing but the
spirit of pacifism!” He paused to let this revelation sink in. “In the hand of amateurs, pacifism can be extremely dangerous!” he added portentously.

Ulrich would have laughed, but Tuzzi was being dead serious; he had, in fact, linked two things that actually were distantly related, funny as it might be to see how love and pacifism were connected for him in an impression of dilettantish debauchery. At a loss for an answer, Ulrich took the occasion to fall back on the Parallel Campaign and its chosen watchword, “Action!”

“That’s a Leinsdorf idea,” Tuzzi said disdainfully. “Do you recall the last discussion here before you went away? Leinsdorf said: ‘Something’s got to be done!’ That’s all there was to it, and that’s what they mean by their new watchword, ‘Action!’ And Arnheim is of course trying to foist his Russian pacifism on it. Do you remember how I warned them about it? I’m afraid they’ll have cause
to remember me! Nowhere in the world is foreign policy as difficult as it is here, and I said even then: Whoever takes it upon himself these days to put fundamental political ideas into practice has to be part gambler and part criminal.” This time, Tuzzi was really opening up, probably because Ulrich might be called by his wife at any moment, or because in this conversation he did not want to be the only one to have things explained to him.

“The Parallel Campaign is arousing suspicion all over the world,” he reported, “and at home, where it’s being viewed as both anti-German and anti-Slav, it’s also having repercussions in our foreign relations. But if you want to know the difference between amateur and professional pacifism, let me tell you something: Austria could prevent a war for at least thirty years by joining the Entente Cordiale! And this could of course be done on the Emperor’s Jubilee with a
matchless pacifist flourish, while at the same
time we assure Germany of our brotherly
love whether or not she follows suit. The ma-
jority of our nationalities would be over-
joyed. With easy French and English credit
we could make our army so strong that Ger-
many couldn’t bully us. We’d be rid of Italy
altogether. France wouldn’t be able to do a
thing without us. In short, we would be the
key to peace and war, we’d make the big
political deals. I’m not giving away any
secrets; this is a simple diplomatic calcula-
tion that any commercial attaché could work
out. So why can’t it be done? Imponderables
at Court. Where they dislike the Emperor so
heartily that they’d consider it almost inde-
cent to let it happen. Monarchies are at a dis-
advantage today because they’re weighed
down by decency! Then there are imponder-
ables of so-called public opinion—which
brings me to the Parallel Campaign. Why
doesn’t it educate public opinion? Why
doesn’t it teach the public to see things objectively? You see”—but at this point Tuzzi’s statements lost some of their plausibility and began to sound more like concealed affliction—”this fellow Arnheim really amuses me with those books he writes! He didn’t invent writing, and the other night, when I couldn’t fall asleep, I had time to think about it a little. There have always been politicians who wrote novels or plays, like Clemenceau, for instance, or Disraeli; not Bismarck, but Bismarck was a destroyer. And now look at those French lawyers who are at the helm today: enviable! Political profiteers, but with a first-rate diplomatic corps to advise them, to give them guidelines, and all of them have at one time or another dashed off plays or novels without the slightest embarrassment, at least when they were young, and even today they’re still writing books. Do you think these books are worth anything? I don’t. But I give you my word that last night
I was thinking that our own diplomats are missing out on something because they’re not writing books too. And I’ll tell you why: First of all, it’s as true for a diplomat as for an athlete that he has to sweat off his excess water. Secondly, it’s good for public security. Do you know what the European balance of power is?”

They were interrupted by Rachel, who came to tell Ulrich that Diotima was expecting him. Tuzzi let her hand him his hat and coat. “If you were a patriot...,” he said, slipping into the sleeves as Rachel held his coat for him.

“What would I do then?” Ulrich asked him, looking at the black pupils of Rachel’s eyes.

“If you were a patriot, you’d alert my wife or Count Leinsdorf to some of these problems. I can’t do it myself—coming from
a husband it could easily seem narrow-minded.”

“But nobody here takes me seriously,” Ulrich said calmly.

“Oh, don’t say that!” Tuzzi cried out. “They may not take you seriously the way they take other people seriously, but for a long time now they’ve all been quite afraid of you. They’re afraid that you’re liable to put Leinsdorf up to something crazy. Do you know what the European balance of power is?” the diplomat probed intently.

“I suppose so; more or less,” Ulrich said.

“Then I must congratulate you!” Tuzzi flared up bitterly. “We professional diplomats have no idea—none of us do. It is what mustn’t be disturbed if people are not to be at each other’s throats. But what it is that mustn’t be disturbed, no one knows exactly. Just cast your mind back a little over what’s
been going on around you these last few years and is still going on: the Italo-Turkish war, Poincare in Moscow, the Baghdad question, armed intervention in Libya, Austro-Serbian tensions, the Adriatic problem...Is that a balance? Our never-to-be-forgotten Baron Ahrenthal— But I mustn’t keep you any longer!”

“Too bad,” Ulrich said. “If that’s what the European balance of power comes to, then it’s the best possible expression of the European spirit!”

“Yes, that’s what makes it so interesting,” Tuzzi replied from the door, with an indulgent smile. “And from that point of view the spiritual achievement of our Parallel Campaign is not to be underestimated!”

“Why don’t you put a stop to it?”

Tuzzi shrugged his shoulders. “In this country, if a man in His Grace’s position wants something, one can’t come out against
it. All one can do is just keep one’s eyes open.”

“And how have you been getting on?” Ulrich asked the little black-and-white sentry who was now taking him to Diotima.
DIOTIMA HAS CHANGED THE BOOKS SHE READS

“My dear friend,” Diotima said when Ulrich came in, “I didn’t want to let you leave without having a word with you, but to have to receive you in this state...!” She was wearing a negligee in which her majestic form, through its accidental position, looked slightly pregnant; this lent the proud body, which had never given birth, something of the lovely abandon of the travail of motherhood. Beside her on the sofa lay a fur collar, which she had obviously been using to keep herself warm, and on her forehead a compress against migraine had been allowed to stay in place because she knew it was decorative, like a Greek headband. Though it was late, no lamp had been lit, and the mingled
scent of medications and fresheners for some unknown malaise hung in the air, mixed with a powerful fragrance that had been tossed over all the individual odors like a blanket.

Ulrich bent his face low to kiss Diotima’s hand, as if he were trying to make out from the scent of her arm what changes had taken place during his absence. But her skin exuded only the same rich, well-fed, well-bathed aroma it always did.

“Ah, my friend, how good it is to have you back! Oh!” she suddenly moaned, but with a smile. “I’m having the most awful cramps!”

Such information, from a straightforward person as neutral as a weather report, on Diotima’s lips took on all the emphasis of a breakdown and a confession.

“Dear cousin!” Ulrich exclaimed, and leaned forward with a smile to look into her face. For an instant Ulrich confused Tuzzi’s
delicate hint about his wife’s indisposition with a conjecture that Diotima had become pregnant, which would have been a momentous turn of events for the household.

Half guessing what was in his mind, she made a languid gesture of denial. What she had was only menstrual cramps, which were, however, something new in her experience; she had begun having them only in the last few months, suggesting an obscure connection with her wavering between Arnheim and her husband. When she heard of Ulrich’s return it gave her some comfort, and she welcomed him as the confidant of her struggles, which is why she had received him. She lay there, with only a token pretense of sitting up, abandoned to the pains that raged within her, and was in his company a piece of untrammeled nature, without fences or No Trespassing signs, a rare enough condition with her. She had assumed she could convincingly plead a nervous stomachache, no
more than a sign of a sensitive constitution; otherwise, she would not have let him see her.

“Why don’t you take something for it?” Ulrich asked her.

“Ah,” Diotima sighed, “it’s only this excitement. My nerves can’t take it much longer!”

There was a little pause, because this was really Ulrich’s cue to inquire after Arnheim, but he was more interested in finding out about the things that directly concerned himself, and he could not immediately find a way. Finally, he asked:

“Liberating the soul from civilization is not so easy, I suppose?” and added: “I’m afraid I can flatter myself that I predicted long since that your efforts to blaze a trail for the spirit into the world would come to a painful end!”
Diotima remembered how she had escaped from the reception and sat with Ulrich on the shoe bench in her foyer: she had been almost as depressed then as she was today, and yet there had been countless risings and ebbings of hope since then.

‘Wasn’t it glorious, dear friend,’ she said, ‘when we still believed in the great idea! Today I can say that the world listened, but how deeply disappointed I am myself!’

“But why, actually?” Ulrich asked.

“I don’t know. It must be my fault.”

She was about to add something about Arnheim, but Ulrich wanted to know what people had made of the great demonstration; the last he remembered of it was not finding Diotima at home after Count Leinsdorf had sent him to prepare her for some firm intervention, while making sure she would not worry.
Diotima made a disdainful gesture. “The police arrested a few young people, and then they let them go; Leinsdorf was very annoyed, but what else could they do? Now he’s backing Wisnieczky more than ever, and insists that something must be done. But Wisnieczky can’t organize any propaganda if no one knows what it’s supposed to be for!”

“I hear it’s supposed to be Watchword: Action!” Ulrich interjected. The name of Baron Wisnieczky, who as Cabinet Minister had been wrecked by the opposition of the German nationalist parties—so that putting him at the head of the committee to drum up support for the undefined great patriotic idea of the Parallel Campaign could only arouse intense suspicion—vividly reminded Ulrich of His Grace’s political ministrations, whose fruit this was. It seemed that the casual course of Count Leinsdorf’s thinking—perhaps confirmed by the predictable failure of all attempts to electrify the spirit of the
homeland, and beyond that of all Europe, by a concerted effort of its leading intellects—had now led him to the realization that it would be best to give this spirit a push, no matter from what direction. In His Grace’s deliberations this might also have been supported by experiences with cases of possession, whose victims were sometimes supposed to be helped by being ruthlessly screamed at or shaken. But this speculation, which had rushed through Ulrich’s mind before Diotima could reply, was now interrupted by her answer. This time, the invalid again addressed him as “dear friend.”

“My dear friend,” she said, “there is some truth in that! Our century is thirsting for action. An action—”


“It doesn’t matter! In action there is a magnificent pessimism about words. We
can’t deny that in the past all we have done is talk. We have lived for great and eternal words and ideals; for a heightening of human values; for being true to our inmost selves; for an ever-increasing enrichment of life. We have striven for a synthesis, we have lived for new aesthetic joys and new standards of happiness, and I won’t deny that the quest for truth is child’s play compared with the immense responsibility of becoming a truth oneself. But we overreached, considering the meager sense of reality the human soul has in our time, and we have lived in a dream of yearning, but for nothing!”

Diotima had urgently risen on one elbow. “It’s a healthy sign these days to renounce the search for the buried entrance to the soul and try instead to come to terms with life as it is!” she concluded.

Now Ulrich had a second, authorized version of the slogan “Action!” to set beside the conjectural Leinsdorfian one. Diotima
seemed to have changed her library books. He remembered seeing her, as he came in, surrounded by piles of books, but it had grown too dark to make out the titles; besides, some were covered by the meditative young woman’s body as by a great serpent that had now reared up higher and was eagerly watching his face. Since girlhood Diotima had been inclined to nourish herself on very sentimental and subjective books, but now, as Ulrich gathered from what she said, she had been seized by that spiritual urge for renewal which is constantly at work, striving to find what it has failed to find in the ideas of the last twenty years in the ideas of the next twenty years. This may turn out to be the root of those great changes of mood in history, which seesaw between humanitarianism and ruthlessness, rage and indifference, or other such contradictions for which there seems to be no adequate explanation. It passed through Ulrich’s mind that the
little residue of uncertainty left over from every moral experience, about which he had talked so much with Agathe, must really be the cause of this human instability; but because he shied away from the pleasure with which he remembered those conversations, he forced his thoughts to turn aside and focus instead on the General, who had been the first to tell him that the age was receiving a new spirit, and had done so in a tone of healthy irritation that left no room for beguiling oneself with bewitching doubts. And because he was now thinking of the General, the latter’s request that Ulrich might look into the ruffled relationship between his cousin and Arnheim came to mind, so that he ended by responding bluntly to Diotima’s speech of farewell to the soul:

“‘Boundless love’ doesn’t seem to have quite agreed with you!” “Oh, you’re incorrigible!” His cousin sighed, letting herself fall back into her pillows, where she closed her
eyes; unaccustomed to such straightforward language in Ulrich’s absence, she needed time to recollect just how much she had confided in him. But suddenly his nearness brought it back. She dimly remembered a talk with Ulrich about “love beyond measure,” which had been continued at their last or penultimate meeting: a conversation in which she had sworn that souls could step outside the prison of the body, or at least lean out of it halfway, as it were, and Ulrich had retorted that these were the delirious ravings of starved love, and that she should concede her “concession” to Arnheim, or himself, or anyone at all; he had even named Tuzzi in that connection, as she now recalled—suggestions of this kind were probably easier to remember than the rest of the things a man like Ulrich talks about. At the time, she had probably been justified in feeling this as impudent, but since past pain is a harmless old friend compared with present
pain, it now enjoyed the advantage of being a memory of frankness between friends. So Diotima opened her eyes again and said: “There’s probably no perfect love on this earth!”

She said it with a smile, but beneath her compress her brow was sadly furrowed, which gave her face a curiously twisted expression in the dim light. In whatever concerned her personally Diotima was not averse to believing in supernatural possibilities. Even General Stumm’s unexpected appearance at the Council meeting had startled her as though it were die doing of spirits, and as a child she had prayed that she might never die. This made it easier for her to believe in a supernatural way in her relationship with Arnheim, or more accurately, to believe with that not quite complete disbelief, that something-that-cannot-be-ruled-out, which today has become the basic attitude in matters of faith. Had Arnheim been capable of
doing more than drawing something invisible from her soul and his own, something that touched in midair when they were five yards apart, or had their eyes been able to meet in such a way that something tangible would come of it—a coffee bean, a barley-corn, an ink stain—some trace of some kind of real use or even just a suggestion of progress, then the next thing Diotima would have expected was that someday this connection would go higher still, turning into one of those otherworldly connections that it is just as hard to form an exact idea of as it is of most worldly ones. She could even put up with Arnheim’s lately being away more often and for longer periods than before, and his being immersed to a surprising degree in his business affairs even on days when he was present. She permitted herself no doubt that his love for her was still the great event in his life, and whenever they came together again alone, the level of their souls instantly rose
so high, and their sense of contact was so powerful, that their feelings were struck dumb, and if they could not find anything impersonal to talk about, a vacuum developed that left a bitter exhaustion in its wake. However little the possibility could be excluded that this was passion, she could just as little bring herself—accustomed as she was by the times she lived in to regard everything not practical as merely a matter of belief, or rather of unsettled unbelief—to exclude the possibility that something more would come of it, which would be contrary to all reasonable expectations. But at this moment, when she had opened her eyes to look straight at Ulrich, of whom she could make out only a dark outline, and who stood there in silence, she asked herself: ‘What am I waiting for? What am I really expecting to happen?’ At length Ulrich said: “But Arnheim wanted to marry you!” Diotima again propped herself up on her arm, and
she said: “Can one solve the problem of love by getting divorced or married?”

“So I was mistaken about the pregnancy,” Ulrich noted mentally, unable to think of anything to say in response to his cousin’s outburst. Then he said abruptly: “I warned you about Arnheim!” Perhaps he now felt obligated to tell her what he knew about the tycoon’s mixing up both their souls in his business deals; but he instantly dropped the idea, for he felt that in this conversation every word had its allotted place, like the objects in his study that he had found carefully dusted on his return, as though he had been dead for the space of a minute.

Diotima chided him: “You shouldn’t take it so lightly. There’s a deep friendship between Arnheim and me; and if at times there’s also something else between us, something I might call a great anxiety, it only comes from our frankness. I don’t know
whether you’ve ever experienced this, or whether you can: between two people who reach a certain level of emotional rapport any lie becomes so impossible that they can hardly speak to each other at all anymore!”

In this reproof Ulrich’s finely tuned ear heard that his cousin’s soul was more accessible to him than usual, and because he was highly amused by her unintended confession that she could not talk with Arnheim without lying, he demonstrated his own openness for a while by not saying anything either. Then, when she had lain back again, he bent over her arm and kissed its hand in a gentle gesture of friendship. Light as the marrow of elder twigs it rested in his own, and remained lying there even after the kiss. Her pulse throbbed on his fingertips. The powder-fine scent of her nearness clung to his face like a puff of cloud. And although this gallant kiss on the hand had been only in jest, it was like infidelity in leaving behind a
certain bitter aftertaste of desire, of having leaned so closely over a person that one drank from her like an animal, and no longer saw one’s own image rising back up out of the water.

‘What are you thinking?’ Diotima asked. Ulrich merely shook his head and so gave her a fresh opportunity—in the darkness that was brightened only by a last velvety glimmering—to make comparative studies of silence. She was reminded of a wonderful saying: “There are people with whom not even the greatest hero would trust himself to remain silent.” Or it was something like that. She seemed to remember that it was a quotation; Arnheim had used it, and she had applied it to herself. Other than Arnheim’s, she had since the first weeks of her marriage never held a man’s hand in hers for longer than two seconds; but it was happening now with Ulrich’s hand. Wrapped up in herself as she was, she overlooked what
the next step might be, but found herself a moment later pleasantly convinced that she had been quite right not to wait idly for the hour of supreme love—perhaps yet to come, perhaps not—but to use the time of temporizing indecision to devote herself somewhat more to her husband. Married people have it easy; where others would be breaking faith with a lover, they can say that they are remembering their duty.

And because Diotima told herself that, come what might, she must do her duty for now at the post where fate had placed her, she had undertaken to improve her husband’s shortcomings and infuse him with a little more soul. Again a poet’s words came to mind, roughly to the effect that there was no deeper despair than to be entwined in a common fate with a person one did not love; and that also proved that she must make an effort to feel something for Tuzzi as long as their fate had not separated them. In
sensible contrast to the incalculable events of the soul, from which she had made him suffer long enough, she set about it systematically; she felt pride in the books on which she was lying, for they concerned themselves with the physiology and psychology of marriage, and somehow everything harmonized: that it was dark, that she had these books by her, that Ulrich was holding her hand, that she had conveyed to him the magnificent pessimism that she might soon be expressing in her public role by renouncing her ideals. So thinking, Diotima pressed Ulrich’s hand from time to time as if her suitcases were standing packed for her to take leave of everything that had been. She moaned softly, and the faintest wave of pain ran through her body by way of excuse; but Ulrich reassured her with the pressure of his fingertips. After this had happened several times, Diotima thought it really might be too much, yet she no longer dared to withdraw her hand,
because it lay so light and dry in his, even trembling at times, as she herself recognized, like an inadmissible indication of the physiology of love, which she had not the slightest intention of betraying by some awkward movement of flight.

It was “Rachelle,” busying herself in the adjoining room—she had been acting in an oddly impertinent fashion lately—who put an end to this scene by suddenly turning on the light on the other side of the open door. Diotima hastily pulled her hand away from Ulrich’s, in which a space that had been filled with weightlessness remained lying for a moment longer.

“Rachelle,” Diotima called in a hushed voice, “turn the light on in here too!”

When this was done their illumined heads had the look of something just emerged from the depths, as though the darkness had not quite dried off them.
Shadows lay around Diotima’s mouth, giving it moistness and fullness; the little mother-of-pearl bulges on her neck and under her cheeks, which ordinarily seemed to have been created for the delectation of lovers, were hard as a linocut and shaded with slashes of ink. Ulrich’s head, too, loomed up in the unaccustomed light, painted in black and white like that of a savage on the warpath. Blinking, he tried to make out the titles on the books surrounding Diotima, and saw with amazement what his cousin’s choice of reading matter revealed about her desire to learn the hygiene of body and soul. “Someday he’s going to hurt me!” she suddenly thought, following his glance and troubled by it, but it did not enter her consciousness in the form of that sentence: she merely felt much too defenseless as she lay there in the light under his gaze and struggled to recover her poise. With a gesture meant to be thoroughly superior, as
befitted a woman “independent” of everything, she waved her hand over her reading and said in the most matter-of-fact tone: “Would you believe that adultery sometimes strikes me as far too simple a solution for marital conflict?”

“At all events it’s the most sparing,” Ulrich replied, irritating her with his mocking tone. “I’d say it can do no harm at all.”

Diotima gave him a reproachful look and made a sign to warn him that Rachel could hear what they were saying from the next room. Then she said aloud: “That’s certainly not what I meant!” and called her maid, who appeared sullenly and accepted with bitter jealousy her being sent out.

This interlude had, however, given their feelings time to put themselves to rights. The illusion, favored by the darkness, that they were committing a tiny infidelity together, though rather indefinably and toward no one
in particular, evaporated in the light, and Ulrich now turned to the business that had to be attended to before he could leave.

“I haven’t yet told you that I’m resigning as Secretary,” he began.

Diotima, however, had heard of it, and told him that he would have to stay on; there was no way out of it. “There’s such an immense amount of work still to be done,” she pleaded. “Be patient a while longer; we’re bound to find a solution soon! A real secretary will be found to place at your disposal.”

This impersonal “will be found” aroused Ulrich’s curiosity, and he asked for details.

“Arnheim has offered to lend you his own secretary.”

“No, thanks,” Ulrich replied. “I have the feeling that might not be quite disinterested.” Again he was more than strongly
tempted to let Diotima in on the simple connection with the oil fields, but she had not even noticed the ambiguity of his answer, and simply continued:

“Apart from that, my husband has also offered to let you have one of the clerks in his office.”

“Wouldn’t you mind?”

“To be frank, I wouldn’t be entirely happy about that,” Diotima said more energetically. “Especially as there’s no dearth of possibilities. Even your friend the General has given me to understand that he’d be delighted to send you an aide from his department.”

“And Leinsdorf?”

“These three offers were made to me spontaneously, so I had no reason to ask Leinsdorf; but I’m sure he wouldn’t shrink from making a sacrifice.”
“Everyone’s spoiling me,” Ulrich commented, summing up with these words the amazing readiness of Arnheim, Tuzzi, and Stumm to plant a man of their own inside the Parallel Campaign at such low cost. “But perhaps it would be most advisable for me to take on your husband’s clerk.”

“My dear friend—” Diotima said, still protesting, but she did not really know how to go on, which was probably why something quite tangled came out. Again she propped herself up on an elbow and said with feeling: “I reject adultery as too crude a solution of marital conflicts—I’ve told you that! But even so, there’s nothing so hard as being linked for life in a single destiny with a person one doesn’t love enough!”

This was a most unnatural cry of nature. But Ulrich, unmoved, would not be shaken from his resolve. “No doubt Section Chief Tuzzi would like this way of having a hand in your operation; but so would the
others,” he pointed out. “All three are in love with you, and each of them has to reconcile this somehow with his duty.” How odd, he thought, that Diotima did not understand either the language of facts or that of the comments he made on them, and rising to take his leave, he added with even heavier irony: “The only one who loves you unselfishly is myself—because I have no duties of any land and no commitments. But feelings without distraction are destructive; you’ve meanwhile found that out for yourself, and you have always regarded me with a justifiable, even if only instinctive, mistrust.”

Although Diotima did not know why, this was precisely and endearingly the reason that she was pleased to see Ulrich siding with her own house in this matter of the secretary, and she did not let go of the hand he offered her.

“And how does this fit in with your affair with ‘that’ woman?” she asked, playfully
taking her cue from his remark—insofar as Diotima could be playful; the effect was rather that of a shot-putter playing with a feather.

Ulrich did not know whom she could mean.

“That judge’s wife you introduced to me!”

“You noticed that, cousin?”

“Dr. Arnheim drew my attention to it.”

“Oh, did he? How flattering that he should think he can hurt my standing with you in this fashion. But of course my relations with the lady are entirely innocent!” Ulrich stated, defending Bonadea’s honor in the conventional fashion.

“She was in your house twice during your absence,” Diotima said with a laugh. “The first time, we happened to be passing by, and we heard about the second time
some other way. So there’s no point in trying to be discreet. But on the other hand, I wish I could understand you! I simply can’t!”

“How on earth could I explain this to you, of all people!”

“Try!” Diotima commanded. She had put on her expression of “official immorality,” a sort of bespectacled look she donned whenever her mind commanded her to speak or hear things that were out of bounds for her soul as a lady. But Ulrich declined and repeated that his understanding of Bonadea could only be guesswork.

“All right,” Diotima gave in, “even though your lady friend herself was not sparing with her hints! She seems to feel called upon to justify some wrong or other in my eyes. But do speak of this, if you’d rather, as if you were merely guessing!”

Now Ulrich felt a thirst for knowledge, and he learned that Bonadea had been to see
Diotima several times, and not only in matters connected with the Parallel Campaign and her husband’s position.

“I must admit I find her a beautiful woman,” Diotima conceded, “and she is extraordinarily high-minded. I’m really upset that you’re always eliciting confidences from me but always withholding yours!”

At this moment Ulrich’s attitude was approximately “die devil take both of you!” He felt like giving Diotima a scare and paying Bonadea back for her intrusiveness, or else he was suddenly feeling the full distance between himself and the life in which he had been indulging.

“All right,” he told her, summoning up a gloomy expression: “The woman is a nymphomaniac and I find that irresistible!”

Diotima knew “academically” what nymphomania was. There was a pause, and
then she drawled: “The poor woman! And you find that attractive?”

“Isn’t it idiotic?” Ulrich said.

Diotima wanted to know “the details”—would he explain this “lamentable phenomenon” and enable her to understand it in “human terms”? He did so without exactly going into detail, but she was nevertheless overcome by a feeling of satisfaction that doubtless rested on that well-known gratitude to God that she was not like the other woman; but at its apex this feeling faded into dismay and curiosity, which was not to be without influence on her subsequent relations with Ulrich. Pensively she said: “But it must be simply awful to embrace a person who doesn’t mean anything to you!”

“You think so?” her cousin asked candidly. At this insinuation Diotima felt hurt and indignant to the marrow, but she could not let herself show it; she contented herself
with letting go of his hand and sinking back into her pillows with a dismissive gesture. “You never should have told me this!” she said from where she lay. “You treated that poor woman very badly just now, and you’ve been most indiscreet!”

“I’m never indiscreet!” Ulrich objected, and could not help laughing at his cousin. “You’re really being unfair. You are the first woman to whom I’ve ever confided anything about another woman, and it was you who made me do it!”

Diotima was flattered. She wanted to say something of the same kind, to the effect that without a spiritual transformation one cheated oneself of the best in life; but she could not come out with it because it suddenly seemed too personal. Finally, something from one of the books surrounding her prompted her to answer noncommitally, from within the protection of her official persona: “Like all men,” she chided him,
“you make the mistake of treating your love partner not as an equal but merely as a complement to yourself, and then you’re disappointed. Has it never occurred to you that the only way to a transcendent, harmonious eroticism may lie through stricter self-discipline?”

Ulrich’s jaw nearly dropped, but he answered in spontaneous self-defense: “Do you know that Section Chief Tuzzi has already grilled me today on the possibilities of the origin and training of the soul?”

Diotima sat up straight: “What? Tuzzi talks with you about soul?” she asked in amazement.

“Of course he does; he’s trying to find out what it is,” Ulrich assured her, but he could not be induced to stay any longer. He merely promised to betray a confidence some other time and tell her all about that too.
With this visit to Diotima the restless state Ulrich had been in since his return came to an end. On the afternoon of the very next day he sat down at his desk, and in doing so felt at home again, and began writing a letter to Agathe.

It was clear to him—as simple and clear as a windless day sometimes is—that her rash scheme was extremely dangerous. What had happened so far could still be taken as a risky prank, of no concern to anyone but themselves, but that depended entirely on its being rescinded before it acquired connections with reality, and the danger was
growing with every passing day. Ulrich had written this much when he stopped, uneasy at the thought of entrusting to the mails a letter in which this was so openly discussed. He told himself that it would be better in every way to take the next train back, in place of the letter; but of course this made no sense to him either, since he had let days go by without doing anything about it. He knew he would not go.

He realized that there was something behind this tantamount to a choice: he simply felt like letting things take their course and seeing what came of this incident. So his problem was just how far he actually, definitely could want to risk it, and all sorts of wide-ranging thoughts went through his mind.

It occurred to him right at the start, for instance, that whenever he had taken a “moral” stance so far, he had always been psychologically worse off than when he was
doing or thinking something that might usually be considered “immoral.” This is a common occurrence, for in situations that are in conflict with their surroundings these ideas and actions develop all their energies, while in the mere doing of what is right and proper they understandably behave as if they were paying taxes. This suggests that all evil is carried out with zest and imagination, while good is distinguished by an unmistakable dreariness and dearth of feeling. Ulrich recalled that his sister had expressed this moral dilemma quite casually by asking him whether being good was no longer a good thing. It ought to be difficult and breathtaking, she had maintained, and wondered why, nevertheless, moral people were almost always bores.

He smiled contentedly, spinning this thought out with the realization that Agathe and he were as one in their particular opposition to Hagauer, which could be roughly
characterized as that of people who were bad in a good way to a man who was good in a bad way. Leaving out of account the broad middle of life’s spectrum, which is, reasonably enough, occupied by people whose minds have not been troubled by the general terms good and evil since they let go of their mothers apron strings, there remain the two extremes where purposeful moral efforts are still made. Today these are left to just such bad/good and good/bad people, the first kind never having seen good fly or heard it sing, thus expecting their fellowmen to enthuse with them about a moral landscape where stuffed birds perch on dummy trees, while the second kind, the good/bad mortals, exasperated by their competitors, industriously show a penchant for evil, at least in theory, as if they were convinced that only wrongdoing, which is emotionally not quite as threadbare as doing good, still twitches with a bit of moral vitality. And so Ulrich’s
world—not, of course, that he was fully aware of this—had at that time the option of letting itself be ruined by either its lame morality or its lively immoralists, and to this day it probably does not know which of those two choices it finally embraced with stunning success, unless that majority who can never spare the time to concern themselves with morality in general did pay attention to one case in particular because they had lost confidence in their own situation and, as a result, had of course lost a number of other things as well. For bad/bad people, who can so easily be blamed for everything, were even then as rare as they are today, and the good/good ones represent a mission as far removed as a distant nebula. Still, it was precisely of them that Ulrich was thinking, while everything else he appeared to be thinking about left him cold.

And he gave his thoughts an even more general and impersonal form by setting the
relationship that exists between the demands “Do!” and “Don’t!” in the place of good and evil. For as long as a particular morality is in the ascendant—and this is just as valid for the spirit of “Love thy neighbor” as it is for a horde of Vandals— “Don’t!” is still only the negative and natural corollary of “Do!” Doing and leaving undone are red hot, and the flaws they contain don’t count because they are the flaws of heroes and martyrs. In this condition good and evil are identical with the happiness and unhappiness of the whole person. But as soon as the contested system has achieved dominance and spread itself out, and its fulfillment no longer faces any special hurdles, the relationship between imperative and taboo perforce passes through a decisive phase where duty is not born anew and alive each day but is leached and drained and cut up into ifs and buts, ready to serve all sorts of uses. Here a process begins, in the further course of which virtue and vice, because of
their common root in the same rules, laws, exceptions, and limitations, come to look more and more alike, until that curious and ultimately unbearable self-contradiction arises which was Ulrich’s point of departure: namely, that the distinction between good and evil loses all meaning when weighed against the pleasure of a pure, deep, spontaneous mode of action, a pleasure that can leap like a spark from permissible as well as from forbidden activities. Indeed, whoever takes an unbiased view is likely to find that the negative aspect of morality is more highly charged with this tension than the positive: While it seems relatively natural that certain actions called “bad” must not be allowed to happen, actions such as taking what belongs to others or overindulgence in sensual gratification, or, if they are committed, at least ought not to be committed, the corresponding affirmative moral traditions, such as unlimited generosity in giving or the
urge to mortify the flesh, have already almost entirely disappeared; and where they are still practiced they are practiced by fools, cranks, or bloodless prigs. In such a condition, where virtue is decrepit and moral conduct consists chiefly in the restraint of immoral conduct, it can easily happen that immoral conduct appears to be not only more spontaneous and vital than its opposite, but actually more moral, if one may use the term not in the sense of law and justice but with regard to whatever passion may still be aroused by matters of conscience. But could anything possibly be more perverse than to incline inwardly toward evil because, with all one has left of a soul, one is seeking good?

Ulrich had never felt this perversity more keenly than at this moment, when the rising arc his reflections had followed led him back to Agathe again. Her innate readiness to act in the good/bad mode— to resort once more to the term they had coined in
passing—as so notably exemplified in her tampering with their father’s will, offended the same innate readiness in his own nature, which had merely taken on an abstract theoretical form, something like a priest’s admiration of the Devil, while as a person he was not only able to lead his life more or less according to the rules but even, as he could see, did not wish to be disturbed in so doing. With as much melancholy satisfaction as ironic clear-sightedness, he noted that all his theoretical preoccupation with evil basically amounted to this, that he wanted to protect the bad things that happened from the bad people who undertook them, and he was suddenly overcome by a longing for goodness, like a man who has been wasting his time in foreign parts dreaming of coming home one day and going straight to the well in his native village for a drink of water. If he had not been caught up in this comparison, he might have noticed that his whole effort
to see Agathe as a morally confused person, such as the present age produces in profusion, was only a pretext to screen out a prospect that frightened him a good deal more. For his sisters conduct, which certainly did not pass muster objectively, exerted a remarkable fascination as soon as one dreamed along with it; for then all the controversies and indecisions vanished, and one was left with the impression of a passionate, affirmative virtue lusting for action, which could easily seem, compared with its lifeless daily counterpart, to be some kind of ancient vice.

Ulrich was not the man to indulge himself lightly in such exaltations of his feelings, least of all with this letter to write, so he redirected his mind into general reflections. These would have been incomplete had he not remembered how easily and often, in the times he had lived through, the longing for some duty rooted in completeness had led to
first one virtue, then another, being singled out from among the available supply, to be made the focus of noisy glorification. National, Christian, humanistic virtues had all taken their turn; once, it was the virtue of chromium steel, another time, the virtue of kindness; then it was individuality, and then fellowship; today it is the fraction of a second, and yesterday it was historical equilibrium. The changing moods of public life basically depend on the exchange of one such ideal for another: it had always left Ulrich unmoved, and only made him feel that he was standing on the sidelines. Even now all it meant for him was a filling in of the general picture, for only incomplete insight can lead one to believe that one can get at life’s moral inexplicability, whose complications have become overwhelming, by means of one of the interpretations already embedded within it. Such efforts merely resemble the movements of a sick person restlessly changing his
position, while the paralysis that felled him progresses inexorably. Ulrich was convinced that the state of affairs that gave rise to these efforts was inescapable and characterized the level from which every civilization goes into decline, because no civilization has so far been capable of replacing its lost inner elasticity. He was also convinced that the same thing that had happened to every past moral system would happen to every future one. For the slackening of moral energy has nothing to do with the province of the Commandments or the keeping of them: it is independent of their distinctions; it cannot be affected by any outer discipline but is an entirely inner process, synonymous with the weakening of the significance of all actions and of faith in the unity of responsibility for them.

And so Ulrich’s thoughts, without his having intended it, found their way back to the idea he had ironically characterized to Count Leinsdorf as the “General Secretariat
for Precision and Soul,” and although he had never spoken of it other than flippantly and in jest, he now realized that all his adult life he had consistently behaved as though such a General Secretariat lay within the realm of possibility. Perhaps, he could say by way of excuse, every thoughtful person harbors in himself some such idea of order, just as grown men may still wear next to their skin the picture of a saint that their mother hung around their necks when they were small. And this image of order, which no one dares either to take seriously or to put away, must be more or less something like this: On one hand, it vaguely stands for the longing for some law of right living, a natural, iron law that allows no exceptions and excludes no objections: that is, as liberating as intoxication and sober as the truth. On the other hand, however, it evinces the conviction that one will never behold such a law with one’s own eyes, never think it out with one’s own
thoughts, that no one person’s mission or power can bring it about but only an effort by everyone—unless it is only a delusion.

Ulrich hesitated for an instant. He was doubtless a believing person who just didn’t believe in anything. Even in his greatest dedication to science he had never managed to forget that people’s goodness and beauty come from what they believe, not from what they know. But faith had always been bound up with knowledge, even if that knowledge was illusory, ever since those primordial days of its magic beginnings. That ancient knowledge has long since rotted away, dragging belief down with it into the same decay, so that today the connection must be established anew. Not, of course, by raising faith “to the level of knowledge,” but by still in some way making it take flight from that height. The art of transcending knowledge must again be practiced. And since no one man can do this, all men must turn their
minds to it, whatever else their minds might be on. When Ulrich at this moment thought about the ten-year plan, or the hundred- or thousand-year plan that mankind would have to devise in order to work toward a goal it can have no way of knowing, he soon realized that this was what he had long imagined, under all sorts of names, as the truly experimental life. For what he meant by the term “faith” was not so much that stunted desire to know, the credulous ignorance that is what most people take it to be, but rather a knowledgeable intuition, something that is neither knowledge nor fantasy, but is not faith either; it is just that “something else” which eludes all these concepts.

He suddenly pulled the letter toward him, but immediately pushed it away again.

The stern glow on his face went out, and his dangerous favorite idea struck him as ridiculous. As though with one glance through a suddenly opened window, he felt
what was really around him: cannons and business deals. The notion that people who lived in this fashion could ever join in a planned navigation of their spiritual destiny was simply inconceivable, and Ulrich had to admit that historical development had never come about by means of any such coherent combination of ideas as the mind of the individual may just manage in a pinch; the course of history was always wasteful and dissipated, as if it had been flung on the table by the fist of some low-life gambler. He actually felt a little ashamed. Everything he had thought during the last hour was suspiciously reminiscent of a certain “Inquiry for the Drafting of a Guiding Resolution to Ascertain the Desires of the Concerned Sections of the Population”; even the fact that he was moralizing at all, this thinking theoretically that surveyed Nature by candlelight, seemed completely unnatural, while the simple man, accustomed to the clarity of the
sun, goes straight for the next item, unbothered by any problem beyond the very definite one of whether he can risk this move and make it work.

At this point Ulrich’s thoughts flowed back again from these general considerations to himself, and he felt what his sister meant to him. It was to her he had revealed that curious and unlimited, incredible, and unforgettable state of mind in which everything is an affirmation: the condition in which one is incapable of any spiritual movement except a moral one, therefore the only state in which there exists a morality without interruption, even though it may only consist in all actions floating ungrounded within it. And all Agathe had done was to stretch out her hand toward it. She was the person who stretched out her hand and made Ulrich’s reflections give way to the bodies and forms of the real world. All his thoughts now appeared to him a mere delaying and transition. He decided
to “take a chance” on what might come of Agathe’s idea, and at this moment he could not care less that the mysterious promise it held out had started with what was commonly viewed as a reprehensible act. One could only wait and see whether the morality of “rising or sinking” would show itself as applicable here as the simple morality of honesty. He remembered his sister’s passionate question as to whether he himself believed what he was saying, but he could affirm this even now as little as he could then. He admitted to himself that he was waiting for Agathe to be able to answer this question.

The phone rang shrilly, and Walter was suddenly rushing at him with flustered explanations and hasty snatches of words. Ulrich listened indifferently but readily, and when he put down the receiver and straightened up he still felt the ringing of its bell, now finally stopping. Depth and darkness came flooding back into his
surroundings to soothe him, though he could not have said whether it happened as sounds or colors; it was a deepening of all his senses. Smiling, he picked up the sheet of paper on which he had begun writing to his sister and, before he left the room, slowly tore it into tiny pieces.
Meanwhile Walter, Clarisse, and the prophet Meingast were sitting around a platter loaded with radishes, tangerines, almonds, big Turkish prunes, and cream cheese, consuming this delicious and wholesome supper. The prophet, again wearing only his wool cardigan over his rather bony torso, made a point now and again of praising the natural refreshments offered to him, while Clarisse’s brother, Siegmund, sat apart, with his hat and gloves on, reporting on yet another conversation he had “cultivated” with Dr. Friedenthal, the assistant medical officer at the psychiatric clinic, to make
arrangements for his “completely crazy” sister Clarisse to see Moosbrugger.

“Friedenthal insists that he can do it only with a permit from the District Court,” he wound up dispassionately, “and the District Court is not satisfied with the application I obtained for all of you from the Final Hour Welfare Society but requires a recommendation from the Embassy, because we lied, unfortunately, about Clarisse’s being a foreigner. So there’s nothing else to be done: Tomorrow Dr. Meingast will have to go to the Swiss Embassy!”

Siegmund, who was the elder, resembled his sister, except that his face was unexpressive. If one looked at them side by side, the nose, mouth, and eyes in Clarisse’s pallid face suggested cracks in parched soil, while the same features in Siegmund’s face had the soft, slightly blurred contours of rolling grassland, although he was clean-shaven except for a small mustache. He had
not shed his middle-class appearance nearly as much as his sister, and it gave him an ingenuous naturalness even at the moment when he was so brazenly disposing of a philosophers precious time. No one would have been surprised if thunder and lightning had burst from the plate of radishes at this imposition, but the great man took it amiably—which his admirers regarded as an event that would make a great anecdote—and blinked an assenting eye toward Siegmund like an eagle that tolerates a sparrow on the perch beside him.

Nonetheless, the sudden and insufficiently discharged tension made it impossible for Walter to contain himself any longer. He pushed back his plate, reddened like a little cloud at sunrise, and stated emphatically that no sane person who was neither a doctor nor an attendant had any business inside an insane asylum. On him, too, the sage bestowed a barely perceptible
nod. Siegmund, who in the course of his life had appropriated quite a few opinions, articulated this assent with the hygienic words: “It is, no doubt, a revolting habit of the affluent middle class to see something demonic in mental cases and criminals.”

“But in that case,” Walter exclaimed, “please tell me why you all want to help Clarisse do something you don’t approve of and that can only make her more nervous than ever?”

His wife did not dignify this with an answer. She made an unpleasant face, whose expression was so remote from reality as to be frightening; two long, arrogant lines ran down alongside her nose, and her chin came to a hard point. Siegmund did not feel himself obliged or authorized to speak for the others, so Walters question was followed by a short silence, until Meingast said quietly
and equably: “Clarisse has suffered too strong an impression. It can’t be left at that.”

“When?” Walter demanded.

“Just the other day—that evening at the window.”

Walter turned pale, because he was the only one who had not been told before—Clarisse had evidently told Meingast and even her brother. Isn’t that just like her! he thought.

And although it was not exactly called for, he suddenly had the feeling, across the plate of produce, that they were all about ten years younger. That was the time when Meingast—still the old, untrans-formed Meingast—was bowing out and Clarisse had opted for Walter. Later she confessed to him that Meingast had still, even though he had already given her up, sometimes kissed and fondled her. The memory was like the large arc of a swing. Walter had been swung
higher and higher: he succeeded in everything he did then, even though there were lots of downswings too. Yet even then Clarisse had been unable to speak with Walter when Meingast was present; he had often had to find out from others what she was thinking and doing. With him she froze up. “When you touch me, I freeze up!” she had said to him. “My body goes solemn—that’s quite different from the way it is with Meingast!” And when he kissed her for the first time she said to him: “I promised Mother never to do anything like this.” Later on, though, she admitted to him that in those days Meingast was always secretly playing footsie with her under the dining room table. It was all Walters doing! The richness of the inner development he had called forth in her had hindered her freedom of movement, as he explained it to himself.

Now he thought of the letters he and Clarisse had written to each other in those
days; he still believed that if one were to search through all of literature it would be hard to find anything to match them for passion and originality. In those stormy days he would punish Clarisse, when she was keeping company with Meingast, by running off—and then he would write her a letter; and she wrote him letters, swearing that she was faithful, while candidly reporting that Meingast had kissed her once again on her knee, through her stocking. Walter had wanted to publish these letters as a book, and still thought, off and on, that he would do so someday. So far, unfortunately, nothing had come of it except for a fateful misunderstanding with Clarisse’s governess. One day Walter had said to her: “You’ll see, soon I shall make up for everything!” He had only meant it in his sense: namely, how splendidly he would be justified in the family’s eyes once publication of the letters brought him fame and success; for strictly speaking,
things between him and Clarisse at that time were not what they should be. Clarisse’s governess—a family heirloom, pensioned off in the honorable guise of serving as an assistant mother, misunderstood him, however, in her sense, and a rumor promptly arose in the family that Walter was about to put himself in a position to ask for Clarisse’s hand in marriage; once the word was out, it led to very particular joys and restraints. “Real life” instantly awakened: Walters father announced that he would no longer pay his son’s bills unless Walter began to earn his keep. Walters prospective father-in-law invited him to his studio, where he spoke to him of the hardships and disillusionments awaiting the practitioner of pure, disinterested art, whether in the visual arts, music, or literature. And finally both Walter and Clarisse began to itch with the suddenly tangible thought of having their own house, children, openly sharing a bedroom: like a
crack in the skin that cannot heal because one unconsciously keeps scratching at it. And so it came to pass that Walter, only a few weeks after his impulsive words, actually became engaged to Clarisse, which made both of them very happy but also very tense, because it was the beginning of that search for an established place in life that burdens life with all the problems of Western civilization, since the position Walter was sporadically seeking had to pass muster not only as to income but as to how it would affect six major aspects of his life: Clarisse, himself, their love life, literature, music, and painting. Actually, they had only recently emerged from the whirlwind of complications unleashed as soon as he let his tongue run off with him in the elderly mademoiselle’s company, when he accepted his present position in the Department of Works and Monuments and moved with Clarisse into this modest little house, where the rest was up to fate.
In his heart Walter felt it would be quite pleasant if fate were now to call it a day: though the end would not be precisely what the beginning had promised—but then, when apples are ripe they don’t fall up the tree, but to the ground. That was what Walter was thinking, and meanwhile, across the table from him, above the diametrically opposite end of the colorful tray of wholesome vegetarian food, his wife’s small head hovered; Clarisse was trying to supplement Meingast’s explanation with the utmost objectivity, indeed as objectively as Meingast himself: “I must do something to pulverize the shock. The shock was too much for me, Meingast says,” she specified, and added on her own: “It was certainly no coincidence that that man stopped in the bushes right under my window.”

“Nonsense!” Walter waved this away as a sleeper waves off a fly. “It was just as much my window as yours!”
“Our window, then,” Clarisse corrected herself, her thin-lipped smile so pointed that one could not decide whether it expressed bitterness or scorn. “We attracted him. But would you like me to tell you what that man was doing? He was *stealing* sexual pleasure!”

It made Walters head ache, crammed full as it was of the past, and now the present was wedging itself in, leaving no clear difference between past and present. There were still bushes with their bright patches of foliage in Walters head, with bicycle paths winding among them. Their adventurous long trips and walks could have happened only this morning. Girls’ skirts were swinging again just as they had in those years when ankles had been boldly exposed for the first time and the hems of white petticoats had frothed with the new movements of a sports-loving generation. In those days, Walter thought—to put it mildly—that what was going on between him and Clarisse was
not all it should be, because what happened on these bike trips in the spring of the year they became engaged was in fact everything that can happen and leave a girl technically still a virgin. “Almost incredible, for such a nice girl!” Walter thought, reveling in his memories. Clarisse had called it “taking Meingast’s sins upon ourselves”—he had just gone abroad and was not yet known as Meingast. “It would be cowardly not to be sensual because he was!” was the way Clarisse phrased it, adding: “But with you and me I want it to be spiritual!” Walter did at times worry about the fact that these goings-on were too closely connected with the man who had been gone such a little while, but Clarisse replied: “People who aim at greatness, as we do in art, for instance, can’t be bothered with worrying about this and that.” Walter could remember the zeal with which they set about annihilating the past by repeating it in a new spirit, and the relish with
which they found out how to excuse illicit physical pleasures by magically attributing to them some transcendent purpose. At that time, Clarisse had been as energetic in her lustfulness as she was later in refusing herself to him, Walter admitted, letting his mind wander for a moment to dwell on the refractory thought that her breasts were still as taut today as they had been then. Everyone could see that, even through her clothes. Meingast happened to be staring at her breasts just then; perhaps he didn’t realize it. “Her breasts are mute!” Walter declaimed inwardly with all the richness of association of a dream or a poem; and in almost the same way, while this was happening, the reality of the present forced itself through the padding of emotions:

“Come, Clarisse, tell us what you’re thinking,” he heard Meingast prompting her, like a doctor or a teacher, in that polite,
formal tone he sometimes took with her since his return.

Walter also noticed that Clarisse was looking questioningly at Meingast.

“You were telling me about a certain Moosbrugger, that he was a carpenter....”

Clarisse kept her eyes on him.

“Who else was a carpenter? The Savior! Wasn’t that what you said? In fact, you even told me that you had written a letter about it to some influential person, didn’t you?”

“Stop it!” Walter burst out. His head was spinning. But he had no sooner expressed his protest than it occurred to him that the letter was something else he had not heard about, and growing weak, he asked: “What letter?”

He got no answer from anyone. Meingast, passing over his question, said: “It’s one of the most timely ideas. We’re incapable of
liberating ourselves by our own efforts, no doubt about it; we call it democracy, but that’s merely the political term for our psychological state, our you can do it this way, but you can also do it another way.’ Ours is the era of the ballot. Each year we determine our sexual ideal, the beauty queen, by ballot, and all we have done by making empirical science our intellectual ideal is to let the facts do the voting for us. We are living in an unphilosophical, dispirited age; it doesn’t have the courage to decide what is valuable and what isn’t, and democracy means, expressed most succinctly: Do whatever is happening! Incidentally, this is one of the most disgraceful vicious circles in all the history of our race.”

While he spoke, the prophet had irritatingly cracked and peeled a nut, the pieces of which he was now shoving into his mouth. Nobody had understood what he was saying. He broke off his speech in favor of a slow
chewing motion of his jaws, in which the turned-up tip of his nose also participated, while the rest of his face remained ascetically still, but he did not take his eyes off Clarisse. They remained fixed somewhere in the region of her breast. The eyes of both the other men involuntarily left the masters face to follow his abstracted gaze. Clarisse felt a suction, as though these six eyes might lift her right out of her chair if they remained fastened on her much longer. But the master vigorously gulped down the last of his nut and went on with his lecture:

“Clarisse has found out that Christian legend has decreed that the Savior was a carpenter. That’s not quite correct: his foster father was. Nor is she in the least justified in trying to make something of the fact that some criminal she’s heard of happens to be a carpenter too. Intellectually that’s simply beneath criticism. Morally it is frivolous. But it shows courage! It really does!”
Meingast paused, to let the force with which he had said “courage” take effect. Then he qui-edy continued: “She recently saw, as we did also, a psychopath exposing himself. She makes too much of it; there is in general far too much emphasis on sexuality these days. But Clarisse says: It is not by chance that this man stopped under my window....’ Now, let us try to understand her rightly. She’s wrong, for causally the incident is, of course, a coincidence. But what Clarisse is really saying is: If I regard everything as explained, then a person will never be able to change the world. She regards it as inexplicable that a murderer whose name, if I am not mistaken, is Moosbrugger happens to be a carpenter; she regards it as inexplicable that an unknown sufferer from sexual disturbances should have stopped just under her window; and so she has fallen into the habit of regarding all sorts of other things that happen to her as inexplicable and...” Again Meingast
kept his listeners waiting awhile; his voice had become reminiscent of a man with a re-
solve who is firmly but warily tiptoeing up to something, and now he pounced: “And so she will do something!” Meingast ended on a strong note.

It gave Clarisse goose pimples.

“I repeat,” Meingast said, “this is not subject to intellectual criticism. But intellectuality is, as we know, only the expression or the tool of a life that has dried out, while the point Clarisse is making may arise from another sphere: that of the will. Clarisse may never be able to explain what is happening to her, but she may well be able to solve it, re-
solve it. So she is quite right to call it ‘salvation’—she is instinctively using the right term for it. It would be easy for one of us to speak of delusional thinking, or to say that Clarisse is a person with weak nerves, but what would be the point? The world is currently so undeluded that it doesn’t know
when to hate or to love anything, and since we’re all of two minds about everything, all of us are neurasthenics and weaklings. In short,” the prophet concluded abruptly, “although it is not easy for a philosopher to renounce insight, it is probably the great, growing insight of the twentieth century that this is what must be done. For me, in Geneva, it is today of greater spiritual importance that we have a French boxing coach than that the dissector Rousseau did his thinking there!”

Meingast could have continued talking, now that he had hit his stride: To begin with, the idea of salvation had always been anti-intellectual. “What the world today needs more than anything else is a strong, healthy delusion” was what he had been on the point of saying, but he had swallowed it in favor of the other ending. Second, there was the concomitant physical meaning implied in the etymology of salvation, its link with “salve”
carrying an inference that deeds alone could save, or at least experiences involving the whole person, neck and crop. Third, he had been prepared to say that the over-intellectualization of the male could under certain conditions bring woman to the fore as the instinctive leader in action, of which Clarisse was one of the first examples. Finally, there were all the transformations of the salvation idea in the history of peoples, and the present movement from salvation as a purely religious concept, which had been dominant for centuries, toward the realization that salvation must be brought about by resoluteness of will and even, if necessary, by force. Saving the world by force happened to be his central idea at the moment.

Meanwhile, however, the suction of all those eyes on her was becoming more than Clarisse could stand, and she cut off the master’s discourse by turning to Siegmund,
as the point of least resistance, saying to him rather too loudly:

“That’s what I told you: we have to experience something ourselves to understand it. That’s why we have to go to the asylum ourselves!”

Walter, who had been peeling a tangerine as a way of keeping steady, at this moment cut too deeply; an acid jet spurted into his eyes, making him start back and grope for his handkerchief. Siegmund, as always well dressed, first contemplated with an expert’s concern the acid’s effect on his brother-in-law’s eye, then moved his gaze to that still life of respectability, the pigskin gloves and bowler hat resting on his knee. It was only when he could not shake off his sister’s relentless stare, and no one spoke to save him the trouble, that he looked up with a grave nod and murmured serenely: “I have never doubted that we all belong in an asylum.”
Clarisse then turned to Meingast and said: “I’ve told you about the Parallel Campaign. That could be another tremendous opportunity and obligation for us to do away with all the you can do it this way...and another way’ that is the great evil of our century.”

The master waved this off with a smile.

Clarisse, overcome with a heady sense of her own importance, cried out obstinately and somewhat incoherently: “A woman who lets a man have his way with her when it’s only going to weaken his mind is a sex murderer too!”

Here Meingast issued a gentle warning: “Let’s keep this on a general plane! Incidentally, I can set your mind at rest on one point: As regards those absurd committee meetings where a dying democracy is trying to give birth to one more great mission, I’ve had my
observers and confidential agents for a long time now.”

Clarisse simply felt ice at the roots of her hair.

Walter made another vain stab at stemming developments. Deferentially, he took his stand against Meingast, his tone very different from that which he might have used with Ulrich, for example: “What you say probably amounts to much the same thing I’ve been saying for a long time, that one ought to paint only in pure colors. It’s high time to finish with the broken and blurred, with our concessions to the inane, to the fainthearted vision that no longer dares see that each thing has a true outline, true colors. I put it in pictorial terms, you in philosophic terms. But even though we share a point of view...” He suddenly became embarrassed, feeling that he could not talk openly in front of the others about why he dreaded Clarisse’s involvement with the insane.
“No, I won’t have Clarisse doing it!” he exclaimed. “It won’t happen with my consent.”

The master had listened amiably, and he answered Walter just as pleasantly as if not one of these emphatic words had reached his ear. “Incidentally, there’s something Clarisse has expressed beautifully: She claimed that besides the ‘sinful form’ we inhabit, we all have an ‘innocent form.’ We could take this in the lovely sense that, apart from the miserable world of experience, our mind has access to a glorious realm where in lucid moments we feel our image moved by dynamics of an infinitely different kind. How did you put it, Clarisse?” he asked her in an encouraging tone. “Didn’t you say that if you could stand up for this wretch without disgust, go into his cell and play the piano for him day and night, without tiring, you would draw his sins, as it were, out of him, take them upon yourself, and ascend with them?”
Naturally,” he said, turning back to Walter, “this is to be taken not literally but as a subliminal process in the soul of the age, a process that here assumes the form of a parable about this man, inspiring her will....”

He was at this point uncertain whether to add something about Clarisse’s relation to the history of the idea of salvation, or whether it might be more attractive to explain her mission of leadership to her all over again in private. But Clarisse leapt from her chair like an overexcited child, raised her arm, with fist clenched, high above her head, and with a shyly ferocious smile cut short all further praise of herself with the shrill cry: “Onward to Moosbrugger!”

“But we still have nobody who can get us admitted...,” Siegmund was heard to say.

“I am not going along with this!” Walter said firmly.
“I cannot accept favors from a state where freedom and equality are to be had at every price and in every quality,” Meingast declared.

“Then Ulrich must get us permission!” Clarisse exclaimed.

Meingast and Siegmund, having gone to enough trouble already, gladly agreed to a solution that relieved them, at least temporarily, of the responsibility, and even Walter finally had to give in, in spite of his protest, and take on the mission of going down to the nearby grocery to phone their chosen emissary.

This was the call that made Ulrich break off writing his letter to Agathe. Walter’s voice took him by surprise, and so did his proposal. There was certainly room for a difference of opinion about Clarisse’s scheme, Walter freely conceded, but it could not be entirely discounted as a whim.
Perhaps it was time to somehow make a start somewhere, it didn’t matter so much where. Of course, it was only a coincidence that Moosbrugger was involved; but Clarisse was so startlingly direct: her mind looked like those modern paintings in unmixed primary colors, harsh and unwieldy, but if one went along with it, often amazingly right. He couldn’t really explain it all on the phone, but he hoped Ulrich wouldn’t let him down....

Ulrich was happy to drop what he was doing and agreed to come, although it was a disproportionately long way to go for the sake of talking with Clarisse for a mere fifteen minutes; for Clarisse had been invited for supper at her parents’, along with Walter and Siegmund. On the way, Ulrich had time to wonder at his not having given a thought to Moosbrugger in so long and always having to be reminded of him by Clarisse, though the man had been almost constantly on his
mind before. Even in the darkness of late evening through which Ulrich had to walk from the last trolley stop to his friends’ house, there was no room for such a haunting apparition; a void in which he had occurred had closed. Ulrich noted this with satisfaction and also with that faint self-questioning which is a consequence of changes whose extent is clearer than their cause. He was enjoying the sensation of cutting through the permeable darkness with the solider black of his own body, when Walter came uncertainly toward him, nervous at night in this lonely vicinity but anxious to say a few words to Ulrich before they joined the others. He eagerly took up his explanations from the point where he had broken off. He appeared to be trying to defend himself, and Clarisse as well, from being misunderstood. Even when her notions seemed to be incoherent, he said, one could always detect behind them an element of pathology that was
part of the ferment of the times; it was her most curious faculty. She was like a dowsing rod pointing to hidden springs—in this case, the necessity of replacing modern man’s passive, merely intellectual, rational attitude with “values.” The form of intelligence of the time had destroyed all firm ground, so it was only the will—indeed, if it couldn’t be done otherwise, then it was only violence—that could create a new hierarchy of values in which a person could find beginning and end for his inner life....He was repeating, reluctantly and yet with enthusiasm, what he had heard from Meingast.

Guessing this, Ulrich asked him impatiently: ‘Why are you talking so pompously? Is it that prophet of yours? It used to be you couldn’t have enough simplicity and naturalness!”

Walter put up with this for Clarisse’s sake, lest his friend decline to help, but had there been just one ray of light in that
moonless gloom, the flash of his teeth would have been visible as he bared them in frustration. He said nothing, but his suppressed rage made him weak, and the presence of his muscular friend shielding him from the eerie loneliness of the place made him soft. Suddenly he said: “Imagine loving a woman and then meeting a man you admire and realizing that your wife admires and loves him, too, and that both of you feel, in love, jealousy, and admiration, this man’s hopeless superiority—”

“I’d rather not imagine it!” Ulrich should have heard him out, but he squared his shoulders with a laugh and interrupted him.

Walter shot him a venomous glance. He had meant to ask: “What would you do in such a case?” But it was the same game they had been playing since their school days. As they entered the dimly lit hall he said:
“Drop that act of yours! You’re not as conceited and thick-skinned as all that!” Then he had to run to catch up with Ulrich on the stairs, where he hastily whispered the rest of what Ulrich needed to know.

“What has Walter been telling you?” Clarisse asked when they got upstairs.

“I can do it, all right,” Ulrich said, going straight to the point, “but I don’t think it would be sensible.”

“Did you hear that? His very first word was ‘sensible,’ “ Clarisse called out to Mein- gast, laughing. She was rushing back and forth between the clothes closet, the washstand, the mirror, and the half-open door between her room and the one where the men were. They could catch glimpses of her now and then: with a wet face and her hair hanging down; with her hair brushed up; still bare-legged; in stocking feet; in her long-skirted dinner dress below with a
dressing jacket above that looked like a white institutional uniform. She enjoyed this appearing and disappearing. Since she had got her way, all her feelings were submerged in an easy sensuality. “I’m dancing on light-ropes!” she shouted into the room. The men smiled, but Siegmund glanced at his watch and dryly asked her to hurry up. He was treating the whole thing as a gymnastic exercise.

Then Clarisse glided on a “light-rope” to the far corner of her room, for a pin, and shut the drawer of her night table with a bang.

“I can change faster than a man,” she called back to Siegmund in the other room, but suddenly paused over the double meaning of “change,” which right now could mean for her both “dressing for dinner” and “being transformed by mysterious destinies.” She quickly finished dressing, stuck her head through the door, and gravely regarded her
friends one after the other. Anyone who did not think of it as a game might have been alarmed that something in this solemn countenance had been extinguished that should have been part of a natural, healthy face. She bowed to her friends and said ceremonially: “So now I have put on my destiny!” But when she straightened up again she looked quite normal, even rather charming, and her brother Siegmund cried: “Forward—march! Papa doesn’t like people to be late for dinner!”

When the four of them walked to the streetcar—Meingast had disappeared before they left the house—Ulrich fell back a few steps with Siegmund and asked him whether he had not been a bit worried about his sister of late. The glow of Siegmund’s cigarette sketched a flatly rising arc in the darkness.

“No doubt she’s abnormal,” he replied. “But is Meingast normal? Or even Walter? Is playing the piano normal? It’s an unusual
state of excitement associated with tremors in the wrists and ankles. For a physician, there’s no such thing as normal. Still, if you want my serious opinion, my sister is somewhat overwrought, and I think it will pass once the great panjandrum has left. What do you make of him?” There was a hint of malice in “the great panjandrum.”

“He’s a gasbag,” Ulrich said.

“Isn’t he, though!” Siegmund was delighted. “Repulsive, repulsive.

“But his ideas are interesting, I wouldn’t deny that altogether,” he added after a pause.
COUNT LEINSDORF HAS QUALMS ABOUT “CAPITAL AND CULTURE”

And so it happened that Ulrich again appeared before Count Leinsdorf.

He found His Grace, enveloped in tranquility, dedication, solemnity, and beauty, at his desk, reading a newspaper that was lying spread out over a high pile of documents. The Imperial liege-Count sadly shook his head after once more expressing his condolences to Ulrich.

“Your father was one of the last true representatives of capital and culture,” he said. “How well I remember the days when we both sat in the Bohemian Diet. He well deserved the confidence we always placed in him!”
Ulrich inquired out of politeness how the Parallel Campaign had fared in his absence.

“Well, because of that hullabaloo in the street outside my house that afternoon, which you observed, we’ve set up a Commission to Ascertain the Desires of the Concerned Sections of the Population in Reference to Administrative Reform,” Count Leinsdorf told him. “The Prime Minister himself asked us to take this off his shoulders for the time being, because as a patriotic enterprise we enjoy, so to speak, the public’s confidence.”

With a straight face Ulrich assured him that at any rate the Commission’s name had been well chosen and was likely to have a certain effect.

“Yes, a good deal depends on finding the right words,” His Grace said pensively, and suddenly asked: “What do you make of
this business of the municipal employees in Trieste? I should think it would be high time for the government to pull itself together and take a firm stand.” He made as if to hand over the paper he had folded up when Ulrich came in, but at the last moment chose to open it again and read aloud to his visitor, with vivid feeling, from a long-winded article. “Can you imagine this sort of thing happening in any other country in the world?” he asked, when he had finished. “For years the Austrian city of Trieste has been hiring only Italians, subjects of the King of Italy, in its civil service, to make a point that their allegiance is to Italy, not to us. I was there once on His Majesty’s birthday: not a single flag in all Trieste except on the administration building, the tax office, the prison, and the roofs of a few barracks! But if you should have any business in some municipal office in Trieste on the King of Italy’s birthday, you
wouldn’t find a clerk anywhere without a flower in his buttonhole!”

“But why has this been tolerated till now?” Ulrich inquired.

“Why shouldn’t it be tolerated?” Count Leinsdorf said in a disgruntled tone. “If our government forces the city to discharge its foreign staff, we will immediately be accused of Germanizing. That is just the reproach every government fears. Even His Majesty doesn’t like it. After all, we’re not Prussians!”

Ulrich seemed to remember that the coastal and port city of Trieste had been founded on Slavic soil by the imperialistic Venetian Republic and today embraced a large Slavic population, so that even if one were to view it as merely the private concern of its inhabitants—without regard to its also being the gateway to the Empire’s eastern trade and in every way dependent on the Empire for its prosperity—there was no
getting around the fact that its large Slavic lower middle class passionately contested the favored Italian upper class’s right to consider the city as its own property. Ulrich said as much to the Count.

“True enough,” Count Leinsdorf instructed him, “but once the word is out that we’re Germanizing, the Slovenes immediately side with the Italians, even though they have to take time off from tearing each other’s hair out, and all the other minorities rally to support them as well! We’ve been through this often enough. In terms of practical politics, it’s the Germans we have to regard as a threat to peace within the Empire, whether we want to or not.” This conclusion left Count Leinsdorf deep in thought for a while, for he had touched on the great political scheme that weighed on his mind, though it had not come clearly into focus for him until this moment. But suddenly he livened up again, and continued cheerfully:
“Anyway, the others have been told off properly this time.” With a tremor of impatience, he replaced his pince-nez and again read aloud to Ulrich with relish all those satisfying passages in the edict issued by His Imperial and Royal Majesty’s Governor in Trieste.

“ ‘Repeated warnings issued by the governmental institutions of public safety to no avail...harm done to our people...In view of this obstinate resistance to the prescribed official orders, the Governor of Trieste finds himself obliged to take steps toward enforcing the observance of the existing lawful regulations...’” Me interrupted himself to ask: “Spoken with dignity, don’t you think?” He raised his head but immediately lowered it again, eager to get to the final bit, whose official urbane authority underlined his voice with great aesthetic satisfaction:

“ ‘Furthermore,’ “ he read,” ‘it is reserved to the administration at any time to give careful and sympathetic consideration
to each individual case of application for citizenship made by such public functionaries, insofar as these are officially deemed worthy of exceptional regard through long years of public service and an unblemished record, and in such cases the Imperial and Royal Administration is inclined to avoid immediate enforcement of these regulations, while reserving its right to enforce them at such time and in such circumstances as it may think fit.’ Now, that’s the tone our government should have taken all along!” Count Leinsdorf exclaimed.

“Don’t you think, sir, on the basis of this last point, that in the last analysis this leaves things pretty much where they have always been?” Ulrich asked a little later, when the tail end of this long snake of an official sentence had finally vanished inside his ear.

“Yes, that’s just it!” His Grace replied, twiddling his thumbs for a while, as he always did when some hard thinking was going
on inside. Then he gave Ulrich a searching look and opened his heart to him.

“Do you remember how, when we were at the police exhibition, the Interior Minister announced that there was a new spirit of ‘mutual support and strictness’ in the offing? Well, I wouldn’t expect them to immediately lock up all the troublemakers who were raising such a rumpus on my doorstep, but the Minister could at least have said a few dignified words of repudiation in Parliament!” His feelings were hurt.

“I assumed it was done during my absence,” Ulrich cried with

feigned astonishment, aware that a genuine distress was roiling the mind of his benevolent friend.

“Not a thing was done!” His Grace said. Again he fixed his worried, protuberant eyes on Ulrich’s face with a searching look, and he opened his heart further: “But something
will be done!” He straightened up and leaned back in his chair, shutting his eyes as he lapsed into silence.

When he opened them again he began to explain in a calmer tone: “You see, my dear fellow, our Constitution of 1861 entrusted the undisputed leadership in the new experimental governmental scheme to the German element in the population, and in particular to those within that element who represented capital and culture. That was a munificent gift of His Majesty’s, a proof of his generosity and his confidence, perhaps not quite in keeping with the times; for what has become of capital and culture since then?”

Count Leinsdorf raised one hand and then dropped it in resignation on the other. “When His Majesty ascended the throne in 1848, at Olmütz, that is to say, practically in exile...,” he went on slowly, but suddenly becoming impatient or uncertain, he fished a few notes out of his pocket with trembling
fingers, struggled in some agitation to set his pince-nez firmly on his nose, and read aloud, his voice sometimes quavering with emotion, as he strained to decipher his own handwriting:

“... he was surrounded by the uproar of the nationalities’ wild urge for freedom. He succeeded in quenching the extreme manifestations of this upsurge. Finally, even if after granting some concessions to the demands of his peoples, he stood triumphant as the victor, and a gracious and magnanimous victor, moreover, who forgave his subjects the errors of their ways and held out his hand to them with the offer of a peace honorable for them as well. Although the Constitution and the other liberties had been granted by him under the press of circumstances, it was nevertheless an act of His Majesty’s free will, the fruit of his wisdom and compassion, and of hope in the progressive civilization of his peoples. But in recent years this model
relationship between the Emperor and his peoples has been tarnished by the work of agitators, demagogues—” Here Count Leinsdorf broke off reading his exposition of political history, in which every word had been scrupulously weighed and polished,

and gazed pensively at the portrait of his ancestor the Grand Marshal and Knight of the Order of Maria Theresa, hanging on the wall facing him. When Ulrich’s expectant gaze finally drew his attention, he said: “That’s as far as I’ve come.

“But you can see that I have been giving these problems a great deal of thought lately,” he went on. “What I have just read to you is the beginning of the response which the Minister should have presented to Parliament in the matter of the demonstration against me, if he had been doing his job! I’ve gradually worked it out for myself, and I don’t mind telling you that I shall have occasion to present it to His Majesty as soon as I
have finished it. You see, it was not without purpose that the Constitution of 1861 entrusted the leadership of our country to capital and culture. It was meant to secure our future. But where are capital and culture today?"

He seemed really put out with the Minister of the Interior, and to divert him Ulrich remarked innocently that one could at least say about capital that it was nowadays not only in the hands of the bankers but also in the time-tested hands of the landed aristocracy.

"I've nothing at all against the Jews," Count Leinsdorf assured Ulrich out of the blue, as though Ulrich had said something that required such a disclaimer. "They are intelligent, hardworking, and reliable. But it was a great mistake to give them those unsuitable names. Rosenberg and Rosenthal, for instance, are aristocratic names; Baer and Wolf and all such creatures are
originally heraldic beasts; Meyer derives from landed property; Silver and Gold are armorial colors. All those Jewish names,” His Grace disclosed, to Ulrich’s surprise, “are nothing but the insolence of our bureaucrats aimed at our nobility. It was the noble families, not the Jews, who were the butt of these officials, which is why the Jews were given other names as well, like Abrahams, Jewison, or Schmucker. You cannot infrequently observe this animus of our bureaucracy against the old nobility surfacing even today, if you know how to look for it,” he said oracularly, with a gloomy, obstinate air, as though the struggle of the central administration against feudalism had not long since been overtaken by history and vanished completely from sight. In fact, there was nothing His Grace could resent so pure-heartedly as the social privileges enjoyed by important bureaucrats by virtue of their position even when their names might
be plain Fuchsenbauer or Schlosser. Count Leinsdorf was no diehard country *Junker*; he wanted to move with the times, and did not mind such a name when it was that of a Member of Parliament or even a cabinet minister or an influential private citizen, nor did he at all object to the political or economic influence of the middle class; what provoked him, with a passion that was the last vestige of venerable traditions, was the social status of high-ranking administrative officials with middle-class names. Ulrich wondered whether Leinsdorf’s remarks might have been prompted by his own cousin’s husband. It was not out of the question, but Count Leinsdorf continued talking and was, as always happened, soon lifted above all personal concerns by an idea that had apparently been working inside him for a long time.

“The whole so-called Jewish Question would disappear without a trace if the Jews
would only make up their minds to speak Hebrew, go back to their old names, and wear Eastern dress,” he explained. “Frankly, a Galician Jew who has just recently made his fortune in Vienna doesn’t look right on the Esplanade at Ischl, wearing Tyrolean costume with a chamois tuft on his hat. But put him in a long, flowing robe, as rich as you like so long as it covers his legs, and you’ll see how admirably his face and his grand sweeping gestures go with his costume! All those things people tend to joke about would then be in their proper place—even the showy rings they like to wear. I am against assimilation the way the English nobility practice it; it’s a tedious and uncertain process. But give the Jews back their true character and watch them become a veritable ornament, a genuine aristocracy of a rare and special kind among the nations gratefully thronging around His Majesty’s throne—or, if you’d prefer to see it in
everyday terms, imagine them strolling along on our Ringstrasse, the only place in the world where you can see, in the midst of Western European elegance at its finest, a Mohammedan with his red fez, a Slovak in sheepskins, or a bare-legged Tyrolean!"

At this point Ulrich could not do otherwise than express his admiration for His Grace’s acumen, which had now also enabled him to uncover the “real Jew.”

“Well, you know, the true Catholic faith teaches us to see things as they really are,” Count Leinsdorf explained benevolently. “But you would never guess what it was that put me on the right track. It wasn’t Arnheim—I’m not speaking of the Prussians right now. But I have a banker, a man of the Mosaic faith, of course, whom I’ve had to see regularly for years now, and at first his intonation always used to bother me a bit, so that I couldn’t keep my mind on the business at hand. He speaks exactly as if he wanted
me to think he was my uncle—I mean, as if he’d just got out of the saddle, or back from a day’s grouse shooting; exactly the way our own kind of people talk, I must say. Well and good; but then, when he gets carried away, he can’t keep it up and, to make no bones about it, slips into a kind of Yiddish sing-song. It used to bother me considerably, as I believe I’ve told you already, because it always happened when some important business matter was at stake, so that I was always unconsciously primed for it, and it got so that I couldn’t pay attention to what he was talking about, or else I imagined I was listening to something important the whole time. But then I found a way around it: Every time he began to talk like that I imagined he was speaking Hebrew, and you ought to have heard how attractive it sounded then! Positively enchanting—it is, after all, a liturgical language; such a melodious chanting: I’m very musical, I should add. In short, from
then on he had me lapping up the most complicated calculations of compound interest or discount positively as if he were at the piano!” As he said this, Count Leinsdorf had for some reason a melancholy smile.

Ulrich took the liberty of pointing out that the people so favored by His Grace’s sympathetic interest would be more than likely to turn down his suggestion.

“Oh, of course they won’t want to!” the Count said. “But they would have to be forced to for their own good. It would amount to a world mission for the Empire, and it’s not a question of whether they want to or not. You see, many people at the beginning have had to be made to do what’s best for them. But think, too, what it would mean if we ended up allied with a grateful Jewish State instead of with the Germans and Prussia! Seeing that our Trieste happens to be the Hamburg of the Mediterranean, as it were, apart from the fact that it would make us
diplomatically invincible to have not only the Pope on our side but the Jews as well!”

Abruptly, he added: “You must remember that I have to concern myself with problems of the currency, too, these days.” And again he smiled in that strangely sad, absent-minded way.

It was astonishing that His Grace, who had repeatedly sent out urgent calls for Ulrich, did not discuss the problems of the day now that he had finally come, but lavished his ideas on him. Apparently ideas had come to him in abundance while he had had to do without his confidant, ideas as restless as bees that stream out for miles but are sure to return in their own good time, laden with honey.

“You might perhaps object,” Count Leinsdorf resumed, although Ulrich had not said anything, “that I have on earlier occasions often expressed a decidedly low
opinion of the financial world. I don’t deny it: too much is too much, and we have too much finance in modern life. But that’s precisely why we must deal with it! Look, culture has not been pulling its weight alongside capital—there you have the whole secret of developments since 1861. And that’s why we must concern ourselves with capital."

His Grace made an almost imperceptible pause, just long enough to let his listener know that now he was coming to the secret of capital, but then went on in his gloomily confidential tone:

“You see, what’s most important in a culture is what it forbids people: whatever doesn’t belong is out. For instance, a well-bred man will never eat gravy with his knife, only God knows why; they don’t teach you these things in school. That’s so-called tact, it’s based on a privileged class for culture to look up to, a cultural model; in short, if I may say so, an aristocracy. Granted that our
aristocracy has not always lived up to that ideal. That’s exactly the point, the downright revolutionary experiment, of our 1861 Constitution: Capital and culture were meant to make common cause with the aristocracy. Have they done so? Were they up to taking advantage of the great opportunity His Majesty had so graciously made available to them? I’m sure you’d never claim that the results of your cousin’s great efforts that we see every week are in keeping with such hopes.” His voice grew more animated as he exclaimed: “You know, it’s really most interesting, what sorts of things claim to be ‘mind’ these days! I was telling His Eminence the Cardinal about it recently, when we were out hunting in Murzsteg—no, it was Murzbruck, at the Hostnitz girl’s wedding—and he laughed and clapped his hands together: ‘Something new every year,’ he said. ‘Now you can see how modest we are; we’ve been telling people the same old thing for almost
two thousand years.’ And that’s so true. The main thing about faith is that it keeps believing the same old thing, even if it’s heresy to say so. ‘You know,’ he said, ‘I always go out hunting because my predecessor in the days of Leopold von Babanberg did too. But I never kill,’ he said—he happens to be known for never firing a shot on the hunt—’because it goes against my grain, something tells me it’s not in keeping with my cloth. I can talk about this to you, old friend, because we were boys in dancing class together. But I’d never stand up in public and say: “You shall not shoot while hunting!”’ Good Lord, who knows whether that would be true, and besides, it’s no part of the Church’s teaching. But the people who meet at your friend’s house make a public issue of things like that the minute it occurs to them! There you have what’s called “intelligence” nowadays!’ It’s easy for him to laugh,” Count Leinsdorf went on, speaking for himself again. “He holds that job in
perpetuity, but we laymen have the hard task of finding the right path amid perpetual change. I told him as much. I asked him: Why did God let literature and painting and all that come into the world anyway, when they’re really such a bore?’ And he came up with a very interesting explanation. ‘You’ve heard about psychoanalysis, haven’t you?’ he asked me. I didn’t know quite what I was supposed to say. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘you’ll probably say it’s just a lot of filth. We won’t argue about it, it’s what everyone says; and yet they all run to these newfangled doctors more than to our Catholic confessional. Take it from me, they rush to them in droves because the flesh is weak! They let their secret sins be discussed because they enjoy it, and if they disparage it, take it from me, we always pick holes in the things we mean to buy! But I could also prove to you that what their atheistic doctors imagine they invented is nothing but what the Church has been
doing from the beginning: exorcising the Devil and healing the possessed. It’s identical step for step with the ritual of exorcism, for instance, when they try with their own methods to make the person who’s possessed talk about what’s inside him; according to Church teaching, that’s precisely the turning point, where the Devil is getting ready to break out! We merely missed adapting ourselves in time to changing conditions by talking of psychosis, the unconscious, and all that current claptrap instead of filth and the Devil.’ Isn’t that interesting?’ Count Leinsdorf asked. “But what comes next may be even more so. ‘Never mind the weakness of the flesh,’ the Cardinal said. ‘What we need to talk about is that the spirit is weak too. And that’s where the Church has kept its wits and not let anything slip by. People aren’t nearly so scared of the Devil in the flesh, even if they make a great show of fighting him, as they are of the illumination that
comes from the spirit. You never studied theology,’ he said to me, ‘but at least you respect it, and that’s more than a secular philosopher in his blindness ever does. Let me tell you, theology is so difficult that a man can devote himself to studying it and nothing else for fifteen years before he realizes that he hasn’t really understood a word of it! If people knew how difficult it is, none of them would have any faith at all; they’d only run us down! They’d run us down exactly the way they run people down—you understand?’ he said slyly,’—who are writing their books and painting their pictures and trotting out their theories. And today we’re only too glad to let them have plenty of rope to hang themselves with, because, let me tell you, the more earnestly one of those fellows sets about it, the less he’s a mere entertainer, or working for his own pocket; the more, in other words, he serves God in his mistaken way, the more he bores people, and the more they run him
down. “That’s not what life is like!” they say. But we know very well what it’s like, and we’ll show them too, and because we can also wait, you may yet live to see them come running back to us, full of fury about the time they wasted on all that clever talk. You can see it happening in our own families, even now. And in our father’s’ day, God knows, they thought they were going to turn heaven itself into a university.’

“I wouldn’t go so far,” Count Leinsdorf rounded out this part of his discourse to start on a new topic, “as to say he meant all that literally. The Hostnitzes in Miirzbruck happen to have a celebrated Rhine wine that, General Marmont left behind and forgot in 1805 because he had to march on Vienna in such a hurry, and they brought some of it out for the wedding. But in the main I’m sure the Cardinal was right on target. So if I ask myself now what to make of it, all I can say is, I’m sure it’s true, but it doesn’t work. I mean,
there can be no doubt that the people we brought in because we were told they represent the spirit of the times have nothing to do with real life, and the Church can well afford to wait them out. But we civilian politicians can’t wait; we must squeeze what good we can out of life as we find it. After all, man doesn’t live by bread alone, but by the soul as well. The soul is that which enables him to digest his bread, so to speak. And that’s why it’s necessary...” Count Leinsdorf was of the opinion that politics should be a spur to the soul. “In short, something has to happen,” he said, “that’s what the times demand. Everyone has that feeling, as it were, not just the politically minded. The times have a sort of interim character that nobody can stand indefinitely.” He had the idea that the trembling balance of ideas upon which the no less trembling balance of power in Europe rested must be given a push.
“It hardly matters what kind of push,” he assured Ulrich, who made a show of being stunned by His Grace’s having turned, in the period since they had last seen each other, into a veritable revolutionary.

“Well, why not?” Count Leinsdorf retorted, flattered. “His Eminence of course also thought that it might be a small step in the right direction if His Majesty could be persuaded to replace the present Minister of the Interior, but such petty reforms don’t do the trick in the long run, however necessary they may be. Do you know that as I mull this over I actually find my thoughts turning to the Socialists?” He gave his interlocutor time to recover from the amazement he assumed this was bound to cause, and then continued firmly: “You can take it from me, real socialism wouldn’t be nearly as terrible as people seem to think. You may perhaps object that the Socialists are republicans; that’s true, you simply can’t listen when they’re talking,
but if you consider them in terms of practical politics, you might well reach the conclusion that a social-democratic republic with a strong ruler at the helm would not be an impossible solution at all. For my own part, I’m convinced that if we were to go just a little way to meet them, they’d be glad to give up the idea of using brute force and they’d recoil from the rest of their objectionable principles. As it is, they’re already inclined to modify their notion of the class struggle and their hostility to private property. And there really are people among them who still place country before party, as compared with the middle-class parties who’ve gone radical since the last elections in putting their conflicting national-minority interests above everything else. Which brings us to the Emperor.” He lowered his voice confidentially. “As I’ve said already, we must learn to think in economic terms. The one-sided policy of encouraging national minorities has led the
Empire into the desert. Now, to the Emperor, all this Czech-Polish-German-Italian ranting about autonomy...I don’t *Into the Millennium (The Criminals)* · 923

know how to put it: let’s just say His Majesty couldn’t care less. What His Majesty does care about, deeply, is our getting the defense budget through without any cuts so that the Empire may be strong, and apart from that he feels a hearty distaste for all the pretensions of the middle-class idea-mongers, a distaste he probably acquired in 1848. But these two priorities simply make His Majesty the First Socialist in the land, as it were. You can now see, I think, the magnificent vista I was speaking of? Which leaves only the problem of religiosity, in which there is still an unbridgeable gap between opposing camps, and that’s something I’d have to talk over with His Eminence again.”

His Grace fell silent, absorbed in his conviction that history, in particular that of
his own country, bogged down as it was in fruitless nationalist dissensions, would shortly be called upon to take a step into the future—whereby he perceived the spirit of history as being more or less two-legged, but otherwise a philosophical necessity. Hence it was understandable that he surfaced suddenly with sore eyes, like a diver who had gone too far down. “In any case, we must get ready to do our duty!” he said.

“But where does our duty lie, Your Grace?”

“Why, in doing our duty, of course! It’s the only thing we can always do! But to change the subject...” It was only now that Count Leinsdorf seemed to remember the pile of newspapers and files on which his fist rested. “Look here, what the people want today is a strong hand. But today a strong hand needs fine words, or the people
won't put up with it. And you, and I mean you personally, are eminently qualified in this respect. What you said, for instance, the last time we all met at your cousin's before you left town, was that what we actually need—if you recall—is a central committee for eternal happiness, to bring it in step with our earthly precision in ratiocination. Well, it wouldn't work out quite so easily, but His Eminence

    laughed heartily when I told him about it; actually, I rubbed it in a bit, as they say, and even though he's always making fun of everything, I can tell pretty well whether his laugh comes from the spleen or from the heart. The fact is, my dear man, we simply can't do without you...."

    While all of Count Leinsdorf's other pronouncements that day had had the character of complicated dreams, the wish he
now expressed—that Ulrich should give up “definitely, at least for now,” any idea of resigning his post as Honorary Secretary of the Parallel Campaign—was so definite and so pointedly fledged, and his hand had come down on Ulrich’s arm with such an effect of a surprise maneuver, that Ulrich almost had the not entirely pleasing impression that all the elaborate harangues he had been listening to had only been calculated, far more slyly than he had anticipated, to put him off his guard. At this moment he was quite annoyed with Clarisse, who had got him into this fix. But since he had appealed on her behalf to Count Leinsdorf ‘s kindness the very first time there had been an opening in the conversation, and the request had been granted instantly by the obliging high official, who wanted only to go on talking without interruption, he had no choice now but reluctantly to square the account.
“I’ve heard from Tuzzi,” Count Leinsdorf said, pleased with his success, “that you might decide on a man from his office to take the routine business off your hands. ‘Splendid.’ I told him, ‘if he stays on.’ After all, his man has taken his oath of office, which we’ll give you too, and my own secretary, whom I’d gladly have put at your disposal, is unfortunately an idiot. All you perhaps shouldn’t let him see is the strictly confidential stuff, because he’s Tuzzi’s man, and that has certain drawbacks; but otherwise, do arrange matters to suit your own convenience,” His Grace said, concluding this successful interview with the utmost cordiality.
During this time and from the moment she had stayed behind alone, Agathe had been living in a state of utter release from all ties to the world, in a sweetly wistful suspension of will; a condition that was like a great height, where only the wide blue sky is to be seen. Once a day she treated herself to a short stroll in town; at home, she read, attended to her affairs, and experienced this mild, trivial business of living with grateful enjoyment. Nothing troubled her state: no clinging to the past, no straining for the future; if her eye lit upon some nearby object, it was like coaxing a baby lamb to her: either it came gently closer or it took no notice of her at all—but at no time did her mind
deliberately take hold of it with that motion of inner grasping which gives to every act of cold understanding a certain violence as well as a certain futility, for it drives away the joy that is in things. In this fashion everything around her seemed far more intelligible to Agathe than ordinarily, but in the main she was still preoccupied with her conversations with her brother. In keeping with the peculiarity of her unusually exact memory, which did not distort its material with any bias or prejudice, there rose up in her mind more or less at random the living words, the subtle surprises of cadence and gestures, in these conversations, much as they were before she had quite understood them and realized where they were tending. Nevertheless, it all held the utmost significance for her; her memory, so often dominated by remorse, was now suffused with a quiet devotion, and the time just past clung like a caress to the warmth of her body, instead of drifting off as
it usually did into the frost and darkness that awaits life lived in vain.

And so, veiled in an invisible light, Agathe also dealt with the lawyers, notaries, brokers, and agents she now had to see. No one refused her; everyone was glad to oblige the attractive young woman—whose father’s name was sufficient recommendation—in every way. She conducted herself with as much self-assurance as detachment; she was sure of what she wanted, but it was detached from herself, as it were, and the experience she had acquired in life—also something that can be seen as detached from the personality—went on working in pursuit of that purpose like a shrewd laborer calmly taking advantage for his commission of whatever opportunities presented themselves. That she was engaged in preparing a felony—the significance of her action that would have been strikingly apparent to an outsider—simply did not enter her state of mind during this
time. The unity of her conscience excluded it. The pure light of this conscience outshone this dark point, which nevertheless, like the core of a flame, formed its center. Agathe herself did not know how to express it; by virtue of her intention she found herself in a state that was a world away from this same ugly intention.

On the morning after her brother had left, Agathe was already considering her appearance with great care: it had begun by accident with her face, when her gaze had landed on it and not come back out of the mirror. She was held fast, much as one who sometimes has absolutely no desire to walk keeps walking a hundred steps, and then another hundred, all the way toward something one catches sight of only at the end, at which point one definitely intends to turn back and yet does not. In this way she was held captive, without vanity, by this landscape of herself, which confronted her behind the
shimmer of glass. She looked at her hair, still like bright velvet; she opened the collar of her reflection’s dress and slipped the dress off its shoulders; then she undressed the image altogether and studied it down to the rosy nails, to where the body tapers off into fingers and toes and hardly belongs to itself anymore. Everything was still like the sparkling day approaching its zenith: ascendant, pure, exact, and infused with that forenoon growth that manifests itself in a human being or a young animal as ineffably as in a bouncing ball that has not yet reached its highest point in the air, but is just about to. “Perhaps it is passing through that point this very moment,” Agathe thought. The idea frightened her. Still, she was only twenty-seven; it might take a while yet. Her body, as untouched by athletic coaches and masseurs as it was by childbearing and maternal toil, had been formed by nothing but its own growth. If it could have been set down naked
in one of those grand and lonely landscapes that mountain ranges form on the side turned toward the sky, the vast, infertile, billowing swell of such heights would have borne it upward like some pagan goddess. In a nature of this kind, noon does not pour down exhalations of light and heat; it merely seems for a while longer to rise above its zenith and then to pass imperceptibly into the sinking, floating beauty of the afternoon. From the mirror came the eerie sense of that undefinable hour.

It occurred to her at this moment that Ulrich, too, was letting his life go by as though it would last forever. “Perhaps it is a mistake that we didn’t first meet when we were old,” she said to herself, conjuring up the melancholy image of two banks of fog drifting earthward in the evening. “They’re not as fine as the blaze of noon, but what do those formless gray shapes care what people
make of them? Their hour has come, and it is just as tender as the most glowing hour!"

She had now almost turned her back on the mirror, but was provoked by a certain extravagance in her mood to turn around again before she knew it, and had to laugh at the memory of two fat people taking the waters at Marienbad years ago; she had watched them as they sat on one of those green benches, doting on each other with the sweetest and tenderest feelings. "Their beating hearts are slim under all that fat, and being lost in their vision of each other, they have no idea how funny they look to the world," Agathe reminded herself, and made an ecstatic face while trying to puff up her body with imaginary rolls of fat. When this fit of exuberance had passed, it looked as if some tiny tears of rage had risen to her eyes, and pulling herself together, she coolly resumed the point-by-point scrutiny of her appearance. Although she was considered
slender, she observed in her body with some concern a possibility that she could become heavy. Perhaps she was too broad-chested. In her face, its very white skin dimmed by her golden hair as if by candles burning in the daytime, the nose was a bit too wide, and its almost classical line a bit dented on one side at the tip. It could be that everywhere inside her flame-like given form a second was lurking, broader and more melancholy, like a linden leaf that has fallen among twigs of laurel. Agathe felt a curiosity about herself, as though she were really seeing herself for the first time. This was how she might well have been perceived by the men she had become involved with, without her having known anything about it. It was a rather uncanny feeling. But by some trick of the imagination, before she could call her memories to account for it, she kept hearing behind everything she had experienced the ardent, long-drawn-out mating cry of donkeys,
which had always curiously aroused her: a hopelessly foolish and ugly sound, which for that very reason makes no other heroism of love seem so desperately sweet as theirs. She shrugged her shoulders at her life and resolutely turned back to her image to discover a place where her appearance might already be yielding to age. There were those small areas near the eyes and ears that are the first to change, beginning by looking as though something had slept on them, or the inner curve under the breasts, which so easily loses its definition. At this moment it would have been a satisfaction to her and a promise of peace to come had she seen such a change, but there was none yet to be seen, and the loveliness of her body floated almost eerily in the depths of the mirror.

It now seemed odd to her that she was actually Frau Hagauer, and the difference between the clear and close relationship that implied and the vagueness with which the
fact reached deep into her being was so great that she seemed to herself to be standing there without a body while the body in the mirror belonged to Frau Hagauer, who was the one who would have to learn to cope with its having committed itself to a situation beneath its dignity. Even in this there was some of that elusive pleasure in living that sometimes startles, and it made Agathe, once she had hastily dressed again, go straight to her bedroom to look for a capsule that must be in her luggage. This small airtight capsule, which had been in her possession almost as long as she had been married to Hagauer, and which she always kept within reach, contained a tiny quantity of a drab powder she had been assured was a deadly poison. Agathe recalled certain sacrifices it had cost her to obtain this forbidden stuff, about which she knew only what she had been told of its effect and one of those chemical names the uninitiated must memorize, like a magic
formula, without knowing what they mean. But evidently all those means by which the end may be brought a little closer, such as poison or guns, or seeking out survivable dangers, are part of the romantic love of life; and it may be that most people’s lives are so oppressed, so fluctuating, with so much darkness in their brightness, and altogether so perverse, that life’s inherent joy can be released only by the distant possibility of putting an end to it. Agathe felt better when her eyes lit on the tiny metal object, which she regarded, amid the uncertainty that lay ahead of her, as a bringer of luck, a talisman.

So this did not at all mean that Agathe at this time already intended to kill herself. On the contrary, she feared death just as every young person does to whom, for instance, before falling asleep in bed at night, after a well-spent day, it suddenly occurs that “It’s inevitable: sometime, on another fine day just like this, I’ll be dead.” Nor does
one acquire an appetite for dying by having to watch someone else die; her father’s death had tormented her with impressions whose horrors had returned since she had been left alone in the house after her brother’s departure. But “I’m sort of dead, in a way” was something Agathe felt often; and especially in moments like this, when she had just been conscious of her young body’s shapeliness and good health, its taut beauty, equally unfathomable in the mystery of what held it together and what made its elements decompose in death, she tended to fall from her condition of happy confidence into one of anxiety, amazement, and silence: it was like stepping from a noisy, crowded room and suddenly standing under the shimmering stars. Regardless of her awakening intentions and her satisfaction at having extricated herself from a bungled life, she now felt rather detached from herself and only obscurely linked to her own existence. Coolly
she thought of death as a state in which one is released from all efforts and illusions, imagined it as a tender inward rocking to sleep: one lies in God’s hand, and this hand is like a cradle or a hammock slung between two tall trees swaying faintly in the wind. She thought of death as a great tranquility and fatigue, the end of all wanting and striving, of all paying attention and having to think, like the pleasant slackening of the fingers one feels when sleep cautiously loosens their hold on whatever last thing of this world they have still been clutching. No doubt she was indulging herself in a rather easy and casual notion of death, typical of someone disinclined to take on the exertions of living; and in the end she was amused to think how this was all of a piece with her moving the couch into her father’s austere drawing room to lounge on, reading—the only change she had made in the house on her own initiative.
Still, the thought of giving up life was anything but a game for Agathe. It seemed profoundly believable to her that all this frustrating turmoil must be followed by a state of blissful repose, which she could not help imagining in physical terms. She felt it this way because she had no need of the suspenseful illusion that the world could be improved, and she was always ready to surrender her share in it completely, as long as it could be done in a pleasant fashion. Besides, she had already had a special encounter with death in that extraordinary illness that had befallen her on the borderline between childhood and girlhood. That was when—in an almost imperceptibly gradual loss of energy that seemed to infiltrate each tiniest particle of time, though as a whole it happened with an irresistible rush—more and more parts of her body seemed to dissolve away from her day by day and be destroyed; yet, keeping pace with this decline
and this slipping away from life there was an unforgettable fresh striving toward a goal that banished all the unrest and anxiety of her illness, a curiously substantive state that even enabled her to exert a certain domination over the adults around her, who were becoming more and more unsure of themselves. It is not out of the question that this sense of power, gained under such impressive circumstances, could later have been at the heart of her spiritual readiness to withdraw in similar fashion from a life whose allurements for some reason fell short of her expectations. But more probably it was the other way around: that that illness, which enabled her to escape the demands of school and home, was the first manifestation of her attitude to the world, an attitude that was transparent and permeated by the light of an emotion unknown to her. For Agathe felt herself to be a person of a spontaneous, simple temperament, warm, lively, even gay
and easy to please; she had in fact adapted herself good-naturedly to a great variety of circumstances, nor had she ever suffered that collapse into indifference that befalls women who can no longer bear their disillusionment. But in the midst of her laughter or the tumult of some sensual adventure that continued nonetheless, there lived a disenchantment that made every fiber of her body tired and nostalgic for something else, something best described as nothingness.

This nothingness had a definite, if indefinable, content. For a long time she had been in the habit of repeating to herself, on all sorts of occasions, words of Novalis: “What then can I do for my soul, that lives within me like an unsolved riddle, even while it grants the visible man the utmost license, because there is no way it can control him?” But the flickering light of this utterance always went out again, like a flash of lightning that only left her in darkness, for she did not
believe in a soul, as it was something too presumptuous and in any case much too definite for her own person. On the other hand, she could not believe in the earthly here and now either. To understand this rightly, one need only realize that this turning away from an earthly order when there is no faith in a supernatural order is a profoundly natural response, because in every head, alongside the process of logical thought, with its austere and simple orderliness reflecting the conditions of our external world, there is an affective world, whose logic, insofar as it can be spoken of at all, corresponds to feelings, passions, moods. The laws governing these two bear roughly the same relation to each other as those of a lumberyard, where chunks of wood are hewn into rectangular shapes and stacked ready for transport, bear to the dark tangled laws of the forest, with its mysterious workings and rustlings. And since the objects of our thought are in no way quite
independent of its conditions, these two modes of thinking not only mingle in each person but can, to a certain extent, even present him with two worlds, at least immediately before and after that “first mysterious and indescribable moment” of which a famous religious thinker has said that it occurs in every sensory perception before vision and feeling separate and fall into the places in which one is accustomed to find them: one of them an object in space and the other a mental process enclosed within the observer.

And so, whatever the relationship may be between objects and feeling in the civilized person’s mature view of the world, everyone surely knows those ecstatic moments in which a split has not yet occurred, as though water and land had not yet been divided and the waves of feeling still shared the same horizon as the hills and valleys that form the shape of things. There is even no need to assume that Agathe experienced
such moments unusually often or with unusual intensity; she merely perceived them more vividly or, if you like, more superstitionistically, for she was always willing to trust the world and then again not really trust it, just as she had done ever since her school days, and she had not unlearned it even later, when she had come in closer contact with masculine logic. In this sense, which is not to be confused with whim and willfulness, Agathe could have claimed—given more self-confidence than she had—to be the most illogical of women. But it had never occurred to her to regard the alienated feelings she experienced as more than a personal eccentricity. It was only through the encounter with her brother that a transformation occurred within her. In these empty rooms, all hollowed out in the shadows of solitude, rooms so recently filled with talk and a fellowship that reached to the innermost soul, the distinction between physical separation
and mental presence unwittingly lost itself; and as the days glided by without a trace, Agathe felt with a hitherto unknown intensity the curious charm of that sense of omnipresence and omnipotence which occurs when the felt world makes the transition to perceptions. Her attention now seemed to be not with the senses but already opened wide deep inside her emotions, where no light could enter that did not already glow like the light in her heart, and it seemed to her, remembering her brothers words, that regardless of the ignorance she normally complained of she could understand everything that mattered without having to reflect on it. And as in this way her spirit was so filled with itself that even the liveliest idea had something of the soundless floating quality of a memory about it, everything that came her way spread out into a limitless present. Even when she did something, only a dividing line melted between herself, the doer,
and the thing done, and her movements seemed to be the path by which things came to her when she stretched out her arms to them. This gentle power, this knowledge, and the world’s speaking presence were, however, whenever she wondered with a smile what she was doing after all, hardly distinguishable from absence, helplessness, and a profound muteness of the spirit. With only a slight exaggeration of what she was feeling, Agathe could have said that she no longer knew where she was. On all sides she was in a state of suspension in which she felt both lifted up and lost to sight. She might have said: I am in love, but I don’t know with whom. She was filled with a clear will, something she had always felt the lack of, but she did not know what she should undertake in its clarity, since all that her life had ever held of good and evil was now meaningless.

So it was not only when she looked at the poison capsule but every day that Agathe
thought she would like to die, or that the happiness of death must be like the happiness in which she was spending her days while she was waiting to go and join her brother, meanwhile doing exactly what he had pleaded with her to stop doing. She could not imagine what would happen after she was with her brother in the capital. She remembered almost reproachfully that he had sometimes nonchalantly given signs of assuming that she would be successful there and would soon find a new husband or at least a lover; it would be nothing like that, that much she knew. Love, children, fine days, gay social gatherings, travel, a little art—the good life was so easy; she understood its appeal and was not immune to it. But ready as she was to regard herself as useless, Agathe felt the total contempt of the born rebel for this easy way out. She recognized it as a fake. The life supposedly lived to the full is in truth a life “without rhyme or
reason”; in the end—and truly at the real end, death—something is always missing. It is—how should she put it?—like things piled up without being ordered by some guiding principle; unfulfilled in its fullness, the opposite of easy or simple, a jumble one accepts with the cheerfulness of habit! And suddenly going off at a tangent, she thought: “It’s like a bunch of strange children you look at with conventional friendliness, with growing anxiety because you can’t find your own child among them!”

She took some comfort in her resolve to put an end to her life if the new turn it was about to take should prove to have changed nothing. Like fermenting wine, she felt hope streaming in her that death and terror would not be the final word of truth. She felt no need to think about it. Actually, she feared this need, which Ulrich was always so glad to indulge, and she feared it aggressively. For she did feel that everything that moved her
so strongly was not entirely free of a persistent hint that it was merely illusion. But it was just as true that every illusion contained a reality, however fluid and dissolved: perhaps a reality not yet solidified into earth, she thought; and in one of those wonderful moments when the place where she was standing seemed to melt away, she was able to believe that behind her, in that space into which one could never see, God might be standing. This was too much, and she recoiled from it. An awesome immensity and emptiness suddenly flooded through her, a shoreless radiance darkened her mind and overwhelmed her heart with fear. Her youth, easily prone to such anxieties as come with a lack of experience, whispered to her that she might be in danger of allowing an incipient madness to grow in her; she struggled to back away. Fiercely, she reminded herself that she did not believe in God at all. And she really did not believe, ever since she had
been taught belief; it was part of her mistrust of everything she was taught. She was anything but religious if it meant faith in the supernatural, or at least some moral conviction. But after a while, exhausted and trembling, she still had to admit to herself that she had felt “God” as distinctly as if he were a man standing behind her and putting a coat on her shoulders.

When she had thought this over and recovered her nerve, she discovered that the meaning of her experience did not lie in that “solar eclipse” of her physical sensations, but was mainly a moral matter. A sudden change of her inmost condition, and hence of all her relations with the world, had for a moment given her that “unity of the conscience with the senses” which she had so far experienced so fleetingly that it was barely sufficient to impart to her ordinary life a tinge of something disconsolate and murkyly passionate, whether Agathe tried to behave well
or badly. This change seemed to her an incomparable outpouring that emanated as much from her surroundings toward her as from herself toward them, a oneness of the highest significance through the smallest mental motion, a motion that was barely distinguishable from the objects themselves. The objects were perfused by her sensations and the sensations by the objects in a way so convincing that Agathe felt she had never before been remotely touched by anything for which she had formerly used the word “convincing.” And this had happened in circumstances that would normally be expected to rule out the possibility of her being convinced. So the meaning of what she experienced in her solitude did not lie in its possible psychological import, as an indication of a high-strung or overly fragile personality, for it did not lie in the person at all but in something general, or perhaps in the link between his generality and the person,
something Agathe not unjustly regarded as a moral conclusion in the sense that it seemed to the young woman—disappointed as she was in herself—that if she could always live as she did in such exceptional moments, and if she was not too weak to keep it up, she could love the world and willingly accommodate herself to it—something she would never be able to do otherwise! Now she was filled with a fierce longing to recover that mood, but such moments of highest intensity cannot be willed by force. It was only when her furious efforts proved useless that she realized, with the clarity which a pale day takes on after sunset, that the only thing she could hope for, and what in fact she was waiting for, with an impatience merely masked by her solitude, was the strange prospect that her brother had once half-humorously called the Millennium. He could just as well have chosen another word for it, for what it meant to Agathe was the convincing
and confident ring of something that was coming. She would never have dared make this assertion. Even now she did not know whether it was truly possible. She had no idea what it could be. She had at the moment again forgotten all the words with which her brother had proved to her that beyond what filled her spirit with nebulous light, possibility stretched onward into the uncharted. As long as she had been in his company she had simply felt that a country was crystallizing out of his words, crystallizing not in her head but actually under her feet. The very fact that he often spoke of it only ironically, and his usual way of alternating between coolness and emotion, which had so often confused her in the beginning, now gladdened her in her loneliness, and she took it as a kind of guarantee that he meant it—antagonistic states of soul being more convincing than rapturous ones. “I was apparently thinking of death only because I was afraid he was not
being serious enough,” she confessed to herself.

The last day she had to spend in absentia took her by surprise. All at once everything in the house was cleared out and tidied up; nothing was left to do but hand the keys over to the old couple who were being pensioned off under the provisions of the will and were to go on living in the servants’ lodge until the property found a new owner. Agathe refused to go to a hotel, intending to stay at her post until her train left in the small hours. The house was packed up and shrouded. One naked bulb was lit. Some crates, pushed together, served as table and chair. She had them set her table for supper on the edge of a ravine on a terrace of crates. Her father’s old factotum juggled a loaded tray through light and shadow; he and his wife had insisted on cooking a dinner in their own kitchen, so that, as they expressed it, “the young lady” should be properly taken
care of for her last meal at home. Suddenly Agathe thought, completely outside the state of mind in which she had spent the last few days: “Can they possibly have noticed anything?” She could easily have neglected to destroy every last scrap of paper on which she had practiced changing the will. She felt cold terror, a nightmarish weight that hung on all her limbs: the miserly dread of reality that holds no nourishment for the spirit but only consumes it. Now she perceived with fierce intensity her newly awakened desire to live; it furiously resisted the possibility of anything getting in her way. When the old servant returned, she scrutinized his face intently. But the old man, with his discreet smile, went about his business unsuspecting, seeming to feel something or other that was mute and ceremonious. She could not see into him any more than she could see into a wall, and did not know what else there might be in him behind his blank polish. Now she,
too, felt something muted, ceremonious, and sad. He had always been her

father’s confidant, unfailingly ready to betray to him his children’s every secret as soon as he had discovered it. But Agathe had been born in this house, and everything that had happened since was coming to an end this day: Agathe was moved to find herself and him here now, solemnly alone. She made up her mind to give him a special little gift of money, and in a fit of sudden weakness she planned to tell him that it came from Professor Hagauer; not from some calculating motive but as an act of atonement, with the intention of leaving nothing undone, even though she realized this was as unnecessary as it was superstitious. Before the old man returned again, she also took out her locket and capsule. The locket with the portrait of her never-forgotten beloved she slipped, after one last frowning look at his face, under the loosely nailed lid of a crate destined to go
into storage indefinitely; it appeared to contain kitchen utensils or lamps, for she heard the clink of metal on metal, like branches falling from a tree. Then she placed the capsule with the poison where she had formerly worn the portrait.

“How old-fashioned of me!” she thought with a smile as she did this. “I’m sure there are things more important than one’s love life!” But she did not believe it.

At this moment it would have been as untrue to say that she was disinclined to enter into illicit relations with her brother as that she desired to. That might depend on how things turned out; but in her present state of mind nothing corresponded to the clarity of such a problem.

The light painted the bare boards of the crates between which she was sitting a glaring white and deep black. And a similar tragic mask gave an eerie touch to the otherwise
simple thought that she was now spending her last evening in the house where she had been born of a woman she had never been able to remember, who had also given birth to Ulrich. An old impression came to her of clowns with dead-serious faces and strange instruments standing around her. They began to play. Agathe recognized it as a childhood daydream of hers. She could not hear the music, but all the clowns were looking at her. She told herself that at this moment her death would be no loss to anyone or anything, and for herself it would mean no more than the outward end of an inner dying. So she thought while the clowns were sending their music up to the ceiling and she seemed to be sitting on a circus floor strewn with sawdust, tears dropping on her finger. It was a feeling of utter futility she had known often as a girl, and she thought: “I suppose I’ve remained childish to this day,” which did not prevent her from thinking at
the same time of something that loomed vastly magnified by her tears: how, in the first hour of their reunion, she and her brother had come face-to-face in just such clown costumes. “What does it mean that it is my brother, of all people, who seems to hold the key to what’s inside me?” she wondered. And suddenly she was really weeping. It seemed to be happening for no other reason she knew of but sheer pleasure, and she shook her head hard, as though there were something here she could neither undo nor put together.

At the same time she was thinking with a native ingenuousness that Ulrich would find the answers to all problems...until the old man came back again and was moved at seeing her so moved. “Oh my, the dear young lady!” he said, also shaking his head.

Agathe looked at him in confusion, but when she realized the misunderstanding behind this compassion, that it had been
aroused by her appearance of childlike grief, her youthful high spirits rose again.

“Cast all thou hast into the fire, even unto thy shoes. When thou has nothing left, think not even on thy shroud, but cast thyself naked into the fire!” she said to him.

It was an ancient saying that Ulrich had read to her delightedly, and the old man showed the stumps of his teeth in a smile at the grave and mellow lilt of the words she recited to him, her eyes aglow with tears; with his eyes he followed her hand pointing at the high-piled crates—she was trying to help his understanding by misleading it—suggesting something like a pyre. He had nodded at the word “shroud,” eager to follow even though the path of the words was none too smooth, but he’d stiffened from the word “naked” on, and when she repeated her maxim, his face had reverted to the mask of the well-trained servant whose expression gives assurance
that he can be trusted not to hear, see, or judge his betters.

In all his years with his old master that word had never once been uttered in his hearing; “undressed” would have been the closest permissible. But young people were different nowadays, and he would probably not be able to give them satisfaction in any case. Serenely, as one who has earned his retirement, he felt that his career was over. But Agathes last thought before she left was: “Would Ulrich really cast everything into the fire?”
The state in which Ulrich emerged into the street on leaving the Palais Leinsdorf was rather like the down-to-earth sensation of hunger. He stopped in front of a billboard and stilled his hunger for bourgeois normality by taking in the announcements and advertisements. The billboard was several yards wide and covered with words. “Actually,” it occurred to him, “one might assume that these particular words, which are met with in every corner of the city, have a great deal to tell us.” The language seemed to
him akin to the clichés uttered by the characters in popular novels at important points in their lives. He read: “Have you ever worn anything so flattering yet so durable as Topi-nam silk stockings?” “His Excellency Goes Out on the Town!” “Saint Bartholomew’s Night—A Brand-New Production!” “For Fun and Food Come to the Black Pony!” “Hot Sex Show & Dancing at the Red Pony!” Next to this he noticed a political poster: “Criminal Intrigues!” but it referred to the price of bread, not to the Parallel Campaign. He turned away and, a few steps farther along, looked into the window of a bookshop. “The Great Authors Latest Work,” said a cardboard sign beside a row of fifteen copies of the same book. In the opposite corner of the display window, a sign accompanying another book read: “Love’s Tower of Babel by ——— makes gripping reading for men and women.”
“The Great Author?” Ulrich thought. He remembered having read one book by him and resolved never to read another; but since then the man had nevertheless become famous. Considering the window display of German intellect, Ulrich was reminded of an old army joke: “Mortadella!” During Ulrich’s military service this had been the nickname of an unpopular general, after the popular Italian sausage, and if anyone wondered why, the answer was: “Part pig, part donkey.” He was prevented from pursuing this stimulating analogy by the voice of a woman asking him:

“Are you waiting for the streetcar too?” Only then did he realize that he was no longer standing in front of the bookshop. He also had not realized that he was now standing immobile at a streetcar stop. The woman who had called this to his attention wore a knapsack and glasses, and turned out to be an acquaintance from the staff of the
Astronomical Institute, one of the few women of accomplishment in this man’s profession. He looked at her nose and the bags under her eyes, which the strain of unremitting intellectual effort had turned into something resembling underarm dress shields made of guttapercha. Then he glanced down and noticed her short tweed skirt, then up and saw a black rooster feather in a green mountaineer’s hat that floated over her learned features, and he smiled.

“Are you off to the mountains?” he asked.

Dr. Strastil was going to the mountains for three days to “relax.” “What do you think of Koniatowski’s paper?” she asked Ulrich. Ulrich had nothing to say. “Kneppler will be furious,” she said, “but Koniatowski’s critique of Kneppler’s deduction from Danielli’s theorem is interesting, don’t you agree? Do you think Kneppler’s deduction is possible?”
Ulrich shrugged his shoulders.

He was one of those mathematicians called logicians, for whom nothing was ever “correct” and who were working out new theoretical principles. But he was not entirely satisfied with the logic of the logicians either. Had he continued his work, he would have gone right back to Aristotle; he had his own views of all that.

“For my part, I don’t think Kneppler’s deduction is mistaken, it’s just that it’s wrong,” Dr. Strastil confessed. She might have said with the same firmness that she did consider the deduction mistaken but nevertheless not essentially wrong. She knew what she meant, but in ordinary language, where the terms are undefined, one cannot express oneself unequivocally. Using this holiday language under her tourist hat made her feel something of the timid haughtiness that might be aroused in a cloistered monk
who was rash enough to let himself come in contact with the sensual world of the laity.

Ulrich got into the streetcar with Fraulein Strastil; he didn’t know why. Perhaps it was because she cared so much about Koniatowski’s criticism of Kneppler. Perhaps he felt like talking to her about literature, about which she knew nothing.

“What will you do in the mountains?” he asked.

She was going up to the Hochschwab.

“There’ll still be too much snow up there.” He knew the mountains. “It’s too late for skis, and too early to go up there without them.”

“Then I’ll stay down,” Fraulein Strastil declared. “I once spent three days in a cabin at the foot of the Farsenalm. I only want to get back to nature for a bit!”
The expression on the worthy astronomer’s face as she uttered the word “nature” provoked Ulrich to ask her what she needed nature for.

Dr. Strastil was sincerely indignant. She could He on the mountain meadow for three whole days without stirring—”just like a boulder!” she declared.

“That’s because you’re a scientist,” Ulrich pointed out. “A peasant would be bored.”

Dr. Strastil did not see it that way. She spoke of the thousands who sought nature every holiday, on foot, on wheels, or by boat.

Ulrich spoke of the peasants deserting the countryside in droves for the attractions of the city.

Fraulein Strastil doubted that he was feeling on a sufficiently elementary level.
Ulrich claimed that the only elementary level, besides eating and love, was to make oneself comfortable, not to seek out an alpine meadow. The natural feeling that was supposed to drive people to do such things was actually a modern Rousseauism, a complicated and sentimental attitude.

He was not at all pleased with the way he was expressing himself, but he did not care what he said, and merely kept on talking because he had not yet come to what he wanted to get out of his system. Fraulein Strastil gave him a mistrustful look. She could not make him out. Here her considerable experience in abstract thinking was of no use to her; she could neither keep separate nor fit together the ideas he seemed merely to be juggling so nimbly; she guessed that he was talking without thinking. She took some comfort in listening to him with a rooster feather on her hat, and it reinforced her joy in the solitude she was heading for.
At this point Ulrich’s eye happened to light on the newspaper of the man opposite him, and he read the opening line of an advertisement, in heavy type: “Our time asks questions—Our time gives answers.” It could have been the announcement of a new arch support or of a forthcoming lecture—who could tell these days?—but his mind suddenly leapt onto the track he had been seeking.

His companion struggled to be objective. “I’m afraid,” she admitted with some hesitation, “that I don’t know much about literature; people like us never have time. Perhaps I don’t know the right things, either. But”—she mentioned a popular name—”means a great deal to me. A writer who can make us feel things so intensely is surely what we mean by a great writer!”

However, since Ulrich felt he had now profited enough from Dr. Strastil’s combination of an exceptionally developed capacity
for abstract thought and a notably retarded understanding of the soul, he stood up cheerfully, treated his colleague to a bit of outrageous flattery, and hastily got off, excusing himself on the grounds that he had gone two stops past his destination. When he stood on the street, raising his hat to her once more, Fraulein Strastil remembered that she had recently heard some disparaging remarks about his own work; but she also felt herself blushing in response to his charming parting words to her, which, to her way of thinking, was not exactly to his credit. But he now knew, without yet being fully conscious of it, why his thoughts were revolving on the subject of literature and what it was they were after, from the interrupted “Mortadella” comparison to his unintentionally leading the good Strastil on to those confidences. After all, literature had been no concern of his since he had written his last poem, at twenty; still, before that, writing
secretly had been a fairly regular habit, which he had given up not because he had grown older or had realized he didn’t have enough talent, but for reasons that now, with his current impressions, he would have liked to define by some kind of word suggesting much effort culminating in a void.

For Ulrich was one of those book-lovers who do not want to go on reading because they feel that the whole business of reading and writing is a nuisance. “If the sensible Strastil wants to be ‘made to feel’ “ he thought (“Quite right too! If I had objected she’d have brought up music as her trump card!”)—and as one so often does, he was partly thinking in words, partly carrying on a wordless argument in his head—so if this reasonable Dr. Strastil wants to be made to feel, it only amounts to what everyone wants from art, to be moved, overwhelmed, entertained, surprised, to be allowed a sniff of noble ideas; in short, to be made to
experience something "alive," have a "living" experience. Ulrich was certainly not against it. Somewhere at the back of his mind he was thinking something that ended in a mingling of a touch of sentiment and ironic resistance: "Feeling is rare enough. To keep feeling at a certain temperature, to keep it from cooling down, probably means preserving the body warmth from which all intellectual development arises. And whenever a person is momentarily lifted out of his tangle of rational intentions, which involve him with countless alien objects, whenever he is raised to a state wholly without purpose, such as listening to music, for instance, he is almost in the biological condition of a flower on which the rain and the sunshine fall." He was willing to admit that there is a more eternal eternity in the mind's pauses and quiescence than in its activity; but he had been thinking first "feeling" and then "experiencing": a contradiction was implied here. For there were
experiences of the will! There were experiences of action at its peak! Though one could probably assume that by the time each experience had reached its acme of radiant bitterness it was sheer feeling; which would bring up an even greater contradiction: that in its greatest purity the state of feeling is a quiescence, a dying away of all activity. Or was it not a contradiction, after all? Was there some curious connection by which the most intense activity was motionless at the core? At this point he realized that this sequence of ideas had begun not so much as a thought at the back of his mind as one that was unwelcome, for with a sudden stiffening of resistance against the sentimental turn it had taken, Ulrich repudiated the whole train of thought into which he had slipped. He had absolutely no intention of brooding over certain states of mind and, when he was thinking about feeling, succumbing to feelings.
He suddenly realized that what he was getting at could best be defined, without much ado, as the futile actuality or the eternal momentariness of literature. Does it lead to anything? Literature is either a tremendous detour from experience to experience, ending back where it came from, or an epitome of sensations that leads to nothing at all definite. “A puddle,” he now thought, “has often made a stronger impression of depth on someone than the ocean, for the simple reason that we have more occasion to experience puddles than oceans.” It seemed to him that it was the same with feelings, which was the only reason commonplace feelings are regarded as the deepest. Putting the ability to feel above the feeling itself—the characteristic of all sensitive people—like the wanting to make others feel and be made to feel that is the common impulse behind all our arrangements concerning the emotional life, amounts to downgrading the importance and
nature of the feelings compared with their fleeting presence as a subjective state, and so leads to that shallowness, stunted development, and utter irrelevance, for which there is no lack of examples. "Of course," Ulrich added mentally, "this view will repel all those people who feel as cozy in their feelings as a rooster in his feathers and who even preen themselves on the idea that eternity starts all over again with every separate personality'!"

He had a clear mental image of an immense perversity of a scope involving all mankind, but he could not find a way to express it that would satisfy him, probably because its ramifications were too intricate.

While busy with all this he was watching the passing trolley cars, waiting for the one that would take him back as close as possible to the center of town. He saw people climbing in and out of the cars, and his technically trained eye toyed distractedly with the interplay of welding and casting, rolling
and bolting, of engineering and hand finishing, of historical development and the present state of the art, which combined to make up these barracks-on-wheels that these people were using.

“As a last step, a committee from the municipal transportation department comes to the factory and decides what kind of wood to use as veneer, the color of the paint, upholstery, arms on the seats and straps for standees, ashtrays, and the like,” he thought idly, “and it is precisely these trivial details, along with the red or green color of the exterior, and how they swing themselves up the steps and inside, that for tens of thousands of people make up what they remember, all they experience, of all the genius that went into it. This is what forms their character, endows it with speed or comfort; it’s what makes them perceive red cars as home and blue ones as foreign, and adds up to that unmistakable odor of countless details that
clings to the clothing of the centuries.” So there was no denying—and this suddenly rounded out Ulrich’s main line of thought—that life itself largely peters out into trivial realities or, to put it technically, that the power of its spiritual coefficient is extremely small.

And suddenly, as he felt himself swinging aboard the trolley, he said to himself: “I shall have to make Agathe see that morality is the subordination of every momentary state in our life to one enduring one!” This principle had come to him all at once in the form of a definition. But this highly polished concept had been preceded and was followed by others which, though not so fully developed and articulated, rounded out its meaning. The innocuous business of feeling was here set in an austere conceptual framework, it was given a job to do, with a strict hierarchy of values, vaguely foreshortened, in the offing: feelings must either
be functional or refer to a still-undefined condition as immense as the open sea. Should it be called an idea or a longing? Ulrich had to leave it at that, for from the moment his sister’s name had occurred to him her shadow had darkened his thoughts. As always when he thought of her, he felt that he had shown himself in her company in a different frame of mind than usual. And he knew, too, that he was longing passionately to get back into that frame of mind. But the same memory overcame him with humiliation when he thought of himself carrying on in a presumptuous, ludicrous, and drunken fashion, no better than a man who sinks to his knees in a frenzy in front of people he won’t be able to look in the face the next day. Considering how balanced and controlled the intellectual exchange between brother and sister had been this was a wild exaggeration, and if it was not completely unfounded, it was probably no more than a reaction to
feelings that had not yet taken shape. He knew Agathe was bound to arrive in a few days, and he had done nothing to stop her. Had she actually done anything wrong? One might suppose that as she cooled off she had gone back on it all. But a lively premonition assured him that Agathe had not abandoned her scheme. He could have tried to find out by asking her. Again he felt duty bound to write and warn her against it. But instead of giving this even a moment’s serious consideration, he tried to imagine what could have prompted Agathe to do something so irregular: he saw it as an incredibly vehement gesture meant to show her trust in him and to put herself entirely in his hands. “She has very little sense of reality,’ he thought, “but a wonderful way of doing what she wants. Rash, I suppose, but just for that reason spontaneous! When she’s angry, she sees red with a vengeance.” He smiled indulgently and looked around at the other passengers.
Every one of them had evil thoughts, of course, and every one suppressed them, and nobody blamed himself overmuch; but no one else had these thoughts outside himself, in another person, who would give them the enchanting inaccessibility of an experience in a dream.

Since Ulrich had left his letter unfinished, he realized for the first time that he no longer had a choice but was already in the state he was still hesitating to enter. According to its laws—he indulged himself in the overweening ambiguity of calling them “holy”—Agathe’s misstep could not be undone by repentance but only be made good by actions that followed it, which incidentally was doubtless in keeping with the original meaning of repentance as a state of purifying fire, not a state of being impaired. To repair the damage done to Agathe’s inconvenient husband, or indemnify him, would have meant only to undo the damage done, that is,
it would only have been that double and crippling negation of which ordinary good conduct consists, which inwardly cancels out to zero. But what should be done for Hagauer, how a looming burden should be “lifted,” was possible only if one could marshal a great sympathy for him, a prospect Ulrich could not face without dismay. Keeping within the framework of this logic that Ulrich was trying to adapt to, all that could ever be made good was something other than the damage done, and he did not doubt for an instant that this would have to be his and his sister’s whole life.

“Putting it presumptuously,” he thought, “this means: Saul did not make good each single consequence of his previous sins; he turned into Paul!” Against this curious logic, however, both feeling and judgment raised the customary objection that it would nevertheless be more decent—and no deterrent to more romantic future
possibilities—to straighten out accounts with one’s brother-in-law first, and only then to plan one’s new life. The kind of morality to which he was so attracted was not, after all, suited in the least to dealing with money matters and business and the resulting conflicts. So insoluble and conflicting situations were bound to arise on the borderline between that other life and everyday life, which it would be better not to allow to develop into borderline cases; they should be dispatched at the outset, in the normal, unemotional way of simple decency. But here again Ulrich felt it was impossible to take one’s bearings from the normal conditions of goodness if one wanted to press on into the realm of unconditional goodness. The mission laid upon him, to take the first step into uncharted territory, would apparently suffer no abatement.

His last line of defense was his strong aversion to the terms he had been using so
lavishly, such as “self,” “feeling,” “goodness,” “alternative goodness,” “evil,” for being so subjective and at the same time presumptuous, gauzy abstractions, which really corresponded to the moral ponderings of very much younger people. He found himself doing what any number of those who are following his story are likely to do, irritably picking out individual words and phrases, asking himself such questions as: “‘Production and results of feelings?’ What a machinelike, rationalistic, humanly unrealistic notion! ‘Morality as the problem of a permanent state to which all individual states are subordinate’—and that’s all? The inhumanity of it!” Looked at through a rational person’s eyes, it all seemed extraordinarily perverse. “The essence of morality virtually hinges on the important feelings remaining constant,” Ulrich thought, “and all the individual has to do is act in accord with them!”
But just at this point the rolling locale that enclosed him and that had been created with T-square and compass came to a halt, at a spot where his eye, peering out from the body of modern transportation and still an involuntary part of it, lit on a stone column that had been standing beside this roadway since the period of the Baroque, so that the engineered comfort of this calculated artifact, unconsciously taken for granted, suddenly clashed with the passion erupting from the statue’s antiquated pose, which suggested something not unlike a petrified belly-ache. The effect of this optical collision was to powerfully confirm the ideas from which Ulrich had just been trying to escape. Could anything have illustrated life’s confusion more clearly than this chance spectacle? Without taking sides with either the Now or the Then in matters of taste, as one usually does when faced with such a juxtaposition, he felt his mind abandoned by both sides
without an instant’s hesitation, and saw in it only the great demonstration of a problem that is at bottom a moral problem. He could not doubt that the transience of what is regarded as style, culture, the will of the time, or the spirit of an era, for which it is admired, was a moral weakness. For in the great scale of the ages this instability means exactly what it would mean on the smaller scale of personal life: to have developed one’s potential one-sidedly, to have dissipated it in extravagant exaggerations, never taking the measure of one’s own will, never achieving a complete form, and in disjointed passions doing now this, now that. Even the so-called succession or progress of the ages seemed to him to be only another term for the fact that none of these experiments ever reach the point where they would all meet and move on together toward a comprehensive understanding that would at last offer a basis for a coherent development, a lasting enjoyment,
and that seriousness of great beauty of which nowadays hardly more than a shadow occasionally drifts across our life.

Ulrich of course saw the preposterous arrogance of assuming that everything had in effect come to nothing. And yet it was nothing. Immeasurable as existence; confusion as meaning. At least, judging by the results, it was no more than the stuff of which the soul of the present is made, which is not much. While Ulrich was thinking this he was nevertheless savoring the “not much,” as if it were the last meal at the table of life his outlook would permit him to have. He had left the streetcar and taken a route that would bring him quickly to the city’s center. He felt as if he were coming out of a cellar. The streets were screeching with gaiety and filled with unseasonable warmth like a summer day. The sweet poisonous taste of talking to oneself had left his mouth: everything was expansive and out in the sun. Ulrich stopped at
almost every shop window. Those tiny bottles in so many colors, stoppered scents, countless variants of nail scissors—what quantities of genius there were even in a hairdresser's window! A glove shop: what connections, what inventions, before a goat's skin is drawn up on a lady's hand and the animal's pelt has become more refined than her own! He was astonished at the luxuries one took for granted, the countless cozy trappings of the good life, as though he were seeing them for the first time. Trap-pings! What a charming word, he felt. And what a boon, this tremendous contract to get along together! Here there was no reminder of life's earth crust, of the unpaved roads of passion, of—he truly felt this— the uncivilized nature of the soul! One's attention, a bright and narrow beam, glided over a flower garden of fruits, gemstones, fabrics, forms and allure-ments whose gently persuasive eyes were opened in all the colors of the rainbow. Since
at that time a white skin was prized and guarded from the sun, a few colorful parasols were already floating above the crowd, laying silky shadows on women’s pale faces. Ulrich’s glance was even enchanted by the pale-golden beer seen in passing through the plate-glass windows of a restaurant, on tablecloths so white that they formed blue patches at the edges of shadows. Then the Archbishop’s carriage drove by, a gently rocking, heavy carriage, whose dark interior showed red and purple. It had to be the Archbishop’s carriage, for this horse-drawn vehicle that Ulrich followed with his eyes had a wholly ecclesiastical air, and two policemen sprang to attention and saluted this follower of Christ without thinking of their predecessors who had run a lance into his predecessor’s side.

He gave himself up with such zest to these impressions, which he had just been calling “life’s futile actuality,” that little by
little, as he sated himself with the world, his earlier revulsion against it began to reassert itself. Ulrich now knew exactly where his speculations fell short. “What’s the point, in the face of all this vainglory, of looking for some result beyond, behind, beneath it all? Would that be a philosophy? An all-embracing conviction, a law? Or the finger of God? Or, instead of that, the assumption that morality has up to now lacked an ‘inductive stance,’ that it is much harder to be good than we had believed, and that it will require an endless cooperative effort, like every other science? I think there is no morality, because it cannot be deduced from anything constant; all there are are rules for uselessly maintaining transitory conditions. I also assume that there can be no profound happiness without a profound morality; yet my thinking about it strikes me as an unnatural, bloodless state, and it is absolutely not what I want!” Indeed, he might well have asked
himself much more simply, “What is this I have taken upon myself?” which is what he now did. However, this question touched his sensibility more than his intellect; in fact, the question stopped his thinking and diminished bit by bit his always keen delight in strategic planning before he had even formulated it. It began as a dark tone close to his ear, accompanying him; then it sounded inside him, an octave lower than everything else; finally, Ulrich had merged with his question and felt as though he himself were a strangely deep sound in the bright, hard world, surrounded by a wide interval. So what was it he had really taken on himself, what had he promised?

He thought hard. He knew that he had not merely been joking when he used the expression “the Millennium,” even if it was only a figure of speech. If one took this promise seriously, it meant the desire to live, with the aid of mutual love, in a secular
condition so transcendent that one could only feel and do whatever heightened and maintained that condition. He had always been certain that human beings showed hints of such a disposition. It had begun with the “affair of the majors wife,” and though his subsequent experiences had not amounted to much, they had always been of the same kind. In sum, what it more or less came to was that Ulrich believed in the “Fall of Man” and in “Original Sin.” That is, he was inclined to think that at some time in the past, man’s basic attitude had undergone a fundamental change that must have been roughly comparable to the moment when a lover regains his sobriety; he may then see the whole truth, but something greater has been torn to shreds, and the truth appears everywhere as a mere fragment left over and patched up again. Perhaps it was even the apple of “knowledge” that had caused this spiritual change and expelled mankind from
a primal state to which it might find its way back only after becoming wise through countless experiences and through sin. But Ulrich believed in such myths not in their traditional form, but only in the way he had discovered them; he believed in them like an arithmetician who, with the system of his feelings spread out before him, concludes, from the fact that none of them could be justified, that he would have to introduce a fantastic hypothesis whose nature could be arrived at only intuitively. That was no trifle! He had turned over such thoughts in his mind often enough, but he had never yet been in the situation of having to decide within a few days whether to stake his life on it. A faint sweat broke out under his hat and collar, and he was bothered by the proximity of all the people jostling by him. What he was thinking amounted to taking leave of most of his living relationships; he had no illusions about that. For today our lives are
divided, and parts are entangled with other people; what we dream has to do with dreaming and also with what other people dream; what we do has sense, but more sense in relation with what others do; and what we believe is tied in with beliefs only a fraction of which are our own. It is therefore quite unrealistic to insist upon acting out of the fullness of one’s own personal reality. Especially for a man like himself, who had been imbued all his life with the thought that one’s beliefs had to be shared, that one must have the courage to live in the midst of moral contradictions, because that was the price of great achievement. Was he at least convinced of what he had just been thinking about the possibility and significance of another kind of life? Not at all! Nevertheless, he could not help being emotionally drawn to it, as though his feelings were facing the unmistakable signs of a reality they had been looking forward to for years.
At this point he did have to ask himself what, if anything, entitled him, like a veritable Narcissus, to wish not to do ever again anything that left his soul unmoved. Such a resolve runs counter to the principles of the active life with which everyone is today imbued, and even if God-fearing times could have fostered such ambitions, they have melted away like the half-light of dawn as the sun grows stronger. There was an odor of something reclusive and syrupy clinging to him that Ulrich found increasingly distasteful. He tried to rein in his unruly thoughts as quickly as possible, and told himself—if not quite sincerely—that the promise of a Millennium he had so oddly given his sister, rationally considered, boiled down to no more than a kind of social work: living with Agathe would probably call for all the delicacy and selflessness he could muster—qualities that had been all too lacking in him. He recalled, the way one recalls an unusually transparent
cloud flitting across the sky, certain moments of their recent time together that had already been of this kind. “Perhaps the content of the Millennium is merely the burgeoning of this energy, which at first shows itself in two people, until it grows into a resounding universal communion,” he wondered in some embarrassment. Again he resorted to his own “affair of the majors wife” for more light on the subject. Leaving aside the delusions of love, since immaturity had been at the root of that aberration, he focused all his attention on the feelings of tender care and adoration of which he had been capable in his solitude at the time, and it seemed to him that feeling trust and affection, or living for another person, must be a happiness that could move one to tears, as lovely as the lambent sinking of day into the peace of evening and also, just a little, an impoverishing of spirit and intellect to the point of tears. For there was also a funny
side to their project, as of two elderly bachelors setting up house together, and such twitchings of his imagination warned him how little the notion of a life of service in brotherly love was likely to offer him fulfillment. With some detachment he could see that from the first there had been a large measure of the asocial intermingled in his relationship with Agathe. Not only the business with Hagauer and the will, but the whole emotional tone of their association, pointed to something impetuous, and there was no doubt that what brought them together was not so much love for each other as a repelling of the rest of the world.

“No!” Ulrich thought. “Wanting to live for another person is no more than egoism going bankrupt and then opening a new shop next door, with a partner!”

Actually, his inner concentration, despite this brilliantly honed insight, had already passed its peak at the moment when
he had been tempted to confine the diffuse illumination that filled him inside an earthly lamp, and now that this had shown itself to be a mistake, his thinking had lost the urge to press for a decision and was eager for some distraction. Not far from him two men had just collided and were shouting unpleasant remarks at each other as if getting ready to fight; Ulrich watched with a renewed interest, and had hardly tinned away when his glance struck that of a woman giving him a look like a fat flower nodding on its stem. In that pleasant mood which is an equal blend of feeling and extroverted attention, he noted that real people pursue the ideal commandment to love one another in two parts, the first consisting in their detesting one another and the second in making up for it by entering into sexual relations with the half that is excepted. Without stopping to think he too turned, after a few steps, to follow the woman; it was a quite mechanical consequence
of their eye contact. He could see her body beneath her dress like a big white fish just under the surface of the water. He felt the male urge to harpoon the fish and watch it flap and struggle, and there was in this as much repugnance as desire. Some hardly perceptible signs made him certain this woman knew he was prowling after her and was interested. He tried to work out her place on the social scale and decided on “upper-middle class,” where it is hard to pinpoint the position with precision. “Business family? Government service?” he speculated. Various random images came to him, even including that of a pharmacy: he could feel the pungently sweet smell of the husband coming home, the compact atmosphere of the household betraying no sign of the shifting beam from the burglar’s flashlight that had just recently moved through it. It was vile, no doubt, but shamefully exciting.
As Ulrich kept following the woman, actually afraid that she might stop at some shop window and so force him either to stumble foolishly past her or to pick her up, something in him was still undistracted and wide awake. “What exactly might Agathe want from me?” he asked himself for the first time. He did not know. He assumed that it would be something like what he wanted of her, but he had nothing to base this on but intuition. Wasn’t it amazing how quickly and unexpectedly it had all happened? Other than a few childhood memories he had known nothing about her, and the little he had heard, such as her connection of some years with Hagauer, he found rather distasteful. He now recalled the curious hesitancy, almost reluctance, with which he had approached his father’s house on his arrival. Suddenly the idea took hold of him: “My feeling for Agathe is just imagination!” In a man who continually wanted something
other than what those around him wanted—he was thinking seriously again—in such a man, who always felt strong dislikes and never got as far as liking, the usual kindliness and lukewarm human goodness can easily separate and turn into a cold hardness with a mist of impersonal love floating above it. Seraphic love, he had once named it. It could also, he thought, be called love without a partner. Or, just as well, love without sex. Sexual love was all the love there was nowadays: those alike in gentler repelled each other, and in the sexual crossover people loved with a growing resentment of the overestimation of this compulsion. But seraphic love was free of both these defects. It was love cleansed of the crosscurrents of social and sexual aversions. This love, which makes itself felt everywhere in company with the cruelty of modern life, could truly be called the sisterly love of an age that has no
room for brotherly love, he said to himself, wincing in irritation.

Yet having finally arrived at this conclusion, alongside it and alternately with it he went on dreaming of a woman who could not be attained at all. He had a vision of her like late-autumn days in the mountains, when the air is as if drained of its lifeblood to the point of death, while the colors are aflame with fierce passion. He saw the blue vistas, without end in their mysterious gradations. He completely forgot the woman who was actually walking ahead of him; he was far from desire and perhaps close to love.

He was distracted only by the lingering gaze of another woman, like that of the first, yet not so brazen and obvious; this one was well-bred and delicate as a pastel stroke that leaves its stamp in a fraction of a second. He looked up and in a state of utmost emotional exhaustion beheld a very beautiful lady in whom he recognized Bonadea.
The glorious day had lured her out for a walk. Ulrich glanced at his watch: he had been strolling along only fifteen minutes, and no more than forty-five had passed since he left the Palais Leinsdorf.

Bonadea said: ‘Tm not free today.”

Ulrich thought: “How long, by comparison, is a whole day, a year, not to mention a resolution for a lifetime!” It was beyond calculation.
And so it happened that Ulrich received a visit soon afterward from his abandoned mistress. Their encounter on the street had not provided him with an opportunity to call her to account for misusing his name to win Diotima’s friendship, nor had it given Bonadea enough time to reproach him for his long silence and not only defend herself from the charge of indiscretion and call Diotima “an ignoble snake” but even make up a story to prove it. Hence she and her retired lover had hurriedly agreed that they must meet once again and have it all out.

The visitor who appeared was no longer the Bonadea who coiled her hair until it gave her head something of a Grecian look when she studied it in the mirror with eyes narrowed, intending to be just as pure and noble
as Diotima, nor was she the one who raved in the night, maddened by the withdrawal pains of such a cure for her addiction, cursing her exemplar shamelessly and with a woman’s instinct for the lethal thrust; she was once again the dear old Bonadea whose curls hung down over her none-too-wise brow or were swept back from it, depending on the dictates of fashion, and in whose eyes there was always something reminiscent of the air rising above a fire. While Ulrich started to reprove her for having betrayed their relationship to his cousin, she was carefully removing her hat before the mirror, and when he wanted to know exactly how much she had said, she smugly and in great detail told him a story she claimed to have made up for Diotima about having had a letter from him in which he asked her to see that Moosbrugger was not overlooked entirely, whereupon she had thought the best thing to do was to turn to the woman of whose high-
mindedness the writer of the letter had so often spoken to her. Then she perched on the arm of Ulrich’s chair, kissed his forehead, and meekly insisted that it was all perfectly true, except for the letter.

Her bosom emitted a great warmth.

“Then why did you call my cousin a snake? You were one yourself!” Ulrich said.

Bonadea pensively shifted her gaze from him to the wall. “Oh, I don’t know,” she answered. “She’s so nice to me. She takes so much interest in me!”

“What is that supposed to mean?” Ulrich asked. “Are you participating in her efforts for the Good, the True, and the Beautiful?”

Bonadea replied: “She explained to me that no woman can live for her love with all her might, she no more than I. And that is why every woman must do her duty in the
place appointed to her by fate. She really is so very decent,” Bonadea went on, even more thoughtfully. “She keeps telling me to be more patient with my husband, and she insists that a superior woman can find considerable happiness in making the most of her marriage; she puts far more value in that than in adultery. And after all, it’s exactly what I’ve always thought myself!”

It happened to be true, in fact; for Bonadea had never thought otherwise, she had merely always acted otherwise, and so she could agree with a good conscience. When Ulrich said as much to her, it earned him another kiss, this time somewhat lower than the forehead. “You happen to upset my polygamous balance,” she said with a little sigh of apology for the discrepancy that had arisen between her principles and her conduct.

It turned out, after some cross-examination, that she had meant to say “polyglandular balance”—a new physiological
term at that time comprehensible only to initiates, which might be translated as balance of secretions, on the assumption that certain glands which affected the blood had a stimulating or inhibiting effect, thereby influencing character and, more specifically, a person’s temperament, especially the kind of temperament Bonadea had to a degree that caused her much suffering in certain circumstances.

Ulrich raised his eyebrows in curiosity.

“Well, something to do with glands,” Bonadea said. “It’s rather a relief to know one can’t help it!” She gave the lover she had lost a wistful smile. “A person who loses her balance easily is liable to have unsuccessful sexual experiences.”

“My dear Bonadea,” Ulrich marveled, “what kind of talk is this?”

“It’s what I’ve been learning to say. You are an unsuccessful sexual experience, your
cousin says. But she also says that a person can escape the shattering physical and emotional effects by bearing in mind that nothing we do is merely our own personal affair. She’s very nice to me. She says that my mistake is that I make too much of a single aspect of love instead of taking in the whole spectrum of the experience. You see, what she means by a single aspect is what she also calls ‘the crude mechanics’: it’s often very interesting to see things in her light. But there’s one thing about her I don’t like. She may say that a strong woman sees her life’s work in monogamy and should love it like an artist, but she does have three men, and, counting you, possibly four, on her string, and I have none at all now to make me happy!"

The gaze with which she scrutinized her AWOL reservist was warm and questioning. Ulrich did his best to ignore it.
“So the two of you talk about me?” he asked with some foreboding.

“Oh, only on and off,” Bonadea replied. “When your cousin needs to exemplify something, or when your friend the General is present.”

“I suppose Arnheim is in on this too?”

“He lends a dignified ear to what the gracious ladies have to say.” Bonadea made fun of him, not without talent for unobtrusive mimicry, but she added seriously: “I don’t like the way he treats your cousin at all. Most of the time he’s off on some trip or other, and when he’s present he talks too much to everyone, and when she is quoting Frau von Stern, for example—”

“Frau von Stein?” Ulrich corrected her by asking.

“Of course, I meant Stein: it isn’t as if Diotima didn’t talk about her often enough.
Well, when she talks about Frau von Stein and Goethe’s other woman, the Vul... What’s her name? It sounds a little obscene, I think....”

“Vulpius.”

“Oh yes. You know, I get to hear so many foreign words there that I’m beginning to forget the simplest ones! So when she’s making her comparisons between Frau von Stein and the other, Arnheim keeps staring at me as if, compared with his idol, I was no better than the kind you just said.”

Now Ulrich insisted on an explanation of these new developments.

It turned out that since Bonadea had claimed the status of Ulrich’s confidante she had made great strides in her intimacy with Diotima.

Her alleged nymphomania, which Ulrich had carelessly mentioned to Diotima in
a moment of pique, had had a far-reaching effect on his cousin. She had begun by inviting the newcomer to her gatherings, in the role of a lady vaguely active in social welfare, and watched her covertly. This intruder, soaking up Diotima’s domestic interiors with eyes soft as blotting paper, not only had been downright uncanny but had also aroused in her as much feminine curiosity as dread. To tell the truth, when Diotima pronounced the term “venereal disease” she felt the same vague sensations as when she tried to imagine what her new acquaintance actually did, and from one occasion to the next she was expecting, with an uneasy conscience, some impossible behavior, outrage, or scandal from her. Bonadea succeeded, however, in calming these suspicions by cloaking her ambition in the kind of especially well-bred behavior that naughty children affect when their moral zeal is aroused by the tone of their surroundings. In the process she even
managed to forget that she was jealous of Diotima, who was surprised to find that her disturbing protégée was just as much given over to “ideals” as she was herself. For the “fallen sister,” as she thought of her, had soon become a protégée, in whom Diotima was moved to take an especially active interest because her own situation made her see the ignoble mystery of nymphomania as a kind of female sword of Damocles which, she said, might hang by a thin thread even over the head of a vestal virgin. “I know, my child,” she consolingly instructed Bonadea, who was about her own age, “there is nothing so tragic as embracing a man of whom one is not entirely convinced!” and kissed her on that unchaste mouth with a heroic effort that would have been enough to make her press her lips on the blood-dripping bristles of a lion’s beard.

Diotima’s position at that time was midway between Arnheim and Tuzzi: a
seesaw position, metaphorically speaking, one end of which was weighted down too much, the other not enough. Even Ulrich had found her, on his return, with hot towels around her head and stomach; but these female complaints, the intensity of which she sensed to be her body’s protest against the contradictory orders it was receiving from her soul, had also awakened in Diotima that noble resolve that was characteristic of her as soon as she refused to be just like every other woman. It was of course hard to decide, at first, whether it was her soul or her body that was called upon to take action, or whether a change in her attitude toward Arnheim or toward Tuzzi would be the better response; but this was settled with the world’s help, for while her soul with its enigmas eluded her like a fish one tries to hold bare-handed, the suffering seeker was surprised to find plenty of advice in the books of the Zeitgeist, once she had decided to deal
with her fate from the physical angle, as represented by her husband. She had not known that our time, which has presumably distanced itself from the concept of passionate love because it is more of a religious than a sexual concept, regards love contemptuously as being too childish to still bother about, devoting all its energies instead to marriage, the bodily operations of which in all their variants it investigates with zestful specificity. There was already at that time a spate of books that discussed the “sexual revolution” with the clean-mindedness of a gym teacher, and whose aim was to help people be happy though married. In these books man or wife were referred to only as “male and female procreators,” and the boredom they were supposed to exorcise by all manner of mental and physical diversions was labeled “the sexual problem.” When Diotima first immersed herself in this literature she furrowed her brow, but it soon smoothed
out again; for it was a spur to her ambition to discover that a great new movement of the Zeitgeist was under way, which had so far escaped her notice. Transported, she finally clapped hands to brow in amazement that she who had it in her to set the world a great goal (though it was not yet clear what) had never before realized that even the unnerving discomfitures of marriage could be dealt with by using one’s intellectual resources. This possibility coincided with her inclinations and suddenly opened the prospect of treating her relationship with her husband, which she had so far regarded as something to be endured, as a science and an art.

“Wherever we may roam, there’s no place like home,” Bonadea said, with her characteristic taste for platitudes and quotations. For it came about that Diotima, in the role of guardian angel, soon took on Bonadea as a pupil in these matters, in accordance with the pedagogical principle that one
learns best by teaching. This enabled Diotima to go on extracting, from the still un-directed and unclear impressions she gained from her new reading, points she could really believe in— guided as she was by the happy secret of “intuition,” that you are sure to hit the bull’s-eye if you talk about anything long enough. At the same time it worked to Bonadea’s advantage that she could bring to the dialogue that response without which the student remains barren soil for even the best teacher: her rich practical experience, doled out with restraint, had served the theoretician Diotima as an anxiously studied source of information ever since she had set out to put her marriage in order with the aid of textbooks.

“Look, I’m sure I’m not nearly as bright as she is,” Bonadea explained, “but often there are things in her books that even I never dreamed of, and that makes her so discouraged sometimes, and then she’ll say
things like: This can’t be decided at the council table of the marriage bed, I’m afraid; it would, unfortunately, take an immense amount of trained sexual experience, a lot of real physical practice on living material!”

“But for heaven’s sake,” Ulrich exclaimed, convulsed with laughter at the mere idea of his chaste cousin’s straying into “sexology,” “what on earth is she after?”

Bonadea gathered her memories of the happy conjunction between the scientific interests of the time and unthinking utterance. “It’s a question of how best to develop and manage her sex instinct,” she finally responded, in the spirit of her teacher. “And she stands for the principle that a joyous and harmonious sex life has to be achieved through the most severe self-discipline.”

“So you two are in training? Endurance training, at that? I’m impressed, I must say,” Ulrich exclaimed. “But now will you kindly
explain just what it is Diotima is training for?”

“To begin with, she’s training her husband, of course,” Bonadea corrected him.

“The poor devil!” Ulrich could not help thinking. “In that case,” he said, “I’d like to know how she does it. Please don’t turn prudish on me all of a sudden.”

Under this grilling Bonadea did, in fact, feel inhibited by her ambition to shine, like a prize pupil in an exam.

“Her sexual atmosphere is poisoned,” she explained cautiously. “The only way to save it is for her and Tuzzi to make a most careful study of their behavior. There are no general rules for this. Each of them has to observe how the other reacts to life. To be a good observer, a person has to have some insight into sexual life. One has to be able to compare one’s practical experience with the results of theoretical research, Diotima says.
Woman today happens to have a new and different attitude to the sex problem; she expects a man not only to act but to act with a real understanding of the feminine!” And for Ulrich’s entertainment or even just to amuse herself, she gaily added: “Just imagine what it must be like for her husband, who hasn’t the faintest inkling of all this new stuff and gets to hear about it mostly at bedtime while they’re undressing—let’s say when Diotima is taking her hair down and fishing for hairpins, with her petticoats tucked between her knees, and then suddenly she starts talking about all that. I tried it out on my husband, and it drove him almost to apoplexy. One thing you must admit: If marriage is to be for a lifetime, at least there’s the advantage that you have the opportunity of getting all the erotic possibilities in it out of your spouse. Which is what Diotima is trying to do with Tuzzi, who happens to be a bit crude!”
“Sounds like hard times for your husbands!” Ulrich teased.

Bonadea laughed, and he could tell how glad she would be to occasionally play truant from the oppressive earnestness of her school of love.

But Ulrich’s probing instincts would not let go; he sensed that his greatly changed friend was keeping quiet about something she would much rather have talked about. He professed to be mystified because, from what he had heard, the two husbands involved had so far rather erred in overdoing the “erotic possibilities.”

“Of course, that’s all you ever think!” Bonadea said reproachfully, giving him a long, pointed glance with a little hook at its end that could easily be interpreted as regret for the innocence she had acquired. “You take advantage of a woman’s physiological feeblemindedness yourself!”
“What do I take advantage of? You’ve found a splendid expression for the history of our love!”

Bonadea slapped his face lightly and, nervously, patted her hair in front of the mirror. Glancing at him out of the mirror, she said: “That’s from a book.”

“Of course. A very well known book.”

“But Diotima disputes it. She found something in another book that speaks of the physiological inferiority of the male.’ The author is a woman. Do you think it really makes much difference?”

“How can I tell, since I’ve no idea what we’re talking about?”

“Well then, listen! Diotima’s starting point is the discovery that she calls ‘a woman’s constant readiness for sex.’ Can you see that?”

“Not in Diotima!”
“Don’t be so crude!” she rebuked him. “It’s a delicate theory, and it’s hard for me to explain it to you so that you don’t draw false conclusions from the fact that I happen to be here alone with you in your house while I’m talking about it. So this theory has it that a woman can be made love to even when she doesn’t feel like it. Now do you see?”

“I do.”

“Unfortunately, it can’t be denied either. On the other hand, they say that quite often a man can’t make love even when he wants to. Diotima says this has been scientifically established. Do you believe that?”

“It’s been known to happen.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Bonadea said doubtfully. “But Diotima says that if you regard it in the light of science, it’s obvious. For in contrast with a woman’s constant readiness for sex, a man—well, in a word, a man’s manliest part is easily discouraged.”
Her face was the color of bronze as she now turned it away from the mirror.

“I never would have guessed it about Tuzzi,” Ulrich said tactfully.

“I don’t think it used to be the case, either,” Bonadea said. “It’s only happening now, as a belated confirmation of the theory, because she lectures him on it day in, day out. She calls it the theory of the ‘fiasco.’ Because the male procreator is so prone to this fiasco, he only feels sexually secure if he doesn’t have to be afraid of a woman’s being in some way or other spiritually superior, and that’s why men hardly ever have the courage to try a relationship with a woman who’s their equal as a human being. At least, they try right away to put them down. Diotima says that the guiding principle of all male love transactions, and especially of male arrogance, is fear. Great men show it—she means Arnheim, of course. Lesser men hide it behind brutal physical
aggression and abusing a woman’s soul—I mean you! And she means Tuzzi. That sort of ‘Now or never!’ you men so often use to make us give in is only a kind of overcomp—’’ She was about to say “compress”; “overcompensation,” Ulrich said, coming to the rescue.

“Right. That’s how you men manage to overcome the impression of your physiological inferiority!”

“What have you two decided to do, then?” Ulrich said meekly.

“We have to make an effort to be nice to men! That’s why I’ve come to see you. We’ll see how you take it.”

“And Diotima?”

“Heavens, what do you care about Diotima? Arnheim’s eyes pop out like a snail’s when she tells him that the most intellectually superior men unfortunately seem to find
full satisfaction only with inferior women and fail with women who are their equals, as attested scientifically by the case of Frau von Stein and the Vulpius woman. You see, now I’ve got her name right, but of course I’ve always known she was the noted sex partner of the aging Olympian!”

Ulrich tried to steer the conversation away from himself and back to Tuzzi. Bonadea began to laugh; she was not without sympathy for the sorry predicament of the diplomat, whom she found quite attractive as a man, and felt a certain malicious and conspiratorial glee about his having to suffer under the castigations of the soul. She reported that Diotima was basing her treatment of Tuzzi on the assumption that she must cure him of his fear of her, which had also enabled her to come to terms somewhat with his “sexual brutality.” The great blunder of her life, she admitted, was in achieving an eminence too great for her male marriage
partners naive need to feel superior, so she had set about toning it down by hiding her spiritual superiority behind a more suitable erotic coquetry.

Ulrich broke in to ask, with lively interest, what she understood by that.

Bonadea’s glance bored deeply into his face. “She might say to him, for instance, ‘Up to now our life has been spoiled by our competing for status.’ And then she admits to him that the poisonous effect of the male struggle for power dominates all of public life as well....”

“But that’s neither coquettish nor sexy!” Ulrich objected.

“Oh, but it is! You have to remember that a man in the grip of passion will behave toward a woman like an executioner toward his victim. That’s part of his struggle for self-assertion, as it’s now called. On the other
hand, you won’t deny that the sex drive is important to a woman too?”

“Certainly not!”

“Good. But a happy sexual relationship demands an equal give-and-take. To get a really rapturous response from the love partner, the partner must be respected as an equal and not just as a will-less extension of oneself,” she went on, caught up in her mentor’s mode of expression like someone sliding helplessly and anxiously across a polished surface, carried along by his own momentum. “If no other human relationship is able to endure unremitting pressure and counter-pressure, how much less can a sexual—”

“Oho!” Ulrich disagreed.

Bonadea pressed his arm, and her eye glittered like a falling star. “Hold your tongue!” she cried. “None of you have any firsthand experience of the feminine psyche!
And if you want me to go on telling you about your cousin...” But her energy was spent, and her eyes now had the glitter of a tigress’s as she watches fresh meat being carried past her cage. “No, I can’t listen to any more of this myself!” she cried.

“Does she really talk like that?” Ulrich asked. “Did she actually say these things?”

“But it’s all I hear every day, nothing but sexual practice, successful embraces, key principles of eroticism, glands, secretions, repressed urges, erotic training, and regulation of the sex drive! Apparently everyone has the sexuality he deserves, at least that’s what your cousin claims, but do I deserve to be so overloaded with it?”

Her gaze firmly held his.

“I don’t think so,” Ulrich said slowly.

“After all, couldn’t one just as easily say that my strong capacity for experiencing
represents a physiological superiority?” Bonadea asked with a gaily suggestive burst of laughter.

There was no more discussion. When, some considerable time later, Ulrich became aware of a certain resistance in himself, living daylight was spraying through the chinks in the curtains, and if one glanced in that direction the darkened room resembled the sepulcher of an emotion that had shriveled past the point of recognition. Bonadea lay there with her eyes closed, giving no sign of life. The feeling she now had of her body was not unlike that of a child whose defiance had been broken by a whipping. Every inch of that body, which was both completely satiated and battered, cried out for the tenderness of moral forgiveness. From whom? Certainly not from the man in whose bed she lay and whom she had implored to kill her, because her lust could not be appeased by any repetition or intensification. She kept her
eyes shut to avoid having to see him. She tried thinking: “I’m in his bed.” This—and “I’ll never let myself be driven out of it again!”—was what she had been shouting inwardly just a short time before; now it merely expressed a situation she could not get out of without having to go through an embarrassing performance, which was still ahead of her. Bonadea slowly and indolently picked up her thoughts where she had dropped them.

She thought of Diotima. Gradually, words came to mind, then whole sentences and fragments of sentences, but mainly only a sense of satisfaction at being where she was while words as incomprehensible and hard to remember as hormones, lymphatic glands, chromosomes, zygotes, and inner secretions thundered past her ear in a cascade of talk. For her mentors chastity recognized no boundaries as soon as they were effaced by the glare of scientific illumination. Diotima
was capable of saying to her listeners: “One’s sex life is not a craft that is to be learned; it should always be the highest art we may acquire in life!” while feeling as little unscientific emotion as when in her zeal she spoke of a “point of reference” or “a central point.” Her disciple now recalled these expressions exactly. Critical analysis of the embrace, clarification of the physical elements, erogenous zones, the way to highest fulfillment for the woman, men who have themselves well under control and are considerate of their partner... Just an hour ago Bonadea, who normally admired these scientific, intellectual, and highly refined terms, had felt grossly deceived by them. To her surprise she had just now realized with returning consciousness that this jargon was meaningful not only for science but for the emotions too, when the flames were already licking out from the unsupervised emotional side. At that point she hated Diotima. “Talking that
way about such things, it’s enough to kill your appetite!” she had thought, feeling horribly vindictive toward Diotima, who evidently, with four men of her own, begrudged Bonadea anything at all and was deliberately hoodwinking her in this fashion. Indeed, Bonadea had actually considered the enlightenment with whose help sexual science cleans up the occult ways of the sexual process as a plot of Diotima’s. Now she could not understand that any more than she could understand her passionate longing for Ulrich. She tried to remember the moments in which all her thoughts and feelings had gone wild; it was as incomprehensible as if a man bleeding to death were to try to think back on the impatience that had led him to tear off his protective bandages. Bonadea thought of Count Leinsdorf, who had called marriage a high office and had compared Diotima’s books on the subject with a manual for organizing official procedures. She thought of
Arnheim, who was a multimillionaire and who had called the revival of marital fidelity, based on the idea of the body, a true necessity of the times. And she thought of all the other famous men she had recently met, without even remembering whether they had short legs or long ones, were fat or lean, for all she saw in them was the radiance of their celebrity rounded out by a vague physical mass, much as the delicate frame of a young roast pigeon is given substance by a solid mass of herb stuffing. Sunk in these memories, Bonadea vowed that she would never again let herself be prey to one of those sudden hurricanes that mix up above and below, and she swore this to herself so fervently that she could already see herself—if only she could hold firmly enough to her resolve—in fantasy and without physical particulars, as the mistress of the finest of all her great friend’s admirers, hers for the choosing. But since for the present there was no getting
around the fact that she was still lying in Ulrich’s bed with very little on, reluctant to open her eyes, this rich sense of eager contribution, instead of developing further into a comfort to her, turned into a wretched state of exasperation.

The passion whose workings split Bonadea’s life into such opposing elements had its deepest roots not in sensuality but in ambition. Ulrich, who knew her well, thought about this but said nothing, to avoid bringing on her complaints, as he studied her face, while her eyes hid from him. The root of all her desires seemed to him a desire for distinction that had got on the wrong track, quite literally the wrong nerve track. And why shouldn’t, really, an ambition to break social records that can be celebrated with triumph, such as drinking the most beer or hanging the most diamonds on one’s neck, sometimes manifest itself, as in Bonadea’s case, as nymphomania? Now that it was
over, she regretted this form of expression and wished she could undo it, he could see that; and he could also appreciate the fact that Diotima’s elaborate artificiality must impress Bonadea, whom the devil had always ridden bareback, as divine. He looked at her lidded eyeballs resting exhausted and heavy in their sockets; he saw before him her tawny nose, turned decidedly upward at the tip, with its pink, pointed nostrils; he noticed in some bewilderment the various lines of her body, its large round breasts spreading on the straight corset of her ribs, the bulbous curve of hips, the hollow sweep of the back rising from them, the hard pointed nails shielding the soft tips of the fingers. And finally, as he gazed for some time in revulsion at a few tiny hairs sprouting before his eyes from his mistress’s nostrils, he, too, wondered at recalling how his desires had been aroused only a short while ago by this person’s seductive charms. The bright,
mischievous smile with which Bonadea had arrived for their “talk,” the natural ease with which she had fended off any rebukes or told the latest story about Arnheim, indeed her new, almost witty keenness of observation: she really had changed for the better; she seemed to have grown more independent, to have achieved a finer balance between the forces in her nature that pulled her up and those that pulled her down, and Ulrich found this lack of moral ponderousness particularly refreshing after his own recent bouts of seriousness. He still could feel the pleasure with which he had listened to her and watched the play of expression on her face, like sun and waves. Suddenly, while his gaze was still on Bonadea’s now sulky face, it struck him that only serious people could really be evil. “One might safely say,” he thought, “that light-hearted people are proof against wickedness. On the same principle that the villain in opera is always a bass!” Somehow this also
implied an uncomfortable link in his own case between “deep” and “dark.” Guilt is certainly mitigated when incurred “lightly” by a cheerful person, but on the other hand this may apply only to love, where impassioned seducers seem to act far more destructively and unforgivably than frivolous ones, even when they are doing the same thing. So his thoughts went this way and that, and if this hour of love, so lightly begun, left him a little downhearted, it had also unexpectedly stimulated him.

So thinking, he forgot, without quite knowing how, the Bonadea who was there; resting his head on his arm, he had pensively turned his back to Bonadea and was gazing through the walls at distant things, when his total silence moved her to open her eyes. All unaware, he was at this moment remembering how he had once on a journey got off a train before reaching his destination; a translucent day that had mysteriously,
seductively, swept the veils from the landscape had lured him away from the station for a walk, only to desert him at nightfall, when he found himself without his luggage in a hamlet hours away. Indeed, he seemed to recall that he had always had the quality of staying out for unpredictable lengths of time and never returning by the same road; and this suddenly brought back a far distant memory, from a period in his childhood that he normally could not recall, which cast a light on his life. Through a tiny chink in time he seemed to feel again the mysterious yearning by which a child is drawn toward some object it sees, to touch it or even put it in its mouth, at which point the magic comes to a stop as in a blind alley. Just as briefly, he regarded it as possible that the longing of adults, which drives them toward any distance merely to transform it into nearness, is no better or worse—the same sort of longing that dominated him, a compulsion, to judge
by a certain aimlessness that was merely masked by curiosity; and finally, this basic image changed to a third, emerging as this hasty and disappointing episode with Bonadea, which neither of them had wanted to turn out as it had. Lying side by side in bed seemed utterly childish to him. “But what does its opposite mean, that motionless, hushed love at a great distance, as incorporeal as an early autumn day?” he wondered. “Probably only another version of child’s play,” he thought skeptically, and remembered the colorful animal prints he had loved more rapturously as a child than he had loved his mistress today.

Bonadea at this point had seen just about enough of his back to gauge her unhappiness, and she spoke up: “It was your fault!”

Ulrich turned to her with a smile and said spontaneously: “My sister is coming here in a few days to stay with me—did I tell
you? We’ll hardly be able to see each other then.”

“For how long?” Bonadea asked.

“To stay,” Ulrich answered, smiling again.

“Well?” Bonadea said. “What difference will it make? Unless you’re trying to tell me that your sister won’t let you have a lover?”

“That’s just what I am trying to tell you,” Ulrich said.

Bonadea laughed. “Here I came to see you today in all innocence, and you never even let me finish my story!” she complained.

“I seem to have been designed as a machine for the relentless devaluation of life! I want to be different for once,” Ulrich retorted. This was quite beyond her, but it made her remember defiantly that she loved Ulrich. All at once she stopped being the
helpless victim of her nerves and found a convincing naturalness; she said, simply: “You’ve started an affair with her!”

Ulrich warned her not to say such things; a little more grimly than he had meant to. “I intend for a long time to love no woman otherwise than if she were my sister,” he said, and stopped. The length of his silence impressed Bonadea with a greater sense of his determination than was perhaps justified by his words.

“You’re really perverse!” she cried in a tone of prophetic warning, and leapt out of bed in order to hurry back to Diotima’s academy of love, whose unsuspecting portals stood wide open to receive its repentant and refreshed disciple.
That evening there was a telegram, and the next afternoon Agathe arrived.

Ulrich’s sister brought only a few suitcases, in accordance with her plan to leave everything behind—not that the quantity of her luggage was wholly in keeping with the precept “Cast all thou hast into the fire, even unto thy shoes.” When he heard about the precept, Ulrich laughed; there were even two hatboxes that had escaped the fire.

Agathe’s forehead showed the charming furrow denoting hurt feelings and futile brooding over them.

Whether it was fair of Ulrich to find fault with the imperfect expression of a grand and sweeping emotion was left undetermined, for Agathe did not raise the
question. The cheerful fuss and upheaval that of necessity attended her arrival made an uproar in her ears and eyes like a dance swaying around a brass band. She was in fine spirits but faintly disappointed, although she had not been expecting anything in particular and had even made a point during her journey of not forming any expectations. It was only that when she remembered that she had stayed up all the previous night she was suddenly overcome with fatigue. She didn’t mind when Ulrich had to tell her, after a while, that her telegram had come too late for him to postpone an appointment he had for the afternoon. He promised to be back in an hour, and settled his sister on the sofa in his study with such elaborate care that they both had to laugh.

When Agathea woke up, the hour was long gone, and Ulrich was not there. The room was sunk in deep twilight and was so alien that she felt suddenly dismayed at
finding herself in the midst of the new life to which she had been looking forward. As far as she could make out, the walls were lined with books just as her father’s had been, and the tables covered with papers. Curiosity led her to open a door and enter the adjacent room: here she found clothes closets, shoe boxes, the punching bag, barbells, and parallel bars. Beyond these were more books, the bathroom with its eau de cologne, bath salts, brushes, and combs, her brother’s bedroom, and the hall, with its hunting trophies. Her passage was marked by lights flashing on and off, but as chance would have it, Ulrich noticed none of this, even though he was home by now. He had put off waking her to let her rest a while longer, and now he ran into her on the landing as he was coming up from the little-used basement kitchen. He had gone there to look around for a snack to bring her; since he had not planned ahead, there was no one to wait on them that day. It
was only when they stood side by side that Agathe’s random impressions began to coalesce into a perception that left her so disconcerted and disheartened that she felt it would be best to bolt as soon as she could. There was something so impersonal, so indifferent about the spirit in which things had been thrown together here that it frightened her.

Ulrich noticed this and apologized, explaining the situation light-heartedly. He told her how he had come to acquire his house and gave its history in detail, beginning with the antlers he had come to own without ever going hunting and ending with the punching bag, which he set bobbing for her benefit. Agathe looked at everything again with disquieting seriousness, and even turned her head for another look whenever they left a room. Ulrich tried to make this examination entertaining, but as it went on he began to feel embarrassed about his house. It
turned out—something habit had made him overlook—that he had used only the few rooms he needed, leaving the rest dangling from them like a neglected decoration. When they sat down together after this survey Agathe asked: “But why did you do it, if you don’t like it?”

Her brother provided her with tea and every refreshment he could find in the house, and insisted on giving a hospitable welcome, belated though it was, so that their second reunion should not be inferior to the first in material comforts. Dashing back and forth on these errands, he confessed: “I’ve done everything so carelessly and wrong that the place doesn’t have anything at all to do with me.”

“But it’s all really very attractive,” Agathe now consoled him.

Ulrich responded that it would probably have been even worse if he had done it
differently. “I can’t stand houses with interiors tailored to express one’s personality,” he declared. “It would make me feel that I had ordered myself from an interior decorator too.”

And Agathe said: “I shy away from that kind of house also.”

“Even so, it can’t be left the way it is,” Ulrich rectified. He was sitting at the table with her, and the very fact that they would now be having their meals together raised a number of problems. The realization that all sorts of things would have to be changed took him by surprise; it would take a quite unprecedented effort on his part, and he reacted to this at first with the zeal of a beginner.

“A person living alone,” he said, when his sister seemed considerately willing to leave everything as it was, “can afford to have a weakness; it will merge with his other
qualities and hardly be noticeable. But when two people share a weakness it becomes twice as conspicuous in comparison with the qualities they don’t share, and approaches a public confession.”

Agathe could not see it.

“In other words, as brother and sister there are things that each of us could indulge in on our own but we cannot do together; that’s exactly why we have come together.”

This appealed to Agathe. Still, his negative formulation, that they had come together in order not to do something, left something to be desired, and after a while she asked, returning to the way his furnishings had been assembled by the best firms: “I’m afraid I still don’t understand. Why did you let the place be done like this if you didn’t think it was right?”

Ulrich met her cheerful gaze and let his eyes rest on her face, which, above the
slightly crumpled traveling dress she was still wearing, now looked smooth as silver and so amazingly present that it felt equally near and far from him; or perhaps the closeness and the remoteness in his presence canceled each other out, just as, out of the infinity of sky, the moon suddenly appears behind the neighboring roof.

“Why did I do it?” he answered, smiling. “I forget now. Probably because I could just as well have done it some other way. I felt no responsibility. I’d be less sure of myself if I were to tell you that the irresponsible way in which we’re conducting ourselves now may well be the first step toward a new responsibility.”

“How so?”

“Oh, in all sorts of ways. You know: the life of an individual person may be only a slight variant of the most probable average value in the series, and so on.”
All Agathe took in of this was what made sense to her. She said: “Which comes to: ‘Quite nice’ and ‘Very nice indeed.’ Soon one stops realizing what a revolting life one is leading. But sometimes it gives one the creeps, like waking up to find oneself on a slab in the mortuary!”

“What was your place like?” Ulrich asked.

“Middle-class respectable, a la Hagauer. ‘Quite nice.’ Just as counterfeit as yours!”

Ulrich had meanwhile found a pencil and was sketching the plan of his house on the tablecloth, realloctting the rooms. That was easy, and so quickly done that Agathe’s housewifely gesture of protecting the tablecloth came too late and ended uselessly with her hand resting on his. Problems arose again only over the principles of how the place should be furnished.
“We happen to have a house,” Ulrich argued, “and we do have to make some changes to accommodate the two of us. But by and large it’s an outdated and idle question these days. ‘Setting up house’ is putting up a façade with nothing behind it: social and personal relations are no longer solid enough for homes; no one takes any real pleasure now in keeping up a show of durability and permanence. In the old days people did that, to show who they were by the number of rooms and servants and guests they had. Today almost everyone feels that only a formless life corresponds to the variety of purposes and possibilities life is filled with, and young people either prefer stark simplicity, which is like a bare stage, or else they dream of wardrobe trunks and bobsled championships, tennis cups and luxury hotels along great highways, with golf course scenery and music on tap in every room.”
He spoke in a light conversational tone, as if playing host to a stranger, but was actually talking himself up to the surface because he was self-conscious about their being together in a situation that combined finality with a new beginning.

After she had let him have his say, his sister asked:

"Are you suggesting that we ought to live in a hotel?"

"Not at all!" Ulrich hastened to assure her. "Except now and then when traveling."

"And for the rest of the time, should we build ourselves a bower on an island or a log cabin in the mountains?"

"We’ll be settling in here, of course," Ulrich answered, more seriously than the nature of their conversation warranted. There was a brief lull in the exchange. He had stood up and was pacing up and down
the room. Agathe pretended to be picking at a thread on the hem of her dress, bending her head below the line on which their eyes had been meeting. Suddenly Ulrich stopped and said, with some effort in his voice but going straight to the point:

“My dear Agathe, there’s a whole circle of questions here, which has a large circumference and no center, and all these questions are: ‘How should I live?’ “

Agathe had risen, too, but still did not look at him. She shrugged her shoulders.

“We’ll have to try!” she said. Her face was flushed from bending over, but when she lifted her head, her eyes were alight with high spirits, the flush only lingering on her cheek like a passing cloud. “If we’re going to stay together,” she declared, “you’ll have to start by helping me unpack and put my things away and change, because I haven’t seen a maid anywhere!”
His bad conscience traveled into his arms and legs and made them galvanically mobile, under Agathe’s direction and with her help, to make up for his negligence. He cleared out closets like a hunter disemboweling an animal, abandoning his bedroom to Agathe, swearing to her that it was hers and that he would find a sofa somewhere. Eagerly he moved to and fro all objects of daily use that had hitherto lived in their places like flowers in a flower bed, waiting to be picked one at a time by a selecting hand. Suits were piled up on chairs; on the glass shelves in the bathroom, cosmetics were carefully separated into men’s and women’s departments. By the time order had more or less been transformed into disorder, only Ulrich’s gleaming leather slippers remained, abandoned on the floor like an offended lap-dog evicted from its basket: a pitiful symbol of disrupted comfort in all its pleasant trivality. But there was no time to take this to
heart, for Agathe’s suitcases were next, and however few there seemed to be, they were inexhaustibly crammed with exquisitely folded things that spread open as they were lifted out, blossoming in the air just like the hundreds of roses a magician pulls from his hat. These things had to be hung up or laid down, shaken out and put in piles, and because Ulrich was helping, it proceeded with slip-ups and laughter.

But in the midst of all this activity, he could only think, incessantly, that for his whole life, and up to a few hours ago, he had lived alone. And now Agathe was here. This little sentence, “Agathe is here now,” repeated itself in waves, like the astonishment of a boy who has received a new plaything; there was something mind-numbing about it and, on the other hand, a quite overwhelming sense of presence too, all of which expressed itself again and again in the words: Agathe is here now.
“So she’s tall and slender?” Ulrich thought as he watched her covertly. But she wasn’t at all; she was shorter than he, and had broad, athletic shoulders. “Is she attractive?” he mused. That was hard to say too. Her proud nose, for instance, was slightly tilted up from one side; there was far more potent charm in this than attractiveness. “Could she be a beauty?” Ulrich wondered in a rather strange way, for he was not quite at ease with this question even though, leaving aside all convention, Agathe was a stranger to him. There is, after all, no such thing as a natural inhibition against looking at a blood relation with sexual interest; it is only a matter of custom, or to be explained by the detours of morality or eugenics. Also, the circumstance that they had not grown up together had prevented the sterilized brother-sister relationship that is prevalent in European families. Even so, their origin and their feeling toward each other were enough
to take the edge off even the harmless question of how beautiful she might be, a missing excitement Ulrich now noticed with distinct surprise. To find something beautiful surely means, first of all, to find it: whether it is a landscape or a lover, there it is, looking at the pleased finder, and it seems to have been waiting for him alone. And so, delighted that she was now his and ready to be discovered by him, he was hugely pleased with his sister. But he still thought: “One cant regard one’s own sister as truly beautiful; at most one can be pleased by the admiration she evokes in others.’ But then he was hearing her voice for minutes at a time, where no voice had been before, and what was her voice like? Waves of scent accompanied the movement of her clothing, and what was this scent like? Her movements were now knee, now delicate finger, now rebelliousness of a curl. All one could say about it was: it was there. It was there where before there had been nothing.
The difference in intensity between the most vivid moment of thinking about the sister he had left behind and the emptiest present moment was still so great and distinct a pleasure that it was like a shady spot filling up with the warmth of the sun and the scent of wild herbs unfurling.

Agathe was aware of her brother’s watching her, but she did not let him know it. During the pauses, when she felt his eyes following her movements while the interval between a response and the next remark was not so much a complete stop as like a car coasting over some deep and risky patch of road with its motor switched off, she, too, enjoyed the supercharged air and the calm intensity that surrounded their reunion. When they had finished unpacking and putting things away and Agathe was alone in her bath, an adventure threatened to break into these peaceful pastures like a wolf, for she had undressed down to her underclothes in
the room where Ulrich, smoking a cigarette, was now keeping watch over her abandoned things. Soaking in the water, she wondered what she should do. There was no maid, so ringing was as pointless as calling out; there was evidently nothing to be done but to wrap herself in Ulrich’s bathrobe, which was hanging on the wall, knock on the door, and send him out of the room. But considering the serious intimacy that, if not already flourishing, had just been born between them, Agathe cheerfully doubted whether it was appropriate to play the young lady and beg Ulrich to withdraw, so she decided to ignore the ambivalence of femininity and simply appear before him as the natural, familiar companion he should see in her, dressed or not.

Yet when she resolutely entered the room again, both felt an unexpected quickening of the heart. They each tried not to feel embarrassed. For an instant they could not
shake off the conventional inconsistency that permits virtual nakedness on the beach while indoors the hem of a chemise or a panty becomes the smugglers path to romantic intimacy. Ulrich smiled awkwardly as Agathe, with the light of the anteroom behind her, stood in the open door like a silver statue lightly veiled in a haze of batiste and, in a voice much too emphatically casual, asked for her dress and stockings, which turned out to be in the next room. Ulrich showed her the way, and saw to his secret delight that she strode off in a manner that was a little too boyish, taking a sort of defiant pleasure in it, as women tend to do when they don’t feel themselves protected by their skirts. Then something new came up, when a little later Agathe found herself stuck midway getting into her dress and had to call Ulrich for help. While he was busy at her back she sensed, without sisterly jealousy but rather, if anything, with pleasure, that he clearly knew his
way around women’s clothing, and she moved with agility to make it easier for him when the nature of the procedure made it necessary.

Bending over close to the moving, delicate, yet full and fresh skin of her shoulders, intent upon the unaccustomed task, which raised a flush on his brow, Ulrich felt himself lapped by a pleasing sensation not easily put into words, unless one might say that his body was equally affected by having a woman and yet not having a woman so close to him; or one could just as easily have said that though he was unquestionably standing there in his own shoes, he nevertheless felt drawn out of himself and over to her as though he had been given a second, far more beautiful, body for his own.

This was why the first thing he said to his sister when he had straightened up again was: “Now I know what you are: you are my self-love!” It may have sounded odd, but it
really expressed what it was that moved him so. “In a sense,” he explained, “I’ve always lacked the right sort of love for myself that others seem to have in abundance. And now,” he added, “by some mistake or by fate, it has been embodied in you instead of myself!”

It was his first attempt that evening to pass a verdict on the meaning of his sisters arrival.
Later that evening he came back to this.

“You should know,” he started to tell his sister, “that there’s a kind of self-love that’s foreign to me, a certain tenderness toward oneself that seems to come naturally to most other people. I don’t know how best to describe it. I could say, for instance, that I’ve always had lovers with whom I’ve had a skewed relationship. They’ve been illustrations of some sudden idea, caricatures of my mood—in effect, just instances of my inability to be on easy terms with other people. That in itself reveals something about one’s relationship to oneself. Basically, lovers I have chosen were always women I didn’t like....”
“There’s nothing wrong with that!” Agathe interrupted. “If I were a man, I wouldn’t have any qualms about trifling with women in the most irresponsible way. And I’d desire them only out of absent-mindedness and wonder.”

“Oh? Would you really? How nice of you!”

“They’re such absurd parasites. Women share a man’s life on the same level as his dog!” There was no hint of moral indignation in Agathe’s statement. She was pleasantly tired and kept her eyes closed, for she had gone to bed early and Ulrich, who had come to say good night, saw her lying in his place in his bed. But it was also the bed in which Bonadea had lain thirty-six hours earlier, which was probably why Ulrich reverted to the subject of his mistresses.

“All I was trying to describe was my own incapacity for a reasonably forgiving
relationship to myself,” he repeated, smiling. “For me to take a real interest in something it must be part of some context, it must be controlled by an idea. The experience itself I’d really prefer to have behind me, as a memory; the emotional effort it exacts strikes me as unpleasant and absurdly beside the point. That’s how it is with me, to describe myself to you bluntly. Now, the simplest, most instinctive idea one can have, at least when one is young, is that one’s a hell of a fellow, the new man the world’s been waiting for. But that doesn’t last beyond thirty!” He reflected for a moment and then said: “That’s not it. It’s so hard to talk about oneself. What I would have to say is that I have never subjected myself to an idea with staying power. One never turned up. One should love an idea like a woman; be overjoyed to get back to it. And one always has it inside oneself! And always looks for it in everything outside! I never formed such
ideas. My relationship to the so-called great ideas, and perhaps even to those that really are great, has always been man-to-man: I never felt I was born to submit to them; they always provoked me to overthrow them and put others in their place. Perhaps it was precisely this jealousy that drove me to science, whose laws are established by teamwork and never regarded as immutable!” Again he paused and laughed, at either himself or his argument. “But however that may be,” he went on seriously, “by connecting no idea or every idea with myself, I got out of the habit of taking life seriously. I get much more out of it when I read about it in a novel, where it’s wrapped up in some point of view, but when I’m supposed to experience it in all its fullness it always seems already obsolete, overdone in an old-fashioned way, and intellectually outdated. And I don’t think that’s peculiar to me. Most people today feel much the same. Lots of people feign an urgent love
of life, the way schoolchildren are taught to hop about merrily among the daisies, but there’s always a certain premeditation about it, and they feel it. Actually, they’re as capable of killing each other in cold blood as they are of being the best of friends. Our time certainly does not take all the adventures and goings-on it’s full of at all seriously. When they happen, there’s a fuss. They immediately set off more happenings, a land of vendetta of happenings, a whole compulsive alphabet of sequels, from $B$ to $Z$, and all because someone said $A$. But these happenings in our lives have less life than a book, because they have no coherent meaning.”

So Ulrich talked, loosely, his moods changing. Agathe offered no response; she still had her eyes closed but was smiling.

Ulrich said: “Now I’ve forgotten what I’m telling you. I don’t think I know my way back to the beginning.”
They were silent for a while. He was able to scrutinize his sister’s face at leisure, since it was not defended by the gaze of her eyes. It lay there, a piece of naked body, the way women are when they’re together in a women’s public bath. The feminine, un-guarded, natural cynicism of this sight, not intended for men’s eyes, still had an unusual effect on Ulrich, though no longer quite as powerful as in their first days together, when Agathe had from the start claimed her right as a sister to talk to him without any mental beating around the bush, since for her he was not a man like others. He remembered the mixture of surprise and horror he had experienced as a boy when he saw a pregnant woman on the street, or a woman nursing her child; secrets from which the boy had been carefully shielded suddenly bulged out full-blown and unembarrassed in the light of day. Perhaps he had long been carrying vestiges of such reactions about with him, for
all at once he seemed to feel entirely free of them. That Agathe was a woman with many experiences behind her was a pleasant and comfortable thought; there was no need to be on his guard in talking with her, as he would be with a young girl; indeed, it was touchingly natural that everything was morally relaxed with a mature woman. It also made him feel protective toward her, to make up to her for something by being good to her in some way. He decided to do all he could for her. He even decided to look for another husband for her. This need to be kind restored to him, although he barely noticed, the lost thread of his discourse.

“Our self-love probably undergoes a change during adolescence,” he said without transition. “That’s when a whole meadow of tenderness in which one had been playing gets mowed down to provide the fodder for one particular instinct.”
“So that the cow can give milk!” Agathe added, after the slightest pause, pertly and with dignity but without opening her eyes.

“Yes, it’s all connected, I suppose,” Ulrich agreed, and went on: “So there’s a moment when the tenderness goes out of our lives and concentrates on that one particular operation, which then remains overcharged with it. It’s as though there were a terrible drought everywhere on earth except for one place where it never stops raining, don’t you think?”

Agathe said: “I think that as a child I loved my dolls more fiercely than I have ever loved a man. After you’d gone I found a whole trunkful of my old dolls in the attic.”

“What did you do with them?” Ulrich asked. “Did you give them away?”

“Who was there to give them to? I gave them a funeral in the kitchen stove,” she said.
Ulrich responded with animation: “When I remember as far back as I can, I’d say that there was hardly any separation between inside and outside. When I crawled toward something, it came on wings to meet me; when something important happened, the excitement was not just in us, but the things themselves came to a boil. I won’t claim that we were happier then than we were later on. After all, we hadn’t yet taken charge of ourselves. In fact, we didn’t really yet exist; our personal condition was not yet separated from the world’s. It sounds strange, but it’s true: our feelings, our desires, our very selves, were not yet quite inside ourselves. What’s even stranger is that I might as easily say: they were not yet quite taken away from us. If you should sometime happen to ask yourself today, when you think you’re entirely in possession of yourself, who you really are, you will discover that you always see yourself from the
outside, as an object. You’ll notice that one
time you get angry, another time you get sad,
just as your coat will sometimes be wet and
sometimes too warm. No matter how in-
tensely you try to look at yourself, you may at
most find out something about the outside,
but you’ll never get inside yourself. Whatever
you do, you remain outside yourself, with the
possible exception of those rare moments
when a friend might say that you’re beside
yourself. It’s true that as adults we’ve made
up for this by being able to think at any time
that ‘I am’—if you think that’s fun. You see a
car, and somehow in a shadowy way you also
see: ‘I am seeing a car.’ You’re in love, or sad,
and see that it’s you. But neither the car, nor
your sadness, nor your love, nor even your-
self, is quite fully there. Nothing is as com-
pletely there as it once was in childhood;
everything you touch, including your inmost
self, is more or less congealed from the mo-
ment you have achieved your ‘personality,’
and what’s left is a ghostly hanging thread of self-awareness and murky self-regard, wrapped up in a wholly external existence. What’s gone wrong? There’s a feeling that something might still be salvaged. Surely you can’t claim that a child’s experience is all that different from a man’s? I don’t know any real answer, even if there may be this or that idea about it. But for a long time I’ve responded by having lost my love for this kind of ‘being myself and for this kind of world.’

Ulrich was glad that Agathe listened to him without interrupting, for he was not expecting an answer from her any more than he was from himself, and was convinced that for the present, nobody could give him the kind of answer he had in mind. Yet he did not fear for an instant that anything he was talking about might be above her head. He did not see it as philosophizing, nor even as an unusual subject for a conversation, any more than a young man—and he was
behaving like one, in this situation—will let the difficulty of groping for the right words keep him from finding everything simple when he is exchanging views on the eternal problems of “Who are you? This is who I am” with someone else. He derived the assurance that his sister was able to follow him word for word not from having reflected on it but from her inner being. His eyes rested on her face, and there was something in it that made him happy. This face, its eyes closed, did not thrust back at him. The attraction it held for him was bottomless, even in the sense that it seemed to draw him into never-ending depths. Submerging himself in contemplation of this face, he nowhere found that muddy bottom of dissolved resistances from which the diver into love kicks off, to rebound to the surface and reach dry ground again. But since he was accustomed to experience every inclination toward a woman as a forcibly reversed disinclination against
human beings, which—even though he found it regrettable—did offer some guarantee against losing himself in her, the pure inclination as he bent even deeper toward her in curiosity alarmed him almost as if he were losing his balance, so that he soon drew back from this state, and from pure happiness took refuge in a boy's trick for recalling Agathe to everyday reality: with the most delicate touch he could manage, he tried to open her eyes. Agathe opened them wide with a laugh and cried: "Isn't this pretty rough treatment for someone who's supposed to be your self-love?"

This response was as boyish as his attack, and their looks collided hard, like two little boys who want to tussle but are laughing too much to begin. Suddenly Agathe dropped this and asked seriously: "You know that myth Plato tells, following some ancient source, that the gods divided the original human being into two halves, male and
female?” She had propped herself up on one elbow and unexpectedly blushed, feeling awkward at having asked Ulrich if he knew so familiar a story; then she resolutely charged ahead: “Now those two pathetic halves do all kinds of silly things to come together again. It’s in all the schoolbooks for older children; unfortunately, they never tell you why it doesn’t work!”

“I can tell you that,” Ulrich broke in, glad to see how well she had understood him. “Nobody knows which of so many halves running around in the world is his missing half. He grabs one that seems to be his, vainly trying to become one with her, until the futility of it becomes hopelessly clear. If a child results, both halves believe for a few youthful years that they’ve at least become one in the child. But the child is merely a third half, which soon shows signs of trying to get as far away from the other two as it possibly can and look for a fourth half. In
this way human beings keep ‘halving’ themselves physiologically, while the ideal of oneness remains as far away as the moon outside the bedroom window.”

“You’d think that siblings might have succeeded halfway already!” Agathe interjected in a voice that had become husky.

“Twins, possibly.”

“Aren’t we twins?”

“Certainly!” Ulrich suddenly became evasive. “Twins are rare; twins of different gentler especially so. But when, into the bargain, they differ in age and have hardly known each other for the longest time, it’s quite a phenomenon—one really worthy of us!” he declared, struggling to get back into a shallower cheeriness.

“But we met as twins!” Agathe challenged him, ignoring his tone.

“Because we unwittingly dressed alike?”
“Maybe. And in all sorts of ways! You may say it was chance; but what is chance? I think it’s fate or destiny or providence, or whatever you want to call it. Haven’t you ever thought it was by chance that you were born as yourself? Our being brother and sister doubles that chance!” That was how Agathe put it, and Ulrich submitted to this wisdom.

“So we declare ourselves to be twins,” he agreed. “Symmetrical creatures of a whim of nature, henceforth we shall be the same age, the same height, with the same hair, walking the highways and byways of the world in identical striped clothes with the same bow tied under our chins. But I warn you that people will turn around and look after us, half touched and half scornful, as always happens when something reminds them of the mysteries of their own beginnings.”
“Why can’t we dress for contrast?” Agathe said lightly. “One in yellow when the other is in blue, or red alongside green, and we can dye our hair violet or purple, and I can affect a hump and you a paunch: yet we’d still be twins!”

But the joke had gone stale, the pretext worn out, and they fell silent for a while.

“If you realize,” Ulrich then said suddenly, “that this is something very serious we’re talking about?”

No sooner had he said this than his sister again dropped the fan of her lashes over her eyes and, veiling her consent, let him talk alone. Or perhaps it only looked as if she had shut her eyes. The room was dark; what light there was did not so much clarify outlines as pour over them in bright patches. Ulrich had said: “It’s not only the myth of the human being divided in two; we could also mention Pygmalion, the Hermaphrodite, or Isis and
Osiris—all different forms of the same theme. It’s the ancient longing for a doppelgänger of the opposite sex, for a lover who will be the same as yourself and yet someone else, a magical figure that is oneself and yet remains magical, with the advantage over something we merely imagine of having the breath of autonomy and independence. This dream of a quintessential love, unhampered by the body’s limitations, coming face-to-face in two identical yet different forms, has been concocted countless times in solitary alchemy in the alembic of the human skull... .”

Here he broke off; evidently something disturbing had occurred to him, and he ended with the almost unfriendly words: “There are traces of this in even the most commonplace situations of love: the charm of every change of clothing, every disguise, the meaning two people find in what they have in common, the way they see themselves repeated in the other. This little magic
is always the same, whether one’s seeing an elegant lady naked for the first time or a naked girl formally dressed for the first time in a dress buttoned up to the neck, and great reckless passions all have something to do with the fact that everyone thinks it’s his own secret self peering out at him from behind the curtains of a stranger’s eyes.”

It sounded as though he were asking her not to attach too much importance to what they were saying. But Agathe was again thinking of the lightning flash of surprise she had felt when they first met, disguised, as it were, in their lounging suits. And she answered:

“So this has been going on for thousands of years. Is it any easier to understand as a case of shared self-delusion?”

Ulrich was silent.

And after a while, Agathe said delightedly: “But it does happen in one’s sleep!
There you do sometimes see yourself transformed into something else. Or meet yourself as a man. And then you’re much kinder to him than you are to yourself. You’ll probably say that these are sexual dreams, but I think they are much older.”

“Do you often have that sort of dream?” Ulrich asked.

“Sometimes. Not often.”

“I almost never do,” he confessed. “It must be ages since I had such a dream.”

“And yet you once explained to me,” Agathe now said, “—it must have been at the very beginning, back in our old house—that people really did experience life differently thousands of years ago.”

“Oh, you mean the ‘giving’ and the ‘receiving’ vision?” Ulrich replied, smiling at her although she could not see him. “The ‘embracing’ and ‘being embraced’ of the
spirit? Yes, of course I should have talked about this mysterious dual sexuality of the soul too. And how much else besides! There’s a hint of it wherever you look. Every analogy contains a remnant of that magic of being identical and not identical. But haven’t you noticed? In all these cases we’ve been talking about, in dream, in myth, poem, childhood, even in love, feeling more comes at the cost of understanding less, and that means: through a loss of reality.”

“Then you don’t really believe in it?” Agathe asked.

Ulrich did not answer. But after a while he said: “Translated into the ghastly jargon of our times, we could call this faculty we all lack to such a frightening degree nowadays ‘the percentual share’ of an individual’s experiences and actions. In dreams it’s apparently a hundred percent, in our waking life not even half as much. You noticed it today at once in my house; but it’s exactly the same
with my relations to the people you’ll meet. I also once called it—if I’m not mistaken, in conversation with a woman where it was truly relevant, I must admit—the acoustics of the void. If a pin drops in an empty room, the sound it makes is somehow disproportionate, even incommensurable; but it’s the same when there’s a void between people. There’s no way to tell: is one screaming, or is there a deathly silence? For everything out of place and askew acquires the magnetic attraction of a tremendous temptation when there’s nothing with which to counteract it. Don’t you agree?...But I’m sorry,” he interrupted himself, “you must be tired, and I’m not letting you have your rest. It seems there are many things in my surroundings and my social life that won’t be much to your liking, I’m afraid.”

Agathe had opened her eyes. After coming out of hiding at last, her glance contained something uncommonly hard to define,
which Ulrich felt coursing sympathetically through his whole body. He suddenly started to talk again: “When I was younger I tried to see just that as a source of strength. And if one doesn’t have anything to pit against life? Fine, then life flees from man into his works! That’s more or less what I thought. And I suppose there’s something daunting about the lovelessness and irresponsibility of today’s world. At the very least there’s something in it of adolescence, which centuries can go through as well as teenagers, years of rapid, uneven growth. And like every young man I began by plunging into work, adventures, amusements; what difference did it make what one did, as long as one did it wholeheartedly? Do you remember that we once spoke of ‘the morality of achievement’? We’re born with that image, and orient ourselves by it. But the older one gets, the more clearly one finds out that this apparent exuberance, this independence and mobility
in everything, this sovereignty of the driving parts and the partial drives—both your own against yourself and yours against the world—in short, everything that we people of the present’ have regarded as a strength and a special distinction of our species, is basically nothing but a weakness of the whole as against its parts. Passion and willpower can do nothing about it. The moment you’re ready to go all out into the middle of something, you find yourself washed back to the periphery. Today this is the experience in all experiences!”

Agathe, with her eyes now open, was waiting for something to happen in his voice; when nothing changed and her brother’s words simply came to an end like a path turning off a road into a dead end, she said: “So your experience tells you that one can never really act with conviction and will never be able to. By conviction,” she explained, “I don’t mean whatever knowledge or moral
training have been drilled into us, but simply feeling entirely at home with oneself and with everything, feeling replete now where there’s emptiness, something one starts out from and returns to—” She broke off. “Oh, I don’t really know what I mean! I was hoping you’d explain it to me.”

“You mean just what we were talking about,” Ulrich answered gently. “And you’re also the only person I can talk to about these things. But there’d be no point in starting over just to add a few more seductive words. I’d have to say, rather, that being ‘at the inner core’ of things, in a state of unmarred ‘inwardness’—using the word not in any sentimental sense but with the meaning we just gave it—is apparently not a demand that can be satisfied by rational thinking.” He had leaned forward and was touching her arm and gazing steadily into her eyes. “Human nature is probably averse to it,” he said in a low voice. “All we really know is that we feel
a painful need for it! Perhaps it’s connected with the need for sibling love, an addition to ordinary love, moving in an imaginary direction toward a love unmixed with otherness and not-loving.” And after a pause he added: “You know how popular those babes-in-the-wood games are in bed: people who could murder their real siblings fool around as brother-and-sister babies under the same blanket.”

In the dim light his face twitched in self-mockery. But Agathe put her trust in his face and not in his confused words. She had seen faces quivering like this a moment before they plunged; this one did not come nearer; it seemed to be moving at infinitely great speed over an immense distance. Tersely she answered: “Being brother and sister isn’t really enough, that’s all.”

“Well, we’ve already spoken of being twins,” Ulrich responded, getting noiselessly
to his feet, because he thought that she was finally being overwhelmed by fatigue.

“We’d have to be Siamese twins,” Agathe managed to say.

“Right, Siamese twins!” her brother echoed, gently disengaging her hand from his and carefully placing it on the coverlet. His words had a weightless sound, light and volatile, expanding in widening circles even after he had left the room.

Agathe smiled and gradually sank into a lonely sadness, whose darkness imperceptibly turned into that of sleep. Ulrich meanwhile tiptoed into his study and stayed there, unable to work, for another two hours, until he, too, grew tired, learning for the first time what it was like to be cramped out of considerateness. He was amazed at how much he would have wanted to do during this time that would involve making noise and so had to be suppressed. This was new for him. And
it almost irritated him a little, although he did his best to imagine sympathetically what it would be like to be really physically attached to another person. He knew hardly anything about how such nervous systems worked in tandem, like two leaves on a single stalk, united not only through a single bloodstream but still more by the effect of their total interdependence. He assumed that every agitation in one soul would also be felt by the other, even though whatever evoked it was going on in a body that was not, in the main, one’s own. “An embrace, for instance—you are embraced by way of the other body,” he thought. “You may not even want it, but your other self floods you with an overwhelming wave of acceptance! What do you care who’s kissing your sister? But her excitement is something you must love jointly. Or suppose it’s you who are making love, and you have to find a way to ‘ensure’ her participation; you can’t just let her be
flooded with senseless physiological processes...!” Ulrich felt a strong arousal and a great uneasiness at this idea; it was hard for him to draw the line between a new way of looking at something and a distortion of the ordinary way.
The praise Meingast bestowed on her and the new ideas she was getting from him had deeply impressed Clarisse.

Her mental unrest and excitability, which sometimes worried even her, had eased, but they did not give way this time, as they so often did, to dejection, frustration, and hopelessness; they were succeeded instead by an extraordinary taut lucidity and a transparent inner atmosphere. Once again she took stock of herself and arrived at a critical estimate. Without questioning it, and even with a certain satisfaction, she noted that she was not overly bright; she had not been educated enough. Ulrich, on the other hand, whenever she thought of him by comparison, was like a skater gliding to and fro
at will on a surface of intellectual ice. There was no telling where it came from when he said something, or when he laughed, when he was irritable, when his eyes flashed, when he was there and with his broad shoulders preempting Walters space in the room. Even when he merely turned his head in curiosity, the sinews of his neck tautened like the rigging of a sailboat taking off with the wind into the blue. There was always more to him than she could grasp, which acted as a spur to her desire to fling herself on him bodily to catch hold of it. But the tumult in which this sometimes happened, so that once nothing in the world had mattered except that she wanted to bear Ulrich’s child, had now receded far into the distance, leaving behind not even that flotsam and jetsam that incomprehensibly keeps bobbing up in the memory after the tide of passion has ebbed. When she thought of her failure at Ulrich’s house, insofar as she ever still did, Clarissé felt cross, at
most, but her self-confidence was hale and hearty thanks to the new ideas supplied by her philosophic guest, not to mention the sheer excitement of again seeing this old friend who had been transported into the sublime. Thus many days passed in all kinds of suspense while everyone in the little house, now bathed in spring sunshine, waited to see whether Ulrich would or would not bring the permit to visit Moosbrugger in his eerie domicile.

There was one idea in particular that seemed important to Clarisse in this connection: The Master had called the world “so thoroughly stripped of illusions” that people could no longer say about anything whether they ought to love it or hate it. Since then Clarisse felt that one was obliged to surrender oneself to an illusion if one received the grace of having one. For an illusion is a mercy. How was anyone at that time to know whether to turn right or left on leaving the
house, unless he had a job, like Walter, which then cramped him, or, like herself, had a visit to pay to her parents or brothers and sisters, who bored her! It’s different in an illusion! There life is arranged as efficiently as a modern kitchen: you sit in the middle and hardly need stir to set all the gadgets going. That had always been Clarisse’s sort of thing. Besides, she understood “illusion” to mean nothing other than what was called “the will,” only with added intensity. Up to now Clarisse had felt intimidated by being able to understand so little of what was going on in the world. But since Meingast’s return she saw this as a veritable advantage that freed her to love, hate, and act as she pleased. For according to the Masters word mankind needed nothing so much as willpower, and when it came to wanting something with a will, Clarisse had always had that inner power! When Clarisse thought about it she was chilled with joy and
hot with responsibility. Of course, what was meant by will here was not the grim effort it took to learn a piano piece or win an argument; it meant being powerfully steered by life itself, being deeply moved within oneself, being swept away with happiness!

Eventually she could not help telling Walter something about it. She informed him that her conscience was growing stronger day by day. But despite his admiration for Meingast, the suspected instigator of this deed, Walter answered angrily: “It’s probably lucky for us that Ulrich doesn’t seem able to get the permit!”

Clarisse’s lips merely quivered slightly, betraying sympathy for his ignorance and stubbornness.

“What is it you want from this criminal, anyway, who has nothing whatever to do with any of us?” Walter demanded manfully.
“It’ll come to me when I get there!” she said.

“I should think you ought to know it already,” Walter asserted.

His little wife smiled the way she always did when she was about to hurt him to the quick. But then she merely said: “I’m going to do something.”

“Clarisse!” Walter remonstrated firmly. “You may not do anything without my permission. I am your lawful husband and guardian.”

This tone was new to her. She turned away and took a few steps in confusion.

“Clarisse!” Walter called after her, getting up to follow her. “I intend to take steps to deal with the insanity that’s going around in this house!”

Now she realized that the healing power of her resolve was already manifesting itself,
even in the strengthening of Walter’s charac-
ter. She turned on her heel: ‘What steps?’ she asked, and a flash of lightning from her narrowed eyes struck into the moist, wide-
open brown of his.

“Now look,” he said to mollify her, backing away a little, in surprise at her de-
manding such a concrete response. “We’ve all got this in our system, this intellectual taste for the unhealthy, the problematic, for making our flesh creep; every thinking person has it; but—”

“But we let the philistines have their way!” Clarisse interrupted triumphantly. Now she advanced on him without taking her eyes off him; felt how a sense of her own healing power held him in its strong embrace and overpowered him. Her heart was filled with an odd and inexpressible joy.

“But we won’t make such a to-do over it,” Walter muttered sulkily, finishing his
sentence. Behind him, at the hem of his jacket, he felt an obstacle; reaching backward, he identified it as the edge of one of those light, thin-legged little tables they had, which suddenly seemed spooky to him; he realized that if he kept backing away he would make it slide backward, which would be ludicrous. So he resisted the sudden desire to get far away from this struggle, to some dark-green meadow under blossoming fruit trees, among people whose healthy cheerfulness would wash his wounds clean. It was a quiet, stout wish, graced with women hanging on his words and paying their toll of grateful admiration. At the moment Clarisse came up close he actually felt rudely molested, in a nightmarish way. But to his surprise Clarisse did not say: “You’re a coward!” Instead, she said: “Walter? Why are we unhappy?”

At the sound of her appealing, clairvoyant voice he felt that happiness with any other woman could never take the place of his
unhappiness with Clarisse. “We have to be!” he answered with an equally noble upsurge.

“No, we shouldn’t have to be,” she said obligingly. She let her head droop to one side, trying to find a way to convince him. It didn’t matter what it was: They stood there facing each other like a day without an evening, pouring out its fire hour after hour without lessening.

“You’ll have to admit,” she said finally, at once shyly and stubbornly, “that really great crimes come about not because somebody commits them but because we let them happen.”

Now Walter knew, of course, what was coming, and felt a shock of disappointment.

“Oh God!” he cried out impatiently. “I know as well as you do that far more people’s lives are ruined by indifference and by the ease with which most of us today can square our conscience than by the evil intentions of
isolated individuals. And of course it’s admirable that you’re now going to say that this is why we must all quicken our conscience and carefully weigh in advance every step we take.”

Clarisse interrupted him by opening her mouth, but thought better of it and did not respond.

“Of course I think about poverty too, and hunger, and all the corruption that’s allowed to go on in this world, or mines caving in because the management economized on safety measures,” Walter went on in a deflated tone, “and I’ve agreed with you about it already.”

“But in that case two lovers mustn’t love each other either, as long as they’re not in a state of pure happiness,’ “ Clarisse said. “And the world will never improve until there are such lovers!”
Walter struck his hands together. “Don’t you understand how unfair to life such great, dazzling, uncompromising demands are?” he exclaimed. “And it’s the same with this Moosbrugger, who keeps popping into your head like something on a turntable. Of course you’re right to claim that no stone should be left unturned as long as such miserable human creatures are simply killed off because society doesn’t know what to do with them. But of course it’s even more right that the healthy, normal conscience is justified in simply refusing to bother with such over-refined scruples. A healthy way of thinking is recognizable, in fact, by certain signs; one can’t prove it but has to have it in one’s blood.”

“In your blood,” Clarisse replied, “‘of course’ always means ‘of course not.’”

Nettled, Walter shook his head to show that he would not answer this. He was fed up with always being the one to warn that a diet
of one-sided ideas was unhealthy; in the long run, it was probably also making him unsure of himself.

But Clarisse read his thoughts with that nervous sensitivity that never failed to amaze him. With her head high, she jumped over all the intermediate stages and landed on his main point with the subdued but intense question: “Can you imagine Jesus as boss of a coal mine?” He could see in her face that by “Jesus” she really meant him, through one of those exaggerations in which love is indistinguishable from madness. He waved this off with a gesture at once indignant and discouraged. “Not so direct, Clarisse!” he pleaded. “Such things mustn’t be said so directly!”

“Yes, they must,” she answered. “It’s the only way! If we don’t have the strength to save him, we will never have the strength to save ourselves!”
“And what difference will it make if they do string him up?” Walter burst out. The brutality of it made him believe he felt the liberating taste of life itself on his tongue, gloriously blended with the taste of death and the doom of their entanglement with it that Clarisse was conjuring up with her hints.

Clarisse looked at him expectantly. But Walter said nothing more, either from relief after his outburst or from indecision. And like someone forced to play an unbeatable final trump card, she said: “I’ve had a sign!”

“But that’s just one of your fantasies!” Walter shouted at the ceiling, which represented heaven. But with those last airy words Clarisse had ended their tête-à-tête, giving him no chance to say anything more.

Yet he saw her only a short while later talking eagerly with Meingast, who was rightly troubled by a feeling that they were
being watched but was too nearsighted to be sure of it. Walter was not really participating in the gardening being done so zestfully by his visiting brother-in-law, Siegmund, who with rolled-up shirtsleeves was kneeling in a furrow doing something or other that Walter had insisted must be done in the spring if one wanted to be a human being and not a bookmark in the pages of a gardening book. Instead of gardening, Walter was sneaking glances at the pair talking in the far corner of the open kitchen garden.

Not that he suspected anything untoward in the corner he was observing. Still, his hands felt unnaturally cold in the spring air; his legs were cold too, what with the wet places on his trousers from occasionally kneeling to give Siegmund instructions. He took a high tone with his brother-in-law, the way weak, downtrodden people will whenever they get a chance to work off their frustrations on someone. He knew that Siegmund,
who had taken it into his head to revere Walter, would not be easily shaken in his loyalty. But this did not prevent him from feeling a veritable after-sunset loneliness, a graveyard chill, as he watched Clarisse; she never cast a glance in his direction but was all eyes for Meingast, hanging on the Master’s words. Moreover, Walter actually took a certain pride in this. Ever since Meingast had come to stay in his house, he was just as proud of the chasms that suddenly opened up in it as he was anxious to cover them up again. From his standing height he had dispatched to the kneeling Siegmund the words: “Of course we all feel and are familiar with a certain hankering for the morbid and problematic!” He was no sneaking coward. In the short time since Clarisse had called him a philistine for saying the same thing to her, he had formulated a new phrase: “life’s petty dishonesty.”
“A little dishonesty is good, like sweet or sour,” he now instructed his brother-in-law, “but we are obligated to refine it in ourselves to the point where it would do credit to a healthy life! What I mean by a little dishonesty,” he went on, “is as much the nostalgic flirting with death that seizes us when we listen to Tristan as the secret fascination that’s in most sex crimes, even though we don’t succumb to it. For there’s something dishonest and antihuman, you see, both in elemental life when it overpowers us with want and disease, and in exaggerated scruples of mind and conscience trying to do violence to life. Everything that tries to overstep the limits set for us is dishonest! Mysticism is just as dishonest as the conceit that nature can be reduced to a mathematical formula! And the plan to visit Moosbrugger is just as dishonest as”—here Walter paused for a moment—”as if you were to invoke God at a patient’s bedside!”
There was certainly something in what he had said, and he had even managed to take Siegmund by surprise with his appeal to the physician’s professional and spontaneous humanitarianism, to make him see Clarisse’s scheme and her overwrought motivation as an impermissible overstepping of bounds. However, Walter was a genius compared with Siegmund, as may be seen in Walter’s healthy outlook having led him to confess such ideas as these, while his brother-in-law’s even healthier outlook manifested itself in his dogged silence in the face of such dubious subject matter. Siegmund patted the soil with his fingers while tilting his head now to one side, now to the other, without opening his lips, as if he were trying to pour something out of a test tube, or then again, as if he had just heard enough with that ear. And when Walter had finished there was a fearfully profound silence, in which Walter now heard a statement that Clarisse must
have called out to him once, for without being as vivid as a hallucination, it was as if the hollow space were punctuated by these words: “Nietzsche and Christ both perished of their incompleteness!” Somehow, in some uncanny fashion reminiscent of the “coal mine boss,” he felt flattered. It was a strange position that he, health personified, should be standing here in the cool garden between a man he regarded condescendingly and two unnaturally overheated people just out of earshot, whose mute gesticulations he watched with a superior air and yet with longing. For Clarisse was the slightly dishonest element his own health needed to keep from flagging, and a secret voice told him that Meingast was at this very moment engaged in immeasurably increasing the permissible limits of this dishonesty. He admired Meingast as an obscure relation admires a famous one, and seeing Clarisse whispering conspiratorially with him
aroused his envy more than his jealousy—a feeling, that is, that ate into him even more deeply than jealousy would have, and yet it was also somehow uplifting; the consciousness of his own dignity forbade him to get angry or to go over there and disturb them; in view of their agitation he felt himself superior, and from all this arose, he did not know how, some vague, mongrel notion, spawned outside all logic, that the two of them over there were in some reckless and reprehensible fashion invoking God.

If such a curiously mixed state of mind must be called thinking, it was of a kind that cannot possibly be put into words, because the chemistry of its darkness is instantly ruined by the luminous influence of language. Besides, as his remark to Siegmund had shown, Walter did not associate belief of any sort with the word “God,” and when the word occurred to him it generated an abashed void around itself. And so it
happened that the first thing Walter said to his brother-in-law, after a long silence, had nothing to do with this. “You’re an idiot to think you have no right to talk her out of this visit in the strongest possible terms,” he said bitterly. “What are you a doctor for?”

Siegmund wasn’t in the least offended. “You’re the one who will have to have it out with her,” he replied, glancing up calmly before turning back to what he was doing.

Walter sighed, then started over again. “Clarisse is an extraordinary person, of course. I can understand her very well. I’ll even admit that she’s not all wrong to be as austere in her views as she is. Just thinking of the poverty, hunger, misery of every kind the world is so full of, the disasters in coal mines, for instance, because the management wouldn’t spend enough on timbering...”
Siegmund gave no sign that he was giving it any thought.

“Well, she does!” Walter continued sternly. “And I think it’s wonderful of her. The rest of us get ourselves a good conscience much too easily. And she’s better than we are for insisting that we all ought to change and have a more active conscience, the kind with no limit to it, ever. But what I’m asking you is whether this isn’t bound to lead to a pathological state of moral scrupulousness, if it isn’t something like that already. You must have an opinion!”

Siegmund responded to this pressing challenge by propping himself up on one knee and giving his brother-in-law a searching look. “Crazy!” he said. “But not, strictly speaking, in a medical sense.”

“And what do you say,” Walter continued, forgetting his superior stance, “to her claim that she’s being sent signs?”
“She says she’s being sent signs?” Siegmund said dubiously.

“Signs, I tell you. That crazy killer, for instance. And that crazy swine outside our window the other day!”

“A swine?”

“No, a land of exhibitionist.”

“I see,” Siegmund said, turning it over in his mind. “You’re sent signs too, when you find something to paint. She just expresses herself in a more high-strung way than you,” he concluded.

“And what about her claim that she has to take these people’s sins on herself, and yours and mine as well, and I don’t know whose else’s?” Walter pressed him.

Siegmund had risen to his feet and was brushing the dirt from his hands. “She feels oppressed by sin, does she?” he asked, again superfluously, politely agreeing as if glad to
be able at last to support his brother-in-law. “That’s a symptom!”

“That’s a symptom?” Walter echoed, crushed.

“Fixed ideas about sin are a symptom,” Siegmund affirmed with the detachment of a professional.

“But it’s like this,” Walter added, instantly appealing against the judgment he had just been suing for: “You must first ask yourself: Does sin exist? Of course it does. But in that case there’s also a fixed idea of sin that is no delusion. You might not understand that, because it’s beyond empiricism! It’s a human being’s aggrieved sense of responsibility toward a higher life!”

“But she insists she’s receiving signs?” Siegmund persisted.

“But you just said that signs are sent to me too!” Walter cried. “And I can tell you
there are times when I would like to go down on my knees and beg fate to leave me in peace; but it keeps sending signs, and it sends the most inspiring signs through Clarisse!” Then he continued more calmly: “She now claims, for instance, that this man Moosbrugger represents her and me in our ‘sinful body and has been sent to us as a warning; but it can be understood as a symbol of our neglecting the higher possibilities of our lives, our ‘astral body,’ as it were. Years ago, when Meingast left us—”

“But an obsession with sin is a symptom of specific disorders,” Siegmund reminded him, with the relentless equanimity of the expert.

“Symptoms, that’s all you know!” Walter said in animated defense of his Clarisse. “Anything beyond that is outside your experience! But perhaps this superstition, which regards everything that doesn’t accord with the most pedestrian experience as a disorder,
is itself the true sin and sinful form of our life. Clarisse demands spiritual action against this! Many years ago, when Meingast left and we...” He thought of how he and Clarisse had “taken Meingast’s sins upon themselves,” but realized it was hopeless to try telling Siegmund the process of a spiritual awakening, so he ended vaguely by saying: “Anyway, I don’t suppose you’ll deny that there have always been people who have, so to speak, drawn humanity’s sins on themselves or even concentrated them in themselves.”

His brother-in-law looked at him complacently. “There you are!” he said amiably. “You yourself prove just what I’ve been saying. That she regards herself as oppressed by sin is a characteristic attitude of certain disorders. But there are also untypical modes of behavior in life: I never claimed anything more.”
“And the exaggerated stringency with which she carries things out?” Walter asked after a while, with a sigh. “ Surely to be so rigorous can hardly be called normal?”

Clarisse, meanwhile, was having an important conversation with Meingast.

“You’ve said,” she reminded him, “that the kind of people who pride themselves on understanding and explaining the world will never change anything in it, isn’t that so?”

“Yes,” the Master replied. “ True’ and ‘false’ are the evasions of people who never want to arrive at a decision. Truth is something without end.”

“So that’s why you said one must have the courage to choose between worth’ and worthless’?” she pressed on.

“Right,” the Master said, somewhat bored.
“And then there’s your marvelously contemptuous formulation,” Clarisse cried, “that in modern life people only do what is happening anyway.”

Meingast stopped and looked down; one might have said that he was either inclining an ear or studying a pebble lying before him on the path, slightly to the right. But Clarisse did not go on proffering hon- eyed praises; she, too, had now bent her head, so that her chin almost rested in the hollow of her neck, and her gaze bored into the ground between the tips of Meingast’s boots. A gentle flush rose to her pale cheeks as, cautiously lowering her voice, she continued:

“You said all sexuality was nothing but goatish caperings.”

“Yes, I did say that in a particular context. Whatever our age lacks in willpower it
expends, apart from its so-called scientific endeavors, in sexuality.”

After some hesitation, Clarisse said: “I have plenty of willpower myself, but Walter is for capering.”

“What’s really the matter between you two?” the Master asked with some curiosity, but almost immediately added in a tone of disgust: “I can guess, I suppose.”

They were standing in a corner of the treeless garden that lay under the full spring sun, almost diametrically opposite the corner where Siegmund was squatting on the ground with Walter standing over and haranguing him. The garden formed a rectangle parallel with and against the long wall of the house, with a gravel path running around its vegetable and flower beds, and two others forming a bright cross on the still-bare ground in the middle. Warily glancing in the direction of the two men, Clarisse replied:
“Perhaps he can’t help it; you see, I attract Walter in a way that’s not quite right.”

“I can imagine,” the Master answered, this time with a sympathetic look. “There is something boyish about you.”

At this praise Clarisse felt happiness bouncing through her veins like hailstones. “Did you notice before,“ she eagerly asked him, “that I can change clothes faster than a man?”

A blank expression came over the philosopher’s benevolently seamed face. Clarisse giggled. “That’s a double word,” she explained. “There are others too: sex murder, for instance.”

The Master probably thought it would be wise not to show surprise at anything. “Oh yes, I know,” he replied. “You did say once that to satisfy desire in the usual embrace is
a kind of sex murder.” But what did she mean by “changing,” he wanted to know.

“To offer no resistance is murder,” Clarisse explained with the speed of someone going through one’s paces on slippery ground and losing one’s footing through over-agility.

“Now you’ve really lost me,” Meingast admitted. “You must be talking about that fellow the carpenter again. What is it you want from him?”

Clarisse moodily scraped the gravel with the tip of her shoe. “It’s all part of the same thing,” she said. And suddenly she looked up at the Master. “I think Walter should learn to deny me,” she said in an abruptly cut-off sentence.

“I can’t judge that,” Meingast remarked, after waiting in vain for her to go on. “But certainly radical solutions are always best.”
He said this only to cover all contingencies. But Clarisse dropped her head again so that her gaze burrowed somewhere in Meingast’s suit, and after a while her hand reached slowly for his forearm. She suddenly had an uncontrollable impulse to take hold of that hard, lean arm under the broad sleeve and touch the Master, who was pretending to have forgotten all those illuminating things he had said about the carpenter. While this was happening she was dominated by the feeling that she was pushing a part of herself over to him, and in the slowness with which her hand disappeared inside his sleeve, in this flooding slowness, there eddied fragments of a mysterious lust, which derived from her perception that the Master was keeping still and letting her touch him.

But Meingast for some reason stared aghast at the hand clutching his arm this way and creeping up it like some many-legged creature mounting its female. Under the
little woman’s lowered eyelids he caught a flash of something peculiar and realized the dubious character of what was taking place, although he was moved by her doing it so publicly.

“Come!” he said gently, removing her hand from his arm. “We’re too conspicuous, standing here like this; let’s go on walking.”

As they strolled up and down the path, Clarisse said: “I can dress quickly, faster than a man if I have to. Clothes come flying onto my body when I’m—what shall I call it?—when I’m like that! Maybe it’s a kind of electricity. I attract things that belong to me. But it’s usually a sinister attraction.”

Meingast smiled at her puns, which he still did not understand, and fished haphazardly in his mind for an impressive retort. “So you put on your clothes like a hero his destiny?” he responded.
To his surprise, Clarisse stopped short and cried: “Yes, that’s it exactly! Whoever lives like this feels it even in a dress, shoes, knife and fork!”

“There’s some truth in that,” the Master confirmed her obscurely credible assertion. Then he asked point-blank: “But how do you do it with Walter, actually?”

Clarisse failed to understand. She looked at him, and suddenly saw in his eyes yellow clouds that seemed to be driven on a desert wind.

“You said,” Meingast went on with some reluctance, “that you attract him in a way that ‘isn’t right.’ You mean, I suppose, not right for a woman? How do you mean? Are you frigid with men?”

Clarisse did not know the word.
“Being frigid,” the Master explained, “is when a woman is unable to enjoy the act of love with men.”

“But I only know Walter,” Clarisse objected timidly.

“Even so, it does seem a fair assumption, after what you’ve been telling me.”

Clarisse was nonplussed. She had to think about it. She didn’t know. “Me? But I’m not supposed to—I’m the one who must put a stop to it!” she said. “I can’t permit it to happen!”

“You don’t say?” The Master’s laugh was vulgar. “You have to prevent yourself from feeling anything? Or prevent Walter from getting satisfaction?”

Clarisse blushed. But now she understood more clearly what she had to say. “When you give in, everything gets swamped in lust,” she replied seriously. “I won’t let a
man’s lust leave him and become my lust. That’s why I’ve attracted men ever since I was a little girl. There’s something wrong with the lust of men.”

For various reasons Meingast preferred not to go into that.

“Do you have that much self-control?” he asked.

“Well, yes and no,” Clarisse said candidly. “But I told you, if I let him have his way, I’d be a sex murderer!” Warming to her subject, she went on: “My woman friends say they pass out’ in the arms of a man. I don’t know what that is. I’ve never passed out in a man’s arms. But I do know what it’s like to pass out’ without being in a man’s arms. You must know about that too; after all, you did say that the world is too devoid of illusions...!”
Meingast waved this off with a gesture, as if to say she had misunderstood him. But now it was all too clear to her.

“When you say, for instance, that one must decide against the lesser value for the sake of the higher value,” she cried, “it means that there’s a life in an immense and boundless ecstasy! Not sexual ecstasy but the ecstasy of genius! Against which Walter would commit treason if I don’t prevent him!”

Meingast shook his head. Denial filled him on hearing this altered and impassioned version of his words; it was a startled, almost frightened denial, but of all the things it prompted him to say, he chose the most superficial: “But who knows whether he could do anything else?”

Clarisse stopped, as if rooted to the ground by a bolt of lightning. “He must!” she cried. “You yourself taught us that!”
“So I did,” the Master granted reluctantly, trying in vain to get her to keep walking by setting an example. “But what do you really want?”

“There was nothing I wanted before you came, don’t you see?” Clarisse said softly. “But it’s such an awful life, to take nothing more than the little bit of sexual pleasure out of the vast ocean of the possible joys in life! So now I want something.”

“That’s just what I am asking you about,” Meingast prompted.

“One has to be here for a purpose. One has to be ‘good’ for something. Otherwise everything is horribly confused,” Clarisse answered.

“Is what you want connected with Moosbrugger?” Meingast probed.

“That’s hard to say. We’ll have to see what comes of it,” Clarisse replied. Then she
said thoughtfully: “I’m going to abduct him. I’m going to create a scandal!” As she said this, her expression took on an air of mystery. “I’ve been watching you!” she said suddenly. “You have strange people coming to see you. You invite them when you think we’re not home. Boys and young men! You don’t talk about what they want!” Meingast stared at her, speechless. “You’re working up to something,” Clarisse went on, “you’re getting something going! But I,” she uttered in a forceful whisper, “I’m also strong enough to have several different friends at the same time. I’ve gained a man’s character and a man’s responsibilities. Living with Walter, I’ve learned masculine feelings!” Again her hand groped for Meingast’s arm; it was evident she was unaware of what she was doing. Her fingers came out of her sleeve curved like claws. “I’m two people in one,” she whispered, “you must know that! But it’s not
easy. You’re right that one mustn’t be afraid to use force in a case like this!”

Meingast was still staring at her in embarrassment. He had never known her in such a state. The import of her words was incomprehensible. For Clarisse herself at the moment, the concept of being two people in one was self-evident, but Meingast wondered whether she had guessed something of his secret life and was alluding to that. There was nothing much to guess at yet; he had only recently begun to perceive a shift in his feelings that accorded with his male-oriented philosophy, and begun to surround himself with young men who meant more to him than disciples. But that might have been why he had changed his residence and come here, where he felt safe from observation; he had never thought of such a possibility, and this little person, who had turned uncanny, was apparently capable of guessing what was going on in him. Somehow more and more of
her arm was emerging from the sleeve of her dress without reducing the distance between the two bodies it connected, and this bare, skinny forearm, together with its attached hand, which was clutching Meingast, seemed at this moment to have such an unusual shape that everything in the man’s imagination that had hitherto been distinct became wildly muddled.

But Clarisse no longer came out with what she had been just about to say, even though it was perfectly clear inside her. The double words were signs, scattered throughout the language like snapped-off twigs or leaves strewn on the ground, to mark a secret path. “Sex murder” and “changing” and even “quick” and many other words—perhaps all others—exhibited double meanings, one of which was secret and private. But a double language means a double life. Ordinary language is evidently that of sin, the secret one that of the astral
body. “Quick,” for instance, in its sinful form meant ordinary, everyday, tiring haste, while in its joyous form everything flew off it in joyful leaps and bounds. But then the joyous form can also be called the form of energy or of innocence, while the sinful form can be called all the names having to do with the depression, dullness, and irresolution of ordinary life. There were these amazing connections between the self and things, so that something one did had an effect where one would never have expected it; and the less Clarisse could express all this, the more intensely the words kept coming inside her, too fast for her to gather them in. But for quite some time she had been convinced of one thing: the duty, the privilege, the mission of whatever it is we call conscience, illusion, will, is to find the vital form, the light form. This is the one where nothing is accidental, where there is no room for wavering, where happiness and compulsion coincide. Other
people have called this “living authentically” and spoken of the “intelligible character”; they have referred to instinct as innocence and to the intellect as sin. Clarisse could not think in these terms, but she had made the discovery that one could set something in motion, and then sometimes parts of the astral body would attach themselves to it of their own accord and in this fashion become embodied in it. For reasons primarily rooted in Walters hypersensitive inaction, but also because of heroic aspirations she never had the means of satisfying, she had been led to think that by taking forceful action one could set up a memorial to oneself in advance, and the memorial would then draw one into itself. So she was not at all clear about what she intended to do with Moosbrugger, and could not answer Meingast’s question.

Nor did she want to. While Walter had forbidden her to say that the Master was about to undergo another transformation,
there was no doubt that his spirit was moving toward secret preparations for some action, she did not know what, but one which could be as magnificent as his spirit was. He was therefore bound to understand her, even if he pretended not to. The less she said, the more she showed him how much she knew. She also had a right to take hold of him, and he could not forbid it. Thus he accorded recognition to her undertaking and she entered into his and took part in it. This, too, was a land of being-two-people-in-one, and so forceful that she could hardly grasp it. All her strength, more than she could know she had, was flowing through her arm in an inexhaustible stream from her to her mysterious friend, draining the very marrow from her bones and leaving her faint with sensations surpassing any of those from making love. She could do nothing but look at her hand, smiling, or alternately look into his face.
Meingast, too, was doing nothing but gaze now at her, now at her hand.

All at once, something happened that at first took Clarisse by surprise and then threw her into a whirl of bacchantic ecstasy:

Meingast had been trying to keep a superior smile fixed on his face in order not to betray his uncertainty. But this uncertainty was growing from moment to moment, constantly reborn from something apparently incomprehensible. For every act undertaken with doubts is preceded by a brief span of weakness, corresponding to the moments of remorse after the thing is done, though in the normal course of events it may barely be apparent. The convictions and vivid illusions that protect and justify the completed act have not yet been fully formed and are still wavering in the mounting tide of passion, vague and formless as they will probably be when they tremble and collapse afterward in the outgoing tide of passionate
remorse. It was in just this state of his intentions that Meingast had been surprised. It was doubly painful for him because of the past and because of the regard in which he was now held by Walter and Clarisse, and then, every intense excitement changes the sense of one's image of reality so that it can rise to new heights. His own frightened state made Clarisse frightening to Meingast, and the failure of his efforts to get back to sober reality only increased his dismay. So instead of projecting superior strength, the smile on his face stiffened from one minute to the next; indeed, it became a sort of floating stiffness, which ended by floating away stiffly, as if on stilts. At this moment the Master was behaving no differently than a large dog facing some much smaller creature he does not dare to attack, like a caterpillar, toad, or snake; he reared up higher and higher on his long legs, drew back his lips and arched his back, and found himself suddenly
swept away by the currents of discomfort from the place where they had their source, without being able to conceal his flight by any word or gesture.

Clarisse did not let go of him. As he took his first, hesitant steps, her clinging might have been taken for ingenuous eagerness, but after that he was dragging her along with him while barely finding the necessary words to explain that he was in a hurry to get back to his room and work. It was only in the front hall that he managed to shake her off completely; up till then he had been driven only by his urge to escape, paying no attention to what Clarisse was saying and choked by his caution not to attract the attention of Walter and Siegmund. Walter had actually been able to guess at the general pattern of what was going on. He could see that Clarisse was passionately demanding something that Meingast was refusing her, and jealousy bored into his breast like a
double-threaded screw. For although he suffered agonies at the thought that Clarisse was offering her favors to their friend, he was even more furious at the insult of seeing her apparently disdained. If that feeling were taken to its logical conclusion, he would have to force Meingast to take Clarisse, only to be plunged into despair by the sweep of that same impulse. He felt deeply sad and heroically excited. It was insufferable, with Clarisse poised on the razor’s edge of her destiny, that he should have to listen to Siegmund asking whether the seedlings should be planted loosely in the soil or if it had to be patted firmly around them. He had to say something, and felt like a piano in the fraction of a second between the moment when the ten-fingered crash of an incredible blow hits it and the cry of pain. Light was in his throat, words that would surely put a wholly new and different face on everything. Yet all he managed to say was something quite
different from what he expected. “I won’t have it!” he said, again and again, more to the garden than to Siegmund.

But it turned out that Siegmund, intent as he had seemed to be on the seedlings and on pushing the soil this way and that, had also noticed what was going on and even given it some thought. For now he rose to his feet, brushed the dirt from his knees, and gave his brother-in-law some advice.

“If you feel she’s going too far, you’ll have to give her something else to think about,” he said in a tone that implied he had of course been thinking all this time, with a doctor’s sense of responsibility, about everything Walter had confided in him.

“And how am I to do that?” Walter asked, disconcerted.

“like any man!” Siegmund said. “All a woman’s fuss and fury is to be cured in one
place, to quote Mephistopheles more or less!”

Siegmund put up with a great deal from Walter. Life is full of such relationships, in which one partner keeps the upper hand and constantly suppresses the other, who never rebels. In fact, and in accordance with Siegmund’s own convictions, this is the way normal, healthy life is. The world would probably have come to an end in the Bronze Age if everyone had stood up for himself to the last drop of his blood. Instead, the weaker have always moved away and looked around for neighbors they in their turn could push around; the majority of human relationships follow this model to this day, and with time these things take care of themselves.

In his family circle, where Walter passed for a genius, Siegmund had always been treated as a bit of a blockhead; he had accepted it, and even today would have been
the one who yielded and did homage wherever it was a matter of precedence in the family hierarchy. That old hierarchical structure had ceased to matter years ago, compared with the new status each of them had acquired, and precisely for that reason it could be left undisturbed. Siegmund not only had a very respectable practice as a physician—and the doctor’s power, unlike that of the bureaucrat, is not imposed from above but is owed to his personal ability; people come to him for help and submit to him willingly—but also had a wealthy wife, who had presented him within a brief period with herself and three children, and to whom he was unfaithful with other women, not often but regularly, whenever it pleased him. So he was certainly in a position, if he chose, to give Walter confident and reliable advice.

At this moment Clarisse came back out of the house. She no longer remembered what had been said during their tempestuous
rush indoors. She realized that the Master had been trying to get away from her, but the memory of it had lost its details, had folded up and closed. Something had happened! With this one notion in her head, Clarisse felt like someone emerging from a thunderstorm, still charged from head to toe with sensual energy. In front of her, a few yards beyond the bottom of the small flight of stone steps she had come out by, she saw a shiny blackbird with a flame-colored beak, dining on a fat caterpillar. There was an immense energy in the creature, or in the two contrasting colors. One could not say that Clarisse was thinking anything about it; it was more like a response coming from behind and all around her. The blackbird was a sinful body in the act of committing violence. The caterpillar the sinful form of a butterfly. Fate had placed the two creatures in her path, as a sign that she must act. One could see how the blackbird assumed the
caterpillar’s sins through its flaming orange-red beak. Wasn’t the bird a “black genie”? Just as the dove is the “white spirit”? Wer-en’t these signs linked in a chain? The exhibitionist with the carpenter, with the Master’s flight...? Not one of these notions was clearly formed in her; they lodged invisibly in the walls of the house, summoned but still keeping their answer to themselves. But what Clarisse really felt as she stepped out on the stairs and saw the bird that was eating the caterpillar was an ineffable correspondence of inner and outer happenings.

She conveyed it in some curious way to Walter. The impression he received instantly corresponded with what he had called “invoking God”; there was no mistaking it this time. He could not make out what was going on inside Clarisse, she was too far away, but there was something in her bearing that was not happenstance, as she stood facing the world into which the little flight of stairs
descended like steps leading down to a swimming pool. It was something exalted. It was not the attitude of ordinary life. And suddenly he understood; this was what Clarisse meant when she said: “It’s not by chance that this man is under my window!” Gazing at his wife, he himself felt how the pressure of strange forces came flooding in to fill appearances. In the fact that he was standing here and Clarisse there, at such an angle to him that he had to turn his eyes away from the direction they had automatically taken, along the length of the garden, in order to see her clearly—even in this simple juxtaposition, the mute emphasis of life suddenly outweighed natural contingency. Out of the fullness of images thrusting themselves upon the eye something geometrically linear and extraordinary reared up. This must be how it could happen that Clarisse found a meaning in almost empty correlations, such as the circumstance of one man
stopping under her window while another was a carpenter. Events seemed to have a way of arranging themselves that was different from the usual pattern, as elements in some strange entity that revealed them in unexpected aspects, and because it brought these aspects out from their obscure hiding places, it justified Clarisse’s claim that it was she herself who was attracting events toward herself. It was hard to express this without sounding fanciful, but then it occurred to Walter that it came closest to something he knew very well—what happens when you paint a picture. A painting, too, has its own inexplicable way of excluding every color or line not in accord with its basic form, style, and palette of colors, while on the other hand it extracts from the painter’s hand whatever it needs, thanks to the laws of genius, which are not the same as the usual laws of nature. At this point he no longer had in him any of that easy, healthy self-assurance which
scrutinizes life’s excrescences for anything that might come in handy and which he had been extolling only a little while ago; what he felt was more the misery of a little boy too timid to join in a game.

But Siegmund was not the man to let go of something so easily once he had taken it up. “Clarisse is high-strung,” he declared. “She’s always been ready to run her head through a wall, and now she’s got it stuck in one. You’ll have to get a good grip on her, even if she resists you.”

“You doctors don’t have a clue about human psychology!” Walter cried. He looked for a second point of attack and found it. “You talk of ‘signs,’ “ he went on, his irritation overlaid by his pleasure in being able to speak about Clarisse, “and you carefully examine when signs indicate a disorder and when they don’t, but I tell you this: the true human condition is the one in which everything is a sign! But everything! You
may be able to look truth in the eye, but truth will never look you in the eye; this divine, uncertain feeling is something you’ll never know!”

“You’re obviously both crazy,” Siegmund remarked dryly.

“Yes, of course we are!” Walter cried out. “You’re not a creative man, after all; you’ve never learned what it means to ‘express oneself,’ which means first of all, for an artist, to understand something. The expression we impart to things is what develops our ability to perceive them aright. I can only understand what I want, or someone else wants, by carrying it out! This is our living experience, as distinct from your dead experience! Of course you’ll say it’s paradoxical, a confusion of cause and effect; you and your medical causality!”

But Siegmund did not say this; he merely reiterated doggedly: “It will definitely
be for her own good if you won’t put up with too much. Excitable people need a certain amount of strictness.”

“And when I play the piano at the open window,” Walter asked, as if he had not heard his brother-in-law’s warning, “what am I doing? People are passing by, some of them young girls, perhaps anyone who feels like it stops to listen; I play for young lovers and lonely old people. Clever people, stupid people. I’m not giving them something to think about. What I’m playing isn’t rational information. I’m giving them myself. I sit invisible in my room and give them signs: just a few notes, and it’s their life, and it’s my life. You could certainly call this crazy too...!” Suddenly he fell silent. That feeling: “Oh, I could tell all of you a thing or two!”—that basic ambitious urge of every inhabitant of earth who feels the need to communicate something but has no more than an average creative capacity—had fallen to pieces. Every
time Walter sat in the soft emptiness of the room behind his open window and released his music into the air with the proud awareness of the artist giving happiness to unknown thousands, this feeling was like an open umbrella, and the instant he stopped playing, it was like a sloppily closed one. All the airiness was gone, it was as if everything that had happened had not happened, and all he could say was that art had lost its connection to the people and everything was no good. He thought of this and felt dejected. He tried to fight it off. After all, Clarisse had said: music must be played “through to the end.” Clarisse had said: “We understand something only as long as we ourselves are part of it!” But Clarisse had also said: “That’s why we have to go to the madhouse ourselves!” Walters “inner umbrella” flapped halfway closed in irregular stormy gusts.

Siegmund said: “Excitable people need a certain amount of guidance, for their own
good. You yourself said you wouldn’t put up with it anymore. Professionally and personally, I can only give you the same advice: Show her that you’re a man. I know she balks at that, but she’ll come around.” Siegmund was like a dependable machine tirelessly reiterating the “answer” he had come up with.

Walter, in a “stormy gust,” replied: “This medical exaggeration of a well-adjusted sex life is old hat! When I make music or paint or think, I am affecting both an immediate and a distant audience, without depriving the ones of what I give to the others. On the contrary! Take it from me, there’s probably no sphere of life in which one remains justified in living only for oneself, thinking of life as a private matter! Not even marriage!”

But the heavier pressure was on Siegmund’s side, and Walter sailed before the wind across to Clarisse, of whom he had not lost sight during this conversation. He
did not relish anyone’s being able to say of him that he was not a man; he turned his back on this suggestion by letting it drive him over to Clarisse. And halfway there he felt the certainty, between nervously bared teeth, that he would have to begin with the question: “What do you mean, talking about signs?”

But Clarisse saw him coming. She had already seen him wavering while he was still standing there. Then his feet were pulled from the ground and bore him toward her. She participated in this with wild elation. The blackbird, startled, flew off, hastily taking its caterpillar with it. The way was now clear for her power of attraction. Yet she suddenly thought better of it and eluded the encounter for the time being by slowly slipping along the side of the house into the open, not turning away from Walter but moving faster than he, hesitant as he was, could move out
of the realm of telepathic effect into that of statement and response.
Since Agathe had joined forces with him, Ulrich’s relations with the extensive social circle of the Tuzzis had been making great demands on his time. For although it was late in the year the winter’s busy social season was not yet over, and the least he could do in return for the great show of sympathy he had received upon his father’s death was not hide Agathe away, even though their being in mourning relieved them of having to attend large affairs. Had Ulrich chosen to take full advantage of it, their mourning would actually have allowed them to avoid attending all social functions for a long time, so that he could have dropped out of a circle of acquaintances that he had fallen into only
through curious circumstances. However, since Agathe had put her life into his charge Ulrich acted against his own inclination, and assigned to a part of himself labeled with the traditional concept “duties of an elder brother” many decisions that his whole person was undecided about, even when he did not actually disapprove of them. The first of these duties of an elder brother was to see that Agathe’s flight from her husband’s house should end only in the house of a better husband.

“If things continue this way,” he would say, whenever they touched on the subject of what arrangements needed to be made in setting up house together, “you will soon be getting some offers of marriage, or at least of love,” and if Agathe planned something for more than a few weeks ahead he would say: “By that time everything will be different.” This would have wounded her even more had she not perceived the conflict in her
brother, so that for the present she refrained from making an issue of it when he chose to widen their social circle to the limit. And so after Agathe’s arrival they became far more involved in social obligations than Ulrich would have been on his own.

Their constant appearances together, when for a long time Ulrich had always been seen alone and without ever uttering a word about a sister, caused no slight sensation. One day General Stumm von Bordwehr had shown up at Ulrich’s with his orderly, his briefcase, and his loaf of bread, and started to sniff the air suspiciously. Then Stumm discovered a lady’s stocking hanging over a chair, and said reproachfully: “Oh, you young fellows!”

“My sister,” Ulrich declared.

“Oh, come on—you haven’t got a sister!” the General protested. “Here we are,
tormented by the most serious problems, and you’re hiding out with a little playmate!"

Just then Agathe came in, and the General lost his composure. He saw the family resemblance, and could tell by the casual air with which Agathe wandered in that Ulrich had told the truth, yet he could not shake off the feeling that he was looking at one of Ulrich’s girlfriends, who incomprehensibly and misleadingly happened to look like him.

“I really don’t know what came over me, dear lady,” he told Diotima later, “but I couldn’t have been more amazed if he’d suddenly stood before me as a cadet again!” For at the sight of Agathe, to whom he was instantly attracted, Stumm had been overcome by that stupor he had learned to recognize as a sign of being deeply moved. His tender plumpness and sensitive nature inclined the General to hasty retreat from such a tricky situation, and despite all Ulrich’s efforts to make him stay, he did not learn much more
about the serious problems that had brought the educated General to him.

“No!” Stumm blamed himself. “Nothing is so important as to justify my disturbing you like this.”

“But you haven’t disturbed us at all,” Ulrich assured him with a smile. “What’s there to be disturbed?”

“No, of course not,” Stumm assured him, now completely confused. “Of course not, in a sense. But all the same... look, why don’t I come back another time?”

“You might at least tell me what brought you here, before you dash off again,” Ulrich demanded.

“Nothing, not a thing! A trifle!” the General cried in his eagerness to take to his heels. “I think the Great Event is about to start!”

Agathe looked at him in surprise.

“I do apologize,” the General said, turning to her. “You can’t have any idea what this is all about.”

“The Parallel Campaign has found its crowning idea!” Ulrich filled her in.

“No, I never said that,” the General demurred. “All I meant was that the great event everyone was waiting for is now on its way.”

“I see,” Ulrich said. “Well, it’s been on its way from the start.”

“No, not quite like this,” the General earnestly assured him. “There is now a quite definite nobody-knows-what in the air. There’s soon to be a decisive gathering at your cousin’s. Frau Drangsal—”

“Who’s she?” Ulrich had never heard of her.
“That only shows how much you’ve been out of touch,” the General said reproachfully, and turned immediately to Agathe to mend matters. “Frau Drangsal is the lady who has taken the poet Feuermaul under her wing. I suppose,” he said, turning his round body back again to the silent Ulrich, “you don’t know him either?”

“Yes, I do. The lyric poet.”

“Writes verses,” the General said, mistrustfully avoiding the unaccustomed word.

“Good verse, in fact. And all sorts of plays.”

“I don’t know about plays. And I haven’t got my notes with me. But he’s the one who says: Man is good. In short, Frau Drangsal is backing the hypothesis that man is good, and they say it is a great European idea and that Feuermaul has a great future. She was married to a man who was a world-famous doctor, and she means to make Feuermaul
world-famous too. Anyway, there’s a danger that your cousin may lose the leadership to Frau Drangsal, whose salon has also been attracting all the celebrities.”

The General mopped the sweat from his brow, though Ulrich did not find the prospect at all alarming.

“You surprise me!” Stumm scolded him. “As an admirer of your cousin like everyone else, how can you say such things? Don’t you agree, dear lady,” he appealed to Agathe, “that your brother is being incredibly disloyal and ungrateful toward an inspiring woman?”

“I’ve never met my cousin,” Agathe admitted.

“Oh!” said Stumm, and in words that turned a chivalrous intention into a rather backhanded compliment which involved an obscure concession to Agathe, he added: “Though she hasn’t been at her best lately!”
Neither Ulrich nor Agathe had anything to say to this, so the General felt he had to elucidate. “And you know why, too,” he said meaningfully to Ulrich. He disapproved of Diotima’s current absorption in sexology, which was distracting her mind from the Parallel Campaign, and he was worried because her relationship with Arnheim was not improving, but he did not know how far he might go in speaking of such matters in the presence of Agathe, whose expression was now growing steadily cooler. But Ulrich answered calmly: “I suppose you’re not making any progress with your oil affair if our Diotima no longer has her old influence on Arnheim?”

Stumm made a pathetically pleading gesture, as if to stop Ulrich from making a joke not fit for a lady’s ear, but at the same time threw him a sharp glance of warning. He even found the energy, despite his weight, to bounce to his feet like a young
man, and tugged his tunic straight. Enough of his original suspicion about Agathe’s background lingered to keep him from exposing the secrets of the War Ministry in her presence. It was only when Ulrich had escorted him out to the hall that he clutched his arm and whispered hoarsely, through a smile: “For God’s sake, man, don’t talk open treason!” and enjoined Ulrich from uttering a word about the oil fields in front of any third person, even one’s own sister. “Oh, all right,” Ulrich promised. “But she’s my twin sister.”

“Not even in front of a twin sister!” the General asseverated, still so incredulous about the sister that he could take the addition of “twin” in stride. “Give me your word!”

“But it’s no use making me promise such a thing.” Ulrich was even more outrageous. “We’re Siamese twins, don’t you see?” Stumm finally caught on that Ulrich, whose manner was never to give a straight answer to anything, was making fun of him.
“Your jokes used to be better,” he protested, “than to suggest the unappetizing notion that such a delightful person, even if she’s ten times your sister, is fused together with you!” But this had reawakened his lively mistrust of the reclusiveness in which he had found Ulrich, and so he appended a few more questions to find out what he had been up to. Has the new secretary turned up yet? Have you been to see Diotima? Have you kept your promise to visit Leinsdorf? Have you found out how things are between your cousin and Arnheim? Since the plump skeptic was of course already informed on all these points, he was merely testing Ulrich’s truthfulness, and was satisfied with the result.

“In that case, do me a favor and don’t be late for this crucial session,” he pleaded while buttoning up his greatcoat, slightly out of breath from mastering the traversal through the sleeves. “I’ll call you again
beforehand and fetch you in my carriage, agreed?”

“And when will this boredom take place?” Ulrich asked, not exactly with enthusiasm.

“In a couple of weeks or so, I think,” the General said. “We want to bring the rival party to Diotima’s, but we want Arnheim to be there too, and he’s still abroad.” With one finger he tapped the golden sword knot dangling from his coat pocket. ‘Without him, it’s not much fun for us, as you can understand. But believe me”—he sighed—”there’s nothing I personally desire more than that our spiritual leadership should stay with your cousin; it would be horrible for me, if I had to adapt to an entirely new situation!”

Thus it was this visit that brought Ulrich, now accompanied by his sister, back into the fold he had deserted when he was still alone. He would have had to resume his
social obligations even if he had not wanted to, as he could not possibly stay in hiding with Agathe a day longer and expect Stumm to keep to himself a discovery so ripe for gossip. When “the Siamese” called on Diotima, she had apparently already heard of this curious and dubious epithet, if she was not yet charmed with it. For the divine Diotima, famed for the distinguished and remarkable people always to be met under her roof, had at first taken Agathe’s unheralded debut very badly; a kinswoman who might not be a social success could be far more damaging to her own position than a male cousin, and she knew just as little about this new cousin as she had previously known about Ulrich, which in itself caused the all-knowing Diotima some annoyance when she had to admit her ignorance to the General. So she had decided to refer to Agathe as “the orphan sister,” partly to help reconcile herself to the situation and partly to prepare wider circles
for it. It was in this spirit that she received the cousins.

She was agreeably surprised by the socially impeccable manners Agathe was able to produce, while Agathe, mindful of her good education in a pious boarding school and always ready, with a mixture of irony and wonder, to take life as it came—an attitude she deplored to Ulrich—from the first managed almost unconsciously to win the gracious sympathies of the stupendous young woman whose ambition for “greatness” left Agathe quite cold and indifferent. She marveled at Diotima with the same guilelessness with which she would have marveled at a gigantic power station in whose mysterious function of spreading light one did not meddle. Once Diotima had been won over, especially as she could soon see that Agathe was generally liked, she laid herself out to extend Agathe’s social success, which she arranged to throw greater credit
on herself. The “orphan sister” aroused much sympathetic interest, which among Diotima’s intimates began on a note of frank amazement that nobody had ever heard of her before, and in wider circles was transformed into that vague pleasure at everything new and surprising which is shared by princes and the press alike.

And so it happened that Diotima, with her dilettante’s knack for choosing instinctively, among several options, that which was both the worst and the most promising of public success, made the move that assured Ulrich and Agathe of their permanent place in the memory of that distinguished circle by promptly passing on the delightful story—as she now suddenly found it to be—that the cousins, reunited under romantic circumstances after an almost lifelong separation, called themselves Siamese twins, even though they had been blindly fated thus far to be almost the opposite. It would be hard
to say why Diotima first, and then everyone else, was so taken with this circumstance, and why it made the “twins” ‘ resolve to live together appear both extraordinary and natural; such was Diotima’s gift for leadership; and this outcome—for both things happened—proved that she still exerted her gentle sway despite all her rivals’ maneuvers. Arnheim, when he heard of it on his return from abroad, delivered an elaborate address to a select circle, rounding it off with a homage to aristocratic-popular forces. Somehow the rumor arose that Agathe had taken refuge with her brother from an unhappy marriage with a celebrated foreign savant. And since the arbiters of good form at that time had the landowners’ antipathy to divorce and made do with adultery, many older persons perceived Agathe’s choice in that double halo of the higher life composed of willpower and piety which Count Leinsdorf, who looked upon the “twins” with special
favor, at one point characterized with the words: “Our theaters are always treating us to displays of the most awful excesses of passion. Now here’s a story the Burgtheater could use as a good example!"

Diotima, in whose presence this was uttered, responded: “It’s become fashionable for many people to say that man is good. But anyone who knows, as I have learned in my studies, the confusions of our sex life will know how rare such examples are!”

Did she mean to qualify His Grace’s praise or reinforce it? She had not yet forgiven Ulrich what she called his lack of confidence in her, since he had not given her advance notice of his sisters arrival; but she was proud of the success in which she had a part, and this entered into her reply.
TOO MUCH GAIETY

Agathe proved naturally adept at making use of the advantages social life offered, and her brother was pleased to see her moving with so much poise in these demanding social circles. The years she had spent as the wife of a secondary-school principal in the provinces seemed to have fallen from her without leaving a trace. For the present, however, Ulrich summed it all up with a shrug, saying: “Our high nobility find it amusing that we should be called the Siamese twins. They’ve always gone in more for menageries than, say, for art.” By tacit agreement they treated all that was happening as a mere interlude. There was much that needed changing or rearranging in their household, as they had seen from the very first day; but they did nothing about it, because they shied away from
another discussion whose limits could not be foreseen. Ulrich had given up his bedroom to Agathe and settled himself in the dressing room, with the bathroom between them, and had gradually given up most of his closet space to her. He declined her offer of sympathy for these hardships with an allusion to Saint Lawrence and his grille; and anyway it did not occur to Agathe that she might be interfering with her brothers bachelor life, because he assured her that he was very happy and because she could have only the vaguest idea of the degrees of happiness he might have enjoyed previously. She had come to like this house with its unconventional arrangements, its useless extravagance of anterooms and reception rooms around the few habitable rooms, which were now overcrowded; there was about it something of the elaborate civilities of a bygone age left defenseless against the self-indulgent and churlish high-handedness of the present.
Sometimes the mute protest of the handsome rooms against the disorderly invasion seemed mournful, like broken, tangled strings hanging from the exquisitely carved frame of an old instrument. Agathe now saw that her brother had not really chosen this secluded house without interest or feeling, as he pretended, and from its ancient walls emerged a language of passion that was not quite mute, but yet not quite audible. But neither she nor Ulrich admitted to anything more than enjoying its casualness. They lived in some disarray, had their meals sent in from a hotel, and derived from everything a sort of wild fun that comes with eating a meal more awkwardly on the grass at a picnic than one would have had to do at one’s table.

In these circumstances they also did not have the right domestic help. The well-trained servant Ulrich had taken on temporarily when he moved in—an old man about
to retire and only waiting for some technical-
ity to be settled first—could not be expected
to do more than the minimum Ulrich expec-
ted of him; the part of lady’s maid fell to Ul-
rich himself, since the room where a regular
maid might be lodged was, like everything
else, still in the realm of good intentions, and
a few efforts in that direction had not
brought good results. Instead, Ulrich was
making great strides as a squire arming his
lady knight to set forth on her social con-
quests. In addition, Agathe had done some
shopping to supplement her wardrobe, and
her acquisitions were strewn all over the
house, which was nowhere equipped for the
demands of a lady. She had acquired the
habit of using the entire house as a dressing
room, so that Ulrich willy-nilly took part in
her new purchases. The doors between
rooms were left open, his gymnastic appara-
tus served as clotheshorse and coatrack, and
he would be called away from his desk for
conferences like Cincinnatus from his plow. This interference with his latent but at least potential will to work was something he put up with not merely because he thought it would pass but because he enjoyed it; it was something new and made him feel young again. His sister’s vivacity, idle as it might appear to be, crackled in his loneliness like a small fire in a long-unused stove. Bright waves of charming gaiety, dark waves of warm trustfulness, filled the space in which he lived, taking from it the nature of a space in which he up till then had moved only at the dictates of his own will. But what was most amazing about this inexhaustible fountain of another presence was that the sum of the countless trifles of which it consisted added up to a non-sum that was of a quite different kind: his impatience with wasting his time, that unquenchable feeling that had never left him since he could remember, no matter what he had taken up that was
supposed to be great and important, was to his astonishment totally gone, and for the first time he loved his day-to-day life without thinking.

He even overdid it a little, gasping in delight when Agathe, with the seriousness women feel in these matters, offered for his admiration the thousand charming things she had been buying. He acted as if the quaint workings of a woman’s nature—which, on the same level of intelligence, is more sensitive than the male and therefore more susceptible to the suggestion of dressing up to a point of crass self-display that is even further removed from the ideal of a cultivated humanity than the man’s nature—irresistibly compelled his participation. And perhaps it really was so. For the many small, tender, absurd notions he became involved with—tricking oneself out with glass beads, crimping the hair, the mindless arrangements of lace and
embroidery, the ruthless seductive colors: charms so akin to the tinfoil stars at the fairgrounds that every intelligent woman sees right through them without in the least losing her taste for them—began to entangle him in the network of their glittering madness. For the moment one begins to take anything, no matter how foolish or tasteless, seriously and puts oneself on its level, it begins to reveal a rationale of its own, the intoxicating scent of its love for itself, its innate urge to play and to please. This was what happened to Ulrich when he helped equip Agathe with her new outfits. He fetched and carried, admired, appraised, was asked for advice, helped with trying on. He stood with Agathe in front of the mirror. Nowadays, when a woman’s appearance suggests that of a well-plucked fowl ready for the oven, it is hard to imagine her predecessors appearance in all its charm of endlessly titillated desire, which has meanwhile become
ridiculous: the long skirt, to all appearances sewn to the floor by the dressmaker and yet miraculously in motion, enclosing other, secret gossamer skirts beneath it, pastel-shaded silk flower petals whose softly fluttering movements suddenly turned into even finer tissues of white, which were the first to touch the body itself with their soft foam. And if these clothes resembled waves in that they drew the eye seductively and yet repulsed it, they were also an ingenious contrivance of way stations and intermediate fortifications around expertly guarded marvels and, for all their unnaturalness, a cleverly curtained theater of the erotic, whose breathtaking darkness was lit only by the feeble light of the imagination. It was these quintessential preliminaries that Ulrich now saw removed daily, taken apart, as it were from the inside. Even though a woman’s secrets had long since lost their mystery for him, or just because he had always only
rushed through them as anterooms or outer gardens, they had quite a different effect on him now that there was no gateway or goal for him. The tension that lies in all these things struck back. Ulrich could hardly have said what changes it wrought. He rightly regarded himself as a man of masculine temperament, and he could understand being attracted by seeing what he so often desired from its other side, for once, but at times it was almost uncanny, and he warded it off with a laugh.

“As if the walls of a girls’ boarding school had sprouted all around me in the night, completely locking me in!” he protested.

“Is that so terrible?” Agathe asked.

“I don’t know,” he replied.

Then he called her a flesh-eating plant and himself a miserable insect that had crawled into her shimmering calyx. “You’ve
closed it around me,” he said, “and now I’m sitting surrounded by colors, perfume, and radiance, already a part of you in spite of myself, waiting for the males we’re going to attract!”

And it really was uncanny for him to witness the effect his sister had on men, considering his concern to “get her a husband.” He was not jealous—in what capacity could he have been?—and put her interests ahead of his, hoping that the right man would soon come along to release her from this interim phase in which leaving Hagauer had placed her; and yet, when he saw her surrounded by men paying her attentions, or when a man on the street, attracted by her beauty and ignoring her escort, gave her a bold stare, Ulrich did not know what to make of his feelings. Here too, natural male jealousy being forbidden him, he often felt somehow caught up in a world he had never entered before. He knew from experience all about the male
mating dance as well as the female’s warier technique in love, and when he saw Agathe being treated to the one and responding with the other, it pained him; he felt as if he were watching the courtship of horses or mice, the sniffing and whinnying, the pouting and baring of teeth, with which strangers parade their self-regard and regard of the opposite sex; to Ulrich, observing this without empathy, it was nauseating, like some stupefaction welling up from within the body. And if he nevertheless tried to put himself in his sister’s place, prompted by some deep-seated emotional need, it sometimes would not have taken much afterward for him to feel, not just bewilderment at such tolerance, but the sort of shame a normal man feels when deviously approached by one who is not. When he let Agathe in on this, she laughed.

“There are also several women among our friends who take an interest in you,” she said.
What was going on here?

Ulrich said: “Basically it’s a protest against the world!” And then he said: “You know Walter: It’s been a long time since we’ve liked each other. But even when I’m annoyed with him and know that I irritate him too, I nevertheless often feel, at the mere sight of him, a certain warmth as if we understood each other perfectly, as in fact we don’t. Look, there’s so much in life we understand without agreeing with it; that’s why accepting someone from the beginning, before understanding him, is pure mindless magic, like water in spring running down all the hillsides to the valley!”

What he felt was: “That’s the way it is now!” And what he thought was: “Whenever I succeed in shedding all my selfish and ego-centric feelings toward Agathe, and every single hateful feeling of indifference too, she draws all the qualities out of me the way the Magnetic Mountain draws the nails out of a
ship! She leaves me morally dissolved into a primary atomic state, one in which I am neither myself nor her. Could this be bliss?”

But all he said was: “Watching you is so much fun!”

Agathe blushed deeply and said: “Why is that ‘fun?’”

“Oh, I don’t know. Sometimes you’re self-conscious with me in the room,” Ulrich said. “But then you remember that, after all, I’m ‘only your brother.’ And at other times you don’t seem to mind at all when I catch you in circumstances that would be most interesting for a stranger, but then it suddenly occurs to you that I shouldn’t be looking at you, and you make me look the other way....”

“And why is that fun?” Agathe asked.

“Maybe it’s a form of happiness to follow another person with one’s eyes for no reason at all,” Ulrich said. “It’s like a child’s
love for its possessions, without the child’s intellectual helplessness....”

“Maybe it’s fun for you to play at brother-and-sister only because you’ve had more than enough of playing at man-and-woman?”

“That too,” Ulrich said, watching her. “Love is basically a simple urge to come close, to grab at something that has been split into two poles, lady and gentleman, with incredible tensions, frustrations, spasms, and perversions arising in between. We’ve now had enough of this inflated ideology; it’s become nearly as ridiculous as a science of eating. I’m convinced most people would be glad if this connection between an epidermic itch and the entire personality could be revoked. And sooner or later there will be an era of simple sexual companionship in which boy and girl will stand in perfectly tuned incomprehension, staring at an
old heap of broken springs that used to be Man and Woman.”

“But if I were to tell you that Hagauer and I were pioneers of that era you would hold it against me!” Agathe retorted, with a smile as astringent as good dry wine.

“I no longer hold things against people,” Ulrich said. He smiled. “A warrior unbuckled from his armor. For the first time since God knows when, he feels nature’s air instead of hammered iron on his skin and sees his body growing so lax and frail that the birds might carry him off,” he assured her.

And still smiling, simply forgetting to stop smiling, he contemplated his sister as she sat on the edge of a table, swinging one leg in its black silk stocking; aside from her chemise, she was wearing only short panties. But these were somehow fragmentary impressions, detached, solitary images, as it
were. “She’s my friend, in the delightful guise of a woman,” Ulrich thought. “Though this is complicated by her really being a woman!”

And Agathe asked him: “Is there really no such thing as love?”

“Yes, there is,” Ulrich said. “But it’s the exception. You have to make distinctions. There is first of all a physical experience, to be classed with other irritations of the skin, a purely sensory indulgence without any requisite moral or emotional accessories. Second, emotions are usually involved, which become intensely associated with the physical experience, but in such a way that with slight variations they are the same for everyone; so that even the compulsory sameness of love’s climax belongs on the physical-mechanical level rather than on that of the soul. Finally, there is also the real spiritual experience of love, which doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with the other two. One can love God, one can love the world;
perhaps one can only love God and the world. Anyway, it’s not necessary to love a person. But if one does, the physical element takes over the whole world, so that it turns everything upside down, as it were....” Ulrich broke off.

Agathe had flushed a dark red. If Ulrich had deliberately chosen and ordered his words with the hypocritical intention of suggesting to Agathe’s imagination the physical act of love inevitably associated with them, he could not have succeeded better.

He looked around for a match, simply to undo the unintended effect of his speech by some diversion. “Anyway,” he said, “love, if that is love, is an exceptional case, and can’t serve as a model for everyday action.”

Agathe had reached for the corners of the tablecloth and wrapped them around her legs. “Wouldn’t strangers, who saw and
heard us, talk about a perverse feeling?” she asked suddenly.

“Nonsense!” Ulrich maintained. “What each of us feels is the shadowy doubling of his own self in the other’s opposite nature. I’m a man, you’re a woman; it’s widely believed that every person bears within him the shadowy or repressed opposite inclination; at least each of us has this longing, unless he’s disgustingly self-satisfied. So my counterpart has come to light and slipped into you, and yours into me, and they feel marvelous in their exchanged bodies, simply because they don’t have much respect for their previous environment and the view from it!”

Agathe thought: “He’s gone into all that more deeply before. Why is he attenuating it now?”

What Ulrich was saying did, of course, fit quite well with the life they were leading as two companions who occasionally, when
the company of others leaves them free, take
time to marvel at the fact that they are man
and woman but at the same time twins. Once
two people find themselves in such an accord
their relations with the world as individuals
take on the charm of an invisible game of
hide-and-seek, each switching bodies and
costumes with the other, practicing their
carefree two-in-one deception for an unsus-
pecting world behind two lands of masks.
But this playful and overemphatic fun— as
children sometimes make noise instead of
being noisy—was not in keeping with the
gravity that sometimes, from a great height,
laid its shadow on the hearts of this brother
and sister, making them fall unexpectedly si-
lent. So it happened one evening, as they ex-
changed a few chance words more before go-
ing to bed, that Ulrich saw his sister in her
long nightgown and tried to joke about it,
saying: “A hundred years ago I would have
cried out: ‘My angel!’” Too bad the term has
become obsolete!” He fell silent, disconcerted by the thought: “Isn’t that the only word I should be using for her? Not friend, not wife! ‘Heavenly creature!’ was another term they used. Ridiculously high-flown, of course, but nevertheless better than not having the courage of one’s convictions.”

Agathe was thinking: “A man in pajamas doesn’t look like an angel!” But he did look fierce and broad-shouldered, and she suddenly felt ashamed of her wish that this strong face framed in tousled hair might cast its shadow over her eyes. In some physically innocent way she was sensually aroused; her blood was pulsing through her body in wild waves, spreading over her skin while leaving her drained and weak inside. Since she was not such a fanatical person as her brother, she simply felt what she felt. When she was tender, she was tender, not lit up with ideas or moral impulses, even though this was
something she loved in him as much as she shrank from it.

Again and again, day after day, Ulrich summed it all up in the idea: Basically, it’s a protest against life! They walked arm in arm through the city: well matched in height, well matched in age, well matched in their attitude to things. Strolling along side by side, they could not see much of each other. Tall figures, pleasing to one another, they walked together for the sheer enjoyment of it, feeling at every step the breath of their contact in the midst of all the strangeness surrounding them. We belong together! This feeling, far from uncommon, made them happy, and half within it, half in resistance to it, Ulrich said: “It’s funny we should be so content to be brother and sister. The world in general regards it as a commonplace relationship, but we’re making something special of it!”

Perhaps he had hurt her feelings in saying this. He added: “But it’s what I’ve always
wished for. When I was a boy I made up my mind to marry only a woman I’d have adopted as a child and brought up myself. I think plenty of men have such fantasies; they’re pretty banal, I suppose. But as an adult I actually once fell in love with such a child, though it was only for two or three hours!” And he went on to tell her about it:

“IT happened on a streetcar. A little girl of about twelve got on, with her very young father or her older brother. The way she got on, sat down, and casually handed the fare to the conductor for both of them, she was every inch a lady, without a trace of childish affectation. It was the same when she talked to her companion, or quietly listened to him. She was extraordinarily beautiful: brunette, with full lips, strong eyebrows, a slightly turned-up nose; perhaps a dark-haired Polish girl, or a southern Slav. As I recall, the dress she was wearing suggested some national costume: long jacket, tight waist, laced
bodice, and frills at the throat and wrists, all in its way as perfect as the little person herself. Perhaps she was Albanian. I was sitting too far away to be able to hear what she was saying. It struck me that the features of her grave little face were mature beyond her years, so that she seemed fully adult; yet it was not the face of a dwarfishly tiny woman, but unquestionably that of a child. On the other hand, it was not at all the immature stage of an adult’s face. It seems that a woman’s face may sometimes be complete at the age of twelve, formed even spiritually like a perfect first sketch from the hand of a master, so that everything added later to develop the picture only spoils its original greatness. One can fall passionately in love with such a phenomenon, mortally so, and really without any physical desire. I remember I glanced around nervously at the other passengers, because I felt as if I were falling apart. When
she got off, I got off, too, but lost her in the crowded street,” he ended his little story.

After giving it a moment or two, Agathe asked with a smile: “And how does that fit in with the time for love being over, leaving only sex and companionship?”

“It doesn’t fit in at all!” Ulrich laughed.

His sister thought about it, and remarked with a noticeable harshness—it seemed to be an intentional repetition of the words he had used the evening of her arrival: “All men like to play at little-brother-and-little-sister. There must really be some stupid idea behind it. These little brothers and sisters call each other ‘father’ and ‘mother’ when they’re not quite sober.”

Ulrich was taken aback. It was not merely that Agathe was right, for gifted women are merciless observers of the men they love in their lives; but not being inclined to theorize, they make no use of their
discoveries except when provoked. He felt somewhat affronted.

“Of course they’ve got a psychological explanation for it,” he said hesitantly. “It’s pretty obvious that the two of us are psychologically suspect. Incestuous tendencies, demonstrable in early childhood, together with antisocial dispositions and a rebellious attitude toward life. Possibly even a not sufficiently rooted gentler identification, although I—”

“Nor I, either!” Agathe broke in, laughing, if possibly somewhat against her will. “I have no use for women at all!”

“It really doesn’t matter anyway,” Ulrich said. “Psychic entrails, in any case. You might also say that there’s a sultanesque need to be the only one who adores and is adored, to the exclusion of the rest of the world. In the ancient Orient it produced the harem, and today we have family, love, and
the dog. And I don’t mind saying that the mania to possess another person so entirely that no one else can come anywhere near is a sign of personal loneliness within the human community, which even the socialists rarely deny. If you’d like to see it that way, we represent nothing but a bourgeois extravagance! Oh, look at that! How splendid!” He broke off, pulling on her arm.

They were standing at the edge of a small marketplace surrounded by old houses. Around the neoclassical statue of some intellectual giant, colorful vegetables were spread out, the big canvas umbrellas of the market stands had been set up, fruits tumbled, baskets were being dragged along, dogs chased away from the outspread treasures, and one saw the red faces of rough men and women. The air throbbed and pounded with industriously loud voices and smelled of the sun that shines on the earthly hodgepodge.
“Can we help loving the world when we simply see it and smell it?” Ulrich asked spiritedly. “Yet we can’t love it, because we don’t agree with what’s inside people’s heads,” he added.

This did not happen to be a reservation entirely to Agathe’s taste, and she did not reply. But she pressed her brother’s arm, and both of them understood that this was as if she had gently laid her hand over his mouth.

Ulrich laughed, saying: “Not that I like myself either! That’s what happens when one is always finding fault with other people. But even I have to be able to love something, and a Siamese sister who’s neither me nor herself, but just as much me as herself, is clearly the only point where everything comes together for me!”

He had cheered up again. And Agathe usually went along with his mood. But they never again talked as they had on the first
night of their reunion, or before. That was gone, like castles in the clouds, which, when they hover over city streets teeming with life instead of over the deserted countryside, are hard to believe in. Perhaps the cause of this was only that Ulrich did not know what degree of substantiability he should ascribe to the experiences that moved him, while Agathe often thought that he regarded them solely as excesses of fantasy. And she could not prove to him that it was not so; she always spoke less than he did, she could not hit the right note, and did not feel confident enough to try. She merely felt that he was avoiding coming to grips with it, and that he should not be doing that. So they were actually both hiding in their lighthearted happiness, which had no depth or weight, and Agathe became sadder day by day, although she laughed quite as often as her brother.
But thanks to Agathe’s disregarded husband, this changed.

On a morning that brought these joyful days to an end, Agathe received a fat, official-looking letter with a great round yellow seal imprinted with the white insignia of the Imperial and Royal Rudolfs-gymnasium in —— . Instantly, while she was still holding the letter unopened in her hand, there arose out of nothing two-story houses with the mute mirrors of well-polished windows; with white thermometers on the outside of their brown frames, one for each story, to tell what the weather was; with classical pediments and Baroque scallops above the windows, heads projecting from the walls, and other such mythological sentinels, which looked as
if they had been produced in a wood-carving shop and painted as stone. The streets ran through the town brown and wet, just like the country roads they were on the way in, with deep ruts, and lined on both sides by shops with their brand-new display windows, looking for all that like gentlewomen of thirty years earlier who have lifted up their long skirts but cannot make up their mind to step from the sidewalk into the muddy street: the provinces in Agathe’s head! Apparition in Agathe’s head! Something incomprehensible still inside her, which she had been so sure of having shaken off forever! Even more incomprehensible: that she had ever been tied to it! She saw the way from her front door, past familiar housefronts, to the school, the way taken four times daily by her husband, Hagauer, which in the beginning she had often taken with him, accompanying him from his home to his work, in those days when she conscientiously did not
let a drop of her bitter medicine escape. “Is Hagauer taking his lunches at the hotel these days?” she wondered. “Does he tear a page off the calendar each morning, which I used to do?” It had all suddenly come back to life, so surreally vivid as if it could never die, and with a mute shudder she recognized that familiar craven feeling awakening in her that consisted of indifference, of lost courage, of saturation with ugliness, and of her own insecure volatility. With a kind of avidity, she opened the thick letter her husband had addressed to her.

When Professor Hagauer had returned to his home and workplace from his father-in-law’s funeral and a brief visit to the capital, his surroundings welcomed him exactly as they always did after one of his short trips: with the agreeable awareness of his having properly accomplished his mission; and changing from his shoes into the house slippers in which a man works twice as well, he
turned his attention to his environment. He went off to his school, was respectfully greeted by the porter, felt welcomed back when he met the teachers who were under him. In the administration office the files and problems no one had dared to deal with in his absence awaited him. When he hastened through the corridors he was accompanied by the feeling that his steps lent wings to the whole building: Gottlieb Hagauer was somebody, and he knew it. Encouragement and good cheer beamed from his brow throughout the educational establishment under his wing, and when anyone outside school inquired after the health and whereabouts of his wife, he replied with the serenity of a man conscious of having married creditably. Everyone knows that the male of the species, so long as he is still capable of procreation, reacts to brief interruptions of his married life as if an easy yoke has been lifted from his shoulders, even when he
does not think of illicit associations in connection with it and at the end of this interlude, refreshed, resumes his happy lot. In this manner Hagauer at first accepted his wife’s absence, and for a while did not even notice how long she was staying away.

What actually first drew his attention to it was that same wall calendar that had figured in Agathe’s memory as such a hateful symbol of life by its needing to have a page torn off every morning. It hung in the dining room as a spot that did not belong on the wall, stranded there as a New Year’s greeting from a stationery shop brought home from school by Hagauer, and because of its dreariness not only tolerated but actually cultivated by Agathe. It would have been quite true to form for Hagauer to have taken over the chore of ripping off the daily page in Agathe’s absence, for it was not in keeping with his habits to let that part of the wall run wild, as it were. On the other hand, he was
also a man who always knew precisely on what latitude of the week or month he found himself upon the ocean of infinity; moreover, he of course had a proper calendar in his office at school; and lastly, just as he was nevertheless about to lift his hand so as to properly regulate the time in his household, and inwardly smiling, he felt something peculiar stop him—one of those impulses through which, as it would later turn out, fate declares itself, but which at the time he merely took for a tender, chivalrous sentiment that surprised him and made him feel pleased with himself: he decided to leave untouched the page marking the day on which Agathe had left the house as a token of homage and a reminder, until her return.

So the wall calendar became in time a festering wound, reminding Hagauer at every glance how long his wife was avoiding her home. A man thrifty with his emotions as with his household, he wrote her postcards
to let her know how he was and to ask her, with gradually increasing urgency, when she would be coming back. He received no answer. Now he no longer beamed in answer to sympathetic inquiries whether his wife would be away much longer in fulfillment of her sad duties. But luckily he always had a great deal to keep him busy, apart from his duties at school and the various clubs to which he belonged, since the mail daily brought him a pile of invitations, inquiries, letters from admiring readers, attacks, proofs, periodicals, and important books. Hagauers human self might be living in the provinces, as an element in the unendearing impressions these might make on a stranger passing through, but his spirit called Europe its home, and this kept him for a long time from grasping the full significance of Agathe’s prolonged absence. There came a day, however, when the mail brought him a letter from Ulrich, curtly informing him that
Agathe no longer intended to return to him and asking him to agree to a divorce. Politely worded as it was, this letter was so laconic and was written with such a lack of consideration as to make Hagauer feel indignantly that Ulrich cared about his, the recipient’s, feelings about as much as if he were an insect to be flicked off a leaf. His first reaction of inner defense was: Don’t take it seriously, a whim! There the letter lay, like a grinning specter in the bright daylight of pressing correspondence and showers of professional recognition.

It was not until evening, when Hagauer entered his empty house again, that he sat down at his desk and in dignified brevity wrote to Ulrich that it would be best to pretend his communication had never been written. But he soon received a new letter from Ulrich, rejecting this view of the matter, reiterating Agathe’s request (without her knowledge), and merely asking Hagauer in
somewhat more courteous detail to do all he could toward keeping the necessary legal steps simple as befitted a man of his high moral principles, and as was also desirable if the deplorable concomitants of a public dispute were to be avoided. Hagauer now grasped the seriousness of the situation, and allowed himself three days’ time to compose an answer that would leave nothing to be either desired or regretted afterward.

For the first two days he felt as though someone had struck him a blow in the solar plexus. “A bad dream!” he said plaintively to himself several times, and it took great self-discipline not to let himself forget that he had really received such a request. He felt a deep discomfort in his breast very much like injured love, and an indefinable jealousy as well, which was directed not so much against a lover—which he assumed to be the cause of Agathe’s behavior—as against some incomprehensible Something that had shunted him
aside. It was a land of humiliation, similar to that of an extremely orderly man when he has broken or forgotten something; something that had had its fixed place in his mind since time immemorial and that he no longer noticed, but on which much depended, was suddenly smashed. Pale and distraught, in real anguish—not to be underestimated merely because it was lacking in beauty—Hagauer made his rounds, avoiding people, shrinking from the explanations he would have to give and the humiliations to be borne. It was only on the third day that his condition finally stabilized. Hagauer’s natural dislike for Ulrich was just as great as Ulrich’s for him, and while this had never before come out into the open it did so now, all at once, when he intuitively imputed all the blame for Agathe’s conduct to her will-o’-the-wisp gypsy brother, who must have turned her head. He sat down at his desk and demanded in a few words the immediate
return of his wife, resolutely declaring that as her husband he would only discuss anything further with her.

From Ulrich came a refusal, equally terse and resolute.

Now Hagauer decided to work on Agathe herself; he made copies of his correspondence with Ulrich and added a long, carefully considered letter; all of this was what Agathe saw before her when she opened the large envelope with the official seal.

Hagauer himself was unable to believe that these things were really happening. Back from his daily obligations, he had sat that evening in his “deserted home,” facing a blank sheet of paper much as Ulrich had faced one, not knowing how to begin. But in Hagauers experience the tried and true “buttons method” had worked more than once, and he resorted to it again in this case. It
consists in taking a systematic approach to one’s problems, even problems that cause great agitation, on the same principle on which a man has buttons sewn on his clothes to save the time that would be lost if he acted on the assumption that he could get out of his clothes faster without buttons. The English writer Surway, for example, whose work on the subject Hagauer now consulted, for even in his depressed state it was important for him to compare Surway’s work with his own views, distinguishes five such buttons in the process of successful reasoning: (a) close observation of an event, in which the observation immediately reveals problems of interpretation; (b) establishing such problems and defining them more narrowly; (c) hypothesis of a possible solution; (d) logically developing the consequences of this hypothesis; and (e) further observations, leading to acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis and thereby to a successful outcome of the
thinking process. Hagauer had already profitably applied a similar method to so worldly an enterprise as lawn tennis when he was learning the game at the Civil Service Club, and it had lent considerable intellectual charm to the game for him; but he had never yet resorted to this method for purely emotional matters, since his ordinary inner life consisted mainly of professional concerns, and for personal events he relied on that “sound instinct” which is a mix of all the possible feelings acceptable and customary to the Caucasian race in any given situation, with a certain bias toward the most proximate local, professional, or class feelings. Applying the buttons to so extraordinary a situation as his wife’s extraordinary demand was not going to be easy given his lack of practice, and in cases of personal problems even the “sound instinct” shows a tendency to split in two: It told Hagauer on the one hand that much obliges a man who moved with
the times as he did to put no obstacles in the way of a proposal to dissolve a relationship based on trust; but on the other hand, if this goes against the grain, much also absolves him of such an obligation, for the widespread irresponsibility in such matters nowadays should in no way be encouraged. In such a case, as Hagauer had learned, it behooves a modern man to “relax,” i.e., disperse his attention, loosen up physically, and listen intently for whatever may be audible of his deepest inner self. So he cautiously stopped thinking, stared at the orphaned wall calendar, and hearkened to his inner voice; after a while it answered, coming from a depth beneath his conscious mind, and told him what he had already thought: the voice said that he had no reason whatsoever to put up with anything so unjustifiable as Agathe’s preposterous demand.

But at this point Professor Hagauer’s mind found itself set down willy-nilly in
front of Surway’s buttons a to e, or some equivalent series of buttons, and he felt afresh all the difficulties of interpreting the event under his observation. “Can I, Gottlieb Hagauer, possibly be to blame for this embarrassing business?” he asked himself. He examined himself and could not find a single point on which he could be faulted. “Is the cause another man she is in love with?” was his second hypothesis toward a possible solution. It was an assumption he had difficulty accepting, for if he forced himself to look at the matter objectively, he could not really see what another man could offer Agathe that was better than what he did. Still, this problem was especially susceptible to being muddied by personal vanity, so he studied it in exacting detail; and here he found vistas opening up that he had never even thought of. Suddenly, from Surway’s point c, Hagauer found himself on the track of a possible solution via d and e: for the first
time since his marriage, he was struck by a complex of phenomena reported, as far as he knew, only in women whose erotic response to the opposite sex was never deep or passionate. It pained him to find nowhere in his memories any indication of that completely openhearted, dreamy surrender he had experienced earlier, in his bachelor years, with females about whose sensual bent there could be no doubt; but this offered the advantage of enabling him to rule out, with absolute scientific detachment, the destruction of his marital bliss by a third party. Agathe’s conduct was reduced, in consequence, to a purely idiosyncratic rebellion against their happiness, all the more so because she had left without giving the slightest hint of such intentions, and there simply had not been enough time since then for her to develop a rational basis for changing her mind! Hagauer had to conclude, and this conviction never left him, that Agathe’s
incomprehensible behavior could only be understood as one of those slowly building temptations to turn one’s back on life, known to occur in characters who do not know what they want.

But was Agathe really that sort of person? That still remained to be investigated, and Hagauer pensively weeded his whiskers with the end of his pen. Though she usually seemed companionable enough, easy to live with, as he put it, still, when it came to what most preoccupied him, she tended to show a marked indifference, not to say apathy! There was in fact something in her that did not fit in with himself or other people and their interests; not that she set herself up against them. She laughed along with them and looked serious in the right places, but she had always, now that he came to think of it, made a somewhat distracted impression through all these years. She seemed to be listening attentively to what she was told, yet
never to believe it. There was something downright unhealthy about her indifference, the more he thought about it. Sometimes one got the impression that she was not taking in what was going on around her at all. And all at once, before he was aware of it himself, his pen had begun to race over the paper with his purposeful motion. “Who can guess what may be going on in your mind,” he wrote, “if you think yourself too good to love the life I am in a position to offer you, which I can say in all modesty is a pure and full life; you’ve always handled it as if with fire tongs, as it now seems to me. You have shut yourself off from the riches of human and moral values that even an unassuming life has to offer, and even if I had to believe that you could somehow have felt justified in doing this, there is still your lack of the moral will to
change; instead, you have chosen an artificial way out, a fantasy!"

He mulled it over once more. He mustered the schoolboys who had passed through his guiding hands, searching for a case that might be instructive. But even before he had got into this, there popped into his mind the missing bit that had been uneasily hovering in the back of his mind. At this point Agathe ceased to be a completely personal problem for him, without any clues to its general nature, for when he thought how much she was ready to give up in life without being blinded by any specific passion he was led inescapably, to his joy, to that basic assumption so familiar to modern pedagogy, that she lacked the capacity for objective thought and for keeping in firm intellectual touch with the world of reality! Swiftly he wrote: “Probably you are even at this moment far from being aware of what it is, exactly, that you are about to do; but I
warn you, before you come to a decisive conclusion! You are perhaps the absolute opposite of the kind of person, such as I represent, who knows life and knows how to face it, but that is precisely why you should not lightly divest yourself of the support I offer you!"

Actually, Hagauer had meant to write something else. For human intelligence is not a self-contained and unrelated faculty; its flaws involve moral flaws—we speak of moral idiocy—just as moral flaws, though so much less attention is paid to them, often misdirect or totally confuse the rational power in whatever direction they choose. And so Hagauer had formed in his mind an image of a fixed type that he was now inclined, in the course of these reflections, to define as “an adequately intelligent variant of moral idiocy that expresses itself only in certain irregular forms of behavior.” But he could not bring himself to use this illuminating phrase, partly to avoid provoking his
runaway wife even more, and partly because a layperson usually misunderstands such terms when applied to himself. Objectively, however, it was now established that die forms of behavior that Hagauer deprecated came under the great inclusive genus of the “subnormal,” and in the end Hagauer hit upon a way out of this conflict between conscience and chivalry: the irregularities in his wife’s conduct could be classified with a fairly general pattern of female behavior and termed “socially deficient.”

In this spirit he concluded his letter in words charged with feeling. With the prophetic ire of the scorned lover and pedagogue, he depicted Agathe’s asocial, solipsistic, and morbid temperament as a “minus factor” that never permitted her to grapple vigorously and creatively with life’s problems, as “our era” demands of “its people,” but “shielded her instead from reality behind a pane of glass,” mired in deliberate isolation and
always on the edge of pathological peril. “If there was something about me you didn’t like, you ought to have done something about it,” he wrote, “but the truth is that your mind is not equipped to cope with the energies of our time, and evades its demands! Now that I have warned you about your character,” he concluded, “I repeat: You, more urgently than most people, need someone strong to lean on. In your own interest I urge you to come back immediately, and I assure you that the responsibility I bear as your husband forbids me to accede to your wish.”

Before signing this letter Hagauer read it through once more. Although not satisfied with his description of the psychological type under discussion, he made no changes except at the end—expelling as a gusty sigh through his mustache the unaccustomed, proudly mastered strain of thinking hard about his wife as he pondered how much
more still needed to be said about “our modern age”—where he inserted beside the word “responsibility” a chivalrous phrase about his venerated late father-in-law’s precious bequest to him.

When Agathe had read all this, a strange thing happened: the content of these arguments did not fail to make an impression on her. After reading it word for word a second time, where she stood, without bothering to sit down, she slowly lowered the letter and handed it to Ulrich, who had been observing his sisters agitation with astonishment.
ULRICH AND AGATHE LOOK FOR A REASON AFTER THE FACT

While Ulrich was reading, Agathe dispiritedly watched his face. It was bent over the letter, and its expression seemed to be irresolve, as though he could not decide between ridicule, gravity, sadness, or contempt. Now a heavy weight descended on Agathe from all sides, as if the air that had been so unnaturally light and delicious were becoming unbearably dense and sultry; what she had done to her father’s will oppressed her conscience for the first time. To say that she suddenly realized the full measure of her culpability would not be sufficient; what she realized rather was her guilt toward everything,
even her brother, and she was overcome with an indescribable disillusionment. Everything she had done seemed incomprehensible to her. She had talked of killing her husband, she had falsified a will, and she had imposed herself on her brother without asking whether she would be disrupting his life: she had done this in a state of being drunk on her own fantasies. What she was most ashamed of at this moment was that it had never occurred to her to do the obvious, the most natural thing: any other woman who wanted to leave a husband she did not like would either look for a better man or arrange for something else, something equally natural. Ulrich himself had pointed this out often enough, but she had paid no attention. And now here she stood and did not know what he would say. Her behavior seemed to her so much that of a being who was not entirely mentally competent that she thought Hagauer was right; he was only holding up
the mirror to her in his own way. Seeing his letter in Ulrich’s hand struck her dumb in the same way a person might be struck dumb who had been charged with a crime and on top of that receives a letter from a former teacher excoriating him. She had of course never allowed Hagauer to have any influence over her; nevertheless, it now looked as if he had the right to say: “I’m disappointed in you!” or else: “I’m afraid I’ve never been disappointed in you but always had the feeling you’d come to a bad end!” In her need to shake off this absurd and distressing feeling she impatiently interrupted Ulrich, who was still absorbed in reading the letter without giving any sign of coming to the end, by saying: “His description of me is really quite accurate.” She spoke in an apparently casual tone but with a note of defiance, clearly betraying some hope of hearing the opposite. “And even if he doesn’t say it in so many words, it’s true; either I was not mentally
competent when I married him for no compelling reason, or I am not so now, when I’m leaving him for just as little reason.”

Ulrich, who was rereading for the third time those passages that made his vivid imagination an involuntary witness of her close relations with Hagauer, absently muttered something she did not catch.

“Do please listen to me!” Agathe pleaded. “Am I the up-to-date woman, active somehow either economically or intellectually? No. Am I a woman in love? No again. Am I the good, nest-building wife and mother who simplifies things and smooths over the rough spots? That least of all. What else is there? Then what in the world am I good for? The social life we’re caught up in, I can tell you frankly, basically means nothing at all to me. And I almost think I could get along without whatever it is in music, art, and literature that sends the cognoscenti into raptures. Hagauer, for instance, is different:
he needs all that, if only for his quotations and allusions. He at least has the pleasure and satisfaction of a collector. So isn’t he right when he accuses me of doing nothing at all, of rejecting the ‘wealth of the beautiful and moral,’ and tells me that it’s only with Professor Hagauer that I can find any sympathy and tolerance?”

Ulrich handed the letter back to her and replied with composure. “Let’s face it, the term for you is ‘socially retarded,’ isn’t it?” He smiled, but there was in his tone a hint of irritation left from his having been made privy to this intimate letter.

But her brother’s answer did not sit well with Agathe. It made her feel worse. Shyly she tried to turn the tables on him: “In that case why did you insist, if that is what you did, without telling me anything, that I must get a divorce and lose my only protector?”
“Well,” he said evasively, “probably because it is so delightfully easy to adopt a firm, manly tone in our exchanges. I bang my fist on the table, he bangs his fist on the table; so of course I have to bang mine twice as hard the next time around. That’s why I think I did it.”

Up to now—although her dejection kept her from realizing it herself—Agathe had been really glad, overjoyed in fact, at her brother’s secretly doing the opposite of what he had outwardly advocated during the time of their humorous brother-sister flirtation, since offending Hagauer could only have the effect of erecting a barrier to her ever returning to him. Yet even in the place of that secret joy there was now only a hollow sense of loss, and Agathe fell silent.

“We mustn’t overlook,” Ulrich went on, “how well Hagauer succeeds in misunderstanding you so accurately, if I may say so. Just wait, you’ll see that in his own
way—without hiring detectives, just by cogitating over the weaknesses of your attachment to the human race—he’ll find out what you did to Father’s will. How are we going to defend you then?”

So it happened that for the first time since they had been together again the subject came up of the blissful but horrible prank Agathe had played on Hagauer. She fiercely shrugged her shoulders, with a vague gesture of waving it aside.

“Hagauer is in the right, of course,” Ulrich offered, with gentle emphasis, for her consideration.

“He’s not in the right!” she answered vehemently.

“He’s partly right,” Ulrich compromised. “In so risky a situation we must start off by facing things openly, including ourselves. What you’ve done can put us both in jail.”
Agathe stared at him with startled eyes. She had known this, of course, but it had never been so straightforwardly stated.

Ulrich responded with a reassuring gesture. “But that’s not the worst of it,” he continued. “How do we keep what you’ve done, and the way you did it, from being perceived as”—he groped for the right word and failed to find it—”well, let’s just say that to some extent it’s the way Hagauer sees it, that it’s all a bit on the shadowy side, the side of abnormality and the kind of flaw that comes from something already flawed. Hagauer voices what the world thinks, even though it sounds ridiculous coming from him.”

“Now we’re getting to the cigarette case,” Agathe said in a small voice.

“Right, here it comes,” Ulrich said firmly. “I have to tell you something that’s been on my mind for a long time.”
Agathe tried to stop him. “Wouldn’t it be better to undo the whole thing?” she asked. “Suppose I have a friendly talk with him and make some sort of apology?”

“It’s already too late for that. He might use it to blackmail you into coming back to him,” Ulrich declared.

Agathe was silent.

Ulrich returned to his hypothetical cigarette case, stolen on a whim by a man who is well off. He had worked out a theory that there could be only three basic motivations for such a theft of property: poverty, profession, or, if it was neither of these, a damaged psyche. “You pointed out when we talked about it once that it might be done out of conviction too,” he added.

“I said one might just do it!” Agathe interjected.

“Right, on principle.”
“No, not on principle!”

“But that’s just it!” Ulrich said. “If one does such a thing at all, there has to be at least some conviction behind it! There’s no getting away from that. Nobody ‘just does’ anything; there has to be a reason, either an external or an internal one. It may be hard to know one from the other, but we won’t philosophize about that now. I’m only saying that if one feels one is doing the right thing with absolutely no basis for it, or some decision arises out of the blue, then there’s good reason to suspect some sickness, something constitutionally wrong.”

This was certainly far more and much worse than Ulrich had meant to say; it merely converged with the drift of his qualms.

“Is that all you have to say to me about it?” Agathe asked very quietly.
“No, it’s not all,” Ulrich replied grimly. “When one has no reason, one must look for one!”

Neither of them was in any doubt where to look for it. But Ulrich was after something else, and after a slight pause he continued thoughtfully: “The moment you fall out of step with the rest of the world, you can never ever know what’s good and what’s evil. If you want to be good you have to be convinced that the world is good. And neither one of us is. We’re living at a time when morality is either dissolving or in convulsions. But for the sake of a world yet to come, one should keep oneself pure.”

“Do you really think that will have any effect on whether it comes or not?” Agathe asked skeptically.

“No, I’m afraid I don’t think that. Or at most I think like this: If even those people who understand don’t act as they should, it
certainly won’t come at all, and there’s no way to stop everything from falling apart!”

“And what do you care whether it’s any different five hundred years from now or not?”

Ulrich hesitated. “I’m doing my duty, don’t you see? Maybe like a soldier.”

Probably because on that miserable morning Agathe needed a more comforting, more affectionate kind of answer than Ulrich was giving, she said: “No different from your General, then?”

Ulrich said nothing.

Agathe was not inclined to stop. “You don’t even know for sure whether it’s your duty,” she went on. “You do it because that’s how you are and because you enjoy it. And that’s all I did!”

Suddenly she lost her self-control. Something was terribly sad.
Tears sprang to her eyes, and a violent sob rose in her throat. To hide it from her brother’s eyes, she threw her arms around his neck and hid her face against his shoulder. Ulrich felt her crying and the trembling of her back. A burdensome embarrassment came over him: he was aware of turning cold. At this moment, when he should have been sympathetic, all the tender and happy feelings he thought he had for his sister deserted him; his sensibility was disturbed and wouldn’t function. He stroked Agathe’s back and whispered some comforting words, but it went against his grain. Since he did not share her agitation, the contact of their two bodies seemed to him like that of two wisps of straw. He put an end to it by leading Agathe to a chair and himself sitting down in another, some distance away. Then he gave her his answer: “You’re not enjoying this business with the will at all. And
you never shall, because it’s all been a disorderly mess!”

“Order?” Agathe exclaimed through her tears. “Duty?”

She was really quite beside herself because Ulrich had behaved so coldly. But she was already smiling again. She realized that she would have to work things out for herself. She felt that the smile she had forced seemed to be hovering somewhere out there, far from her icy lips. Ulrich meanwhile had shaken off his embarrassment; he was even pleased not to have felt the usual physical stirring; he realized that this, too, would have to be different between them. But he did not have time to think about that now, because he could see that Agathe was deeply troubled, and so he began to talk.

“Don’t be upset by the words I used,” he pleaded, “and don’t hold them against me. I suppose I’m wrong to use words such as
‘order’ and ‘duty’—they sound too much like preaching. But why”—he now went off at a tangent—”why the devil is preaching contemptible? It really ought to be our greatest joy!”

Agathe had no desire to answer this.

Ulrich let it drop.

“Please don’t think I’m trying to set myself up as morally superior!” he begged. “I didn’t mean to say that I never do anything bad. What I don’t like is having to do it in secret. I like the good highway robbers of morality, not the sneak thieves. I’d like to make a moral robber out of you,” he joked, “and not let you err out of weakness.”

“It’s not a point of honor with me,” his sister said from behind her distantly hovering smile.

“It’s really extremely funny that there are times like ours, when all young people
are infatuated with whatever’s bad,” he said with a laugh, to distance the conversation from the personal level. “This current preference for the morally gruesome is a weakness, of course. Probably middle-class gorging on goodness; being all sucked dry. I myself originally thought one had to say no to everything; everyone thinks so who is between twenty-five and forty-five today; but of course it was only a kind of fashion. I can imagine a reaction setting in soon, and with it a new generation that will again stick morality instead of immorality in its buttonhole. The oldest donkeys, who never in their lives felt any moral fervor, who merely uttered moral platitudes when the occasion called for them, will then suddenly be hailed as precursors and pioneers of a new character!”

Ulrich had risen to his feet and was restlessly pacing the room.

“We might put it this way,” he suggested. “Good has become a cliché almost by its
very nature, while evil remains criticism. The immoral achieves its divine right by being a drastic critique of the moral! It shows us that life has other possibilities. It shows us up for liars. For this we show our gratitude by a certain forbearance. That there are truly delightful people who forge wills should prove that there is something amiss with the sanctity of private property. Even if this doesn’t need proving, it is where our task begins: for every land of crime, we must be able to conceive of criminals who can be excused, even including infanticide or whatever other horrors there may be....”

He had been trying in vain to catch his sister’s eye, even though he was teasing her by bringing up the will. Now she made an involuntary gesture of protest. She was no theoretician; the only crime she regarded as excusable was her own, and she was insulted all over again by his comparison.
Ulrich laughed. “It looks like an intellectual game, but this kind of juggling does mean something,” he assured her. “It goes to show that there’s something amiss in the way we judge our conduct. And there really is, you know. In a company of will-forgers you would certainly stand up for the inviolability of the legal regulations; it’s only in the company of the righteous that it all gets blurred and perverted. If only Hagauer were a rogue, you would be flamingly just; it’s too bad he’s such a decent fellow! That’s the seesaw we’re on.”

He waited for a response but none came, so he shrugged his shoulders and came back to the point:

‘We’re looking to justify what you did. We have established that respectable people are deeply attracted to crime, though of course only in their imagination. We might add that criminals, to hear them talk, would almost without exception like to be regarded
as respectable people. So we might arrive at a definition: Crimes are the concentrated form, within sinners, of everything other people work off in little irregularities, in their imagination and in innumerable petty everyday acts and attitudes of spite and viciousness. We could also say: Crimes are in the air and simply seek the path of least resistance, which leads them to certain individuals. We could even say that while they are the acts of individuals who are incapable of behaving morally, in the main they’re the condensed expression of some kind of general human maladjustment where the distinction between good and evil is concerned. This is what has imbued us from our youth with the critical spirit our contemporaries have never been able to get beyond!”

“But what is good and evil?” Agathe tossed off the question, while Ulrich remained oblivious to the pain his banter was causing her.
“Well, how would I know?” he answered with a laugh. “I’ve only just noticed for the first time that I loathe evil. Until today I really didn’t know how much. My dear Agathe, you have no idea what it’s like,” he complained moodily. “Take science, for instance! For a mathematician, to put it very simply, minus five is no worse than plus five. A scientist researching a problem mustn’t recoil in horror from anything, and under certain conditions he might get more excited by a lovely cancer than a lovely woman. A man of knowledge knows that nothing is true and that the whole truth will be revealed only at the end of time. Science is amoral. All our glorious thrusting of ourselves into the Unknown gets us out of the habit of being personally concerned with our conscience; in fact, it doesn’t even give us the satisfaction of taking our conscience entirely seriously. And art? Doesn’t it amount to a creation of images that don’t correspond to the realities of
life? I’m not talking about bogus idealism, or the paintings of voluptuous nudes in a period when everyone goes around covered up to the eyeballs,” he joked again. “But think of a real work of art: have you never had the feeling that something about it is reminiscent of the smell of burning metal you get from a knife you’re whetting on a grindstone? It’s a cosmic, meteoric, lightning-and-thunder smell, something divinely uncanny!”

This was the only point at which Agathe interrupted him with real interest: “Didn’t you once write poetry yourself?” she asked him.

“You still remember that? When did I let you in on it?” Ulrich asked. “Yes; we all write verses at one time or another. I even went on doing it when I was a mathematician,” he admitted. “But the older I got, the worse they became; not so much because of lack of talent, I think, as from a growing aversion to the disorderly and bohemian
romanticism of that sort of emotional excess....”

His sister shook her head almost imperceptibly, but Ulrich noticed it. “Yes,” he insisted, “a poem should be no more of an exceptional phenomenon than an act of goodness! But what, if I may ask, becomes of the moment of inspiration the moment after? You love poetry, I know; but what I’m saying is that it isn’t enough to breathe out one great puff of fire and let it fade away. This kind of sporadic performance is the counterpart of the kind of morality that exhausts itself in half-baked criticism.” And abruptly returning to his main subject, he said to his sister: “If I were to behave in this Hagauer matter the way you’re expecting me to today, I would have to be skeptical, casual, and ironic. The exemplary children you or I might yet have would then be able to say truthfully of us that we belonged to a very secure period of middle-class values that was
never plagued by doubts, or plagued at most by superficial doubts. But in fact you and I have already gone to such trouble over our philosophy...!"

Ulrich probably wanted to say a great deal more; he was actually only leading up to some way of coming down on his sister’s side, which he had already worked out, and it would have been good if he had revealed it to her. For she suddenly stood up and on some vague pretext got her outdoor things.

“So we’re leaving it that I’m morally retarded?” she asked with a forced attempt at humor. “I can’t keep up with all you’ve been saying to the contrary!”

“We’re both morally retarded!” Ulrich gallantly assured her. “Both of us!” And he was rather proud of the haste with which his sister left him without saying when she would return.
AGATHE WANTS TO COMMIT SUICIDE AND MAKES A GENTLEMAN’S ACQUAINTANCE

In truth she had rushed off to spare her brother the sight of the tears she could barely hold back. She was as sad as a person who has lost everything. She did not know why. It had come over her while Ulrich was talking. Why? She didn’t know that either. He should have done something other than talk. What? She didn’t know. He was right, of course, not to take seriously the “stupid coincidence” of her being upset and the arrival of that letter, and to go on talking as he always did. But Agathe had to get away.
At first she felt only die need to walk. She rushed headlong from their house. Where the layout of the streets forced her to detour, she always kept to the same general direction. She fled, in the way people and animals flee from a catastrophe. Why, she did not ask herself. It was only when she grew tired that she realized what she intended to do: never go back!

She would keep walking until dusk. Farther from home with every step. She assumed that by the time she came up against the barricade of evening her decision would be made. The decision was to kill herself. It was not an actual decision to kill herself, but the expectation that by evening it would be. Behind this expectation was a desperate seething and whirling inside her head. She did not even have anything with her to kill herself with. Her little poison capsule lay somewhere in a drawer or in a suitcase. The only clear thing about her death was the
longing never to have to go back again. She wanted to walk out of life. That was where the walking came from. It was as if every step she took was already a step out of life.

As she tired she began to long for green fields and woods, for walking in silence and the open air. She could not get there on foot. She took a streetcar. She had been brought up to control herself in public. So her voice betrayed no emotion when she bought her ticket and asked for directions. She sat straight-backed and impassive, with not a finger twitching. And as she sat there the thoughts started coming. She would of course have felt better had she been able to let herself go; with her limbs fettered as they were, these thoughts came in large bundles that she vainly tried to force through an opening. She bore Ulrich a grudge for what he had said. She didn’t want to hold it against him. She gave up her right to. What had she done for him? She was only taking
up his time, and doing nothing for him in return; she was in the way of his work and his habits. When she thought of his habits she felt a pang. It seemed that no woman had entered his house in all the time she’d been there. Agathe was convinced that her brother always had to have a woman in his life. So he was depriving himself for her sake. At this moment she would have liked to turn back and tenderly beg his forgiveness. As there was no way she could make it up to him, she was being selfish and bad. But then she remembered again how cold he had been. He was obviously sorry he had taken her in. To think of all he had planned and said before he got tired of her! Now he no longer mentioned any of it. Agathe’s heart was again tormented with the great disillusionment her husband’s letter had brought her. She was jealous. Senselessly and commonly jealous. She would have liked to force herself on her brother; she felt the passionate and helpless
friendship of the person throwing himself against his own rejection. “I could steal or walk the streets for him!” she thought, knowing this was ridiculous but not able to help it. Ulrich’s conversations, with their humor and sovereign air of being above the battle, made a mockery of this idea. She admired his superiority and all his intellectual needs, which surpassed her own. But she didn’t see why every idea always had to be equally true for everyone! In her humbled state she needed some personal comforting, not edifying sermons! She did not want to be brave! And after a while, she reproached herself for being the way she was, and enlarged her pain by imagining that she deserved nothing better than Ulrich’s indifference.

This self-denigration, for which neither Ulrich’s conduct nor even Hagauer’s upsetting letter was sufficient cause, was a temperamental outburst. Ever since Agathe had outgrown her childhood, not so very long
ago, everything she regarded as her failure in the face of society’s demands had had to do with her sense of not living in accord with her own deepest inclinations, or even in opposition to them. She inclined to devotion and trustfulness, for she had never become so much at home in solitude as her brother; and if she had found it impossible to yield herself heart and soul to a person or a cause, it was because she had the capacity for some greater devotion, whether it reached out to the whole world or to God. There is the well-known path of devotion to all mankind that begins with an inability to get along with one’s neighbor, and just so may a deep latent yearning for God arise in an antisocial character equipped with a great capacity for love; in that sense, the religious criminal is no greater paradox than the religious old woman who never found a husband. Agathe’s behavior toward Hagauer, which had the absurd appearance of a selfish action, was as
much the outburst of an impatient will as was the intensity with which she accused herself of losing life by her own weakness just when she had been awakened to it by her brother.

She soon lost patience with the slow, rumbling streetcar. When the buildings along the way grew lower and more rural, she got off and continued the rest of the way on foot. The courtyards were open; through archways and over low fences came glimpses of handymen at their chores, animals, children at play. The air was filled with a peace in whose distances voices sounded and tools banged; sounds moved in the bright air with the irregular, gentle motions of a butterfly, while Agathe felt herself gliding like a shadow past them toward the rising ground of vineyards and woodland. Just once she paused, in front of a yard where coopers were at work and there was the good noise of mallets hammering on barrel staves. She had
always liked watching such honest work and taken pleasure in the modest, sensible, well-considered labor of the workmen. This time, too, she could not get enough of the rhythm of the mallets and the men’s moving round and round the barrel. For a few moments it made her forget her misery and plunged her into a pleasant, unthinking oneness with the world. She always admired people who could do this kind of task, with skills developed so variously and naturally out of a generally acknowledged need. But there was nothing she wanted to do herself, although she had all kinds of mental and practical aptitudes. Life was complete without her. And suddenly, before she saw the connection, she heard church bells ringing, and could barely restrain herself from bursting into tears again. Both bells of the little local church had probably been chiming the whole time, but Agathe just now noticed it and was instantly overcome by how these useless chimes,
excluded from the good, lavish earth and flying passionately through the air, were related to her own existence.

She hastily resumed walking, and accompanied by the chimes, which now would not leave her ears, she passed swiftly between the last of the houses and emerged where the road climbed the hillside with its vineyards and scattered bushes lining the paths below, while above, the bright green of the woods beckoned. Now she knew where she was going, and it was a beautiful feeling, as though with every step she were sinking more deeply into nature. Her heart pounded with joy and effort when she sometimes stopped and found the bells still accompanying her, though now hidden high in the air and scarcely audible. It seemed to her she had never heard bells chiming like this in the midst of an ordinary day, for no apparent festive reason, mingling democratically with the natural and self-sufficient affairs of men.
But of all the tongues of this thousand-voiced city, this was the last to speak to her, and something in it seized hold of her as if to lift her high and swing her up the hill, only to drop her again as it faded into a slight metallic sound no better than all the chirping, rumbling, and rustling sounds of the countryside. So Agathe climbed and walked upward for perhaps another hour, until she suddenly found herself facing the little shrubby wilderness she had carried in her memory. It enclosed a neglected grave at the edge of the woods, where nearly a hundred years before a poet had killed himself and where, in accordance with his last wish, he had also been laid to rest. Ulrich had said that he was not a good poet, even if he was famous. Ulrich was sharply critical of the rather shortsighted poetics that expressed a longing to be buried high up with a view. But Agathe had loved the inscription on the big stone slab since the day they had come
this way and together deciphered the beautiful, rain-worn Biedermeier lettering, and she leaned over the black chain fence with its great angular links, which marked off the rectangle of death from life.

“"I meant nothing to all of you" were the words the disgruntled poet had had inscribed on his gravestone, and Agathe thought that this could equally well be said of herself. This thought, here on the edge of the wooded pulpit above the greening vineyards and the alien, immeasurable city that was slowly waving its trails of smoke in the morning sun, moved her afresh. Impulsively she knelt down to press her forehead against one of the stone posts that held the chains; the unaccustomed position and the cool touch of the stone feigned the rather stiff and passive tranquility of the death that was awaiting her. She tried to pull herself together, but was not immediately successful; bird calls intruded on her ear, so many and such
various bird calls that it surprised her; branches stirred, and since she did not feel the wind she had the impression that the trees were waving their branches of their own accord. In a sudden hush, a faint pattering could be heard; the stone she was resting against, touching, was so smooth that she felt that a piece of ice between it and her forehead was keeping her from quite touching it. Only after a while did she realize that what distracted her was precisely what she was trying to hold on to, that fundamental sense of being superfluous which, reduced to its simplest terms, could be expressed only in the words that life was so complete without her that she had no business being in it. This cruel feeling contained, at bottom, neither despair nor offense, but was rather a listening and looking on that Agathe had always known; it was just that she had no impulse, indeed no possibility, of taking a hand in her own fate. This state of exclusion was almost a
shelter, just as there is a land of astonishment that forgets to ask questions. She could just as well go away. Where to? There really must be a Somewhere. Agathe was not one of those people who can find satisfaction in their conviction of the emptiness of all illusions, which, as a way of accepting a disappointing fate, is equivalent to a militant and spiteful asceticism. She was generous and uncritical in such matters, unlike Ulrich, who subjected all his feelings to the most relentless scrutiny in order to outlaw any that did not pass the test. She was simply stupid! That’s what she told herself. She didn’t want to think things over! Defiantly she pressed her forehead against the iron chains, which gave a little and then stiffened in resistance. During these last weeks she had somehow begun to believe in God again, but without thinking of Him. Certain states of mind, in which she perceived the world differently from what it appeared to be, in such a way
that even she lived no longer shut out but completely enveloped in a radiant certainty, had been brought, under Ulrich’s influence, to something akin to an inward metamorphosis, a total transformation.

She would have been willing to imagine a God who opens up His world like a hiding place. But Ulrich said that this was not necessary, it could only do harm to imagine more than one could experience. And it was for him to decide in these matters. But then, it was also for him to guide her without abandoning her. He was the threshold between two lives, and all her longing for the one and all her flight from the other led first to him. She loved him as shamelessly as one loves life. When she opened her eyes in the morning, he awoke in every limb of her body. He was looking at her even now, from the dark mirror of her anguish: which made Agathe remember that she wanted to kill herself. She had a feeling that it was to spite
him that she had run away to God when she had left home to kill herself. But that intention now seemed exhausted, to have sunk back to its source, which was that Ulrich had hurt her feelings. She was angry with him, she still felt that, but the birds were singing, and now she heard them again. She was just as confused as before, but it was now a joyful confusion. She wanted to do something, but it should strike out at Ulrich, not just at herself. The endless stupor in which she had been kneeling gave way to the warmth of the blood streaming back into her limbs as she rose to her feet.

When she looked up, a man was standing beside her. She was embarrassed, not knowing how long he had been watching her. As her glance, still dark with agitation, met his, she saw that he was looking at her with unconcealed sympathy, manifestly hoping to inspire her with wholehearted confidence. The man was tall and lean and wore dark
clothes, and a short blond beard covered his cheeks and chin. Beneath his mustache one could easily make out full, soft lips, which were in remarkably youthful contrast to the many gray hairs already scattered among the blond ones, as if age had forgotten them in the growth of hair. It was altogether not an easy face to read. The first impression led one to think of a secondary-school teacher; the severity in this face was not carved in hardwood but rather resembled something soft that had hardened under petty daily frustrations. But if one started with this softness, on which the manly beard seemed to have been planted in order to adjust it to a system with which the wearer concurred, then one realized that this originally rather effeminate face showed hard, almost ascetic details, clearly the work of a relentlessly active will upon the soft basic material.

Agathe did not know what to make of this face, which left her suspended between
attraction and repulsion; all she understood was that this man wanted to help her.

“Life offers us just as much opportunity to strengthen the will as to weaken it,” the stranger said, wiping his glasses, which had been misted over, in order to see her better. “One should never run away from problems, but try to master them!” Agathe stared at him in surprise. He had obviously been watching her for quite some time, because his words were emerging from the middle of some interior monologue. Startled by his own voice, he raised his hat, his manners belatedly catching up with this essential gesture of courtesy, then quickly regained his composure and went straight on: “Do forgive my asking whether I may be of some help,” he said. “It seems to me that it is truly easier to speak of one’s pain to a stranger, even concerning a grave shock to the self, such as I believe I am witnessing here?”
Evidently it was not without effort that the stranger spoke to her; apparently he had felt called upon to do so out of duty, as an act of charity; and now that he found himself walking beside this beautiful woman, he was literally struggling for words. For Agathe had simply stood up and begun slowly to walk with him away from the grave and out from under the trees into the open space at the edge of the hills, neither of them deciding whether they wanted to choose one of the paths leading downward, or which one. Instead, they walked along the hilltop for quite a distance, talking, then turned back, and then turned back to walk in the original direction once more; neither of them knew where the other had meant to go originally, and neither wanted to interfere with the other’s plans.

“Won’t you tell me why you were crying?” the stranger persisted, in the mild tones of a physician asking where it hurts.
Agathe shook her head. “It wouldn’t be easy to explain,” she said, and suddenly asked him: “But tell me something else: What makes you so sure you can help me without knowing me? I’d be inclined to think that one can’t help anyone!”

Her companion did not answer right away. He opened his mouth to speak several times, but seemed to force himself to hold back. Finally, he said: “One can probably only help someone who is suffering from something one has experienced oneself.”

He fell silent. Agathe laughed at the thought that this man could suppose himself to have been through what she was suffering, which would have been repellent to him had he known what it was. But her companion seemed not to hear this laugh, or to regard it as a rudeness born of nerves. After a pause, he said calmly: “Of course, I don’t mean that anyone has a right to imagine that he can tell anyone else what to do. But you see, fear in a
catastrophe is infectious—and successful escape is also infectious! I mean just having escaped as from a fire, when everyone has lost his head and run into the flames: what an immense help when a single person stands outside, waving, does nothing but wave and shout incomprehensibly that there is a way out.

Agathe nearly laughed again at the horrible ideas this kindly man harbored; but just because they seemed so out of character, they molded his wax-soft face almost uncannily.

“You talk like a fireman!” she retorted, deliberately adopting the teasing, frivolous tone of high society to hide her curiosity. “Still, you must have formed some notion of the land of catastrophe I’m involved in, surely?” Unintentionally, the seriousness of her scorn showed through, for the simple idea that this man presumed to offer her help aroused her indignation by the equally
simple gratitude that welled up in her. The stranger looked at her in astonishment, then collected himself and said almost in rebuke: “You are probably still too young to know how simple life is. It only becomes hopelessly confused when one is thinking of oneself; but as soon as one stops thinking of oneself and asks oneself how to help someone else, it’s quite simple!”

Agathe thought it over in silence. And whether it was her silence or the inviting distance into which his words took wing, the stranger went on, without looking at her:

“It’s a modern superstition to overestimate the personal. There’s so much talk today about cultivating one’s personality, living one’s life to the full, and affirming life. But all this fuzzy and ambiguous verbiage only betrays the user’s need to befog the real meaning of his protest. What, exactly, is to be affirmed? Anything and everything, higgledy-piggledy? Evolution is always
associated with resistance, an American thinker has said. We cannot develop one side of our nature without stunting another. Then what’s to be lived to the full? The mind or the instincts? Every passing whim or one’s character? Selfishness or love? If our higher nature is to fulfill itself, the lower must learn renunciation and obedience!”

Agathe was considering why it should be simpler to take care of others than of oneself. She was one of those completely non-egotistical characters who may always be thinking about themselves, but not for their own benefit, which differs far more from the usual selfishness, which is always on the lookout for its own advantage, than does the complacent unselfishness of those who are always worrying about their fellow human beings. So what her companion was saying was at bottom foreign to her nature, and yet it somehow moved her, and the words he seized hold of so forcefully sailed alarmingly
before her eyes as though their meaning were more to be seen in the air than heard. Also, they happened to be walking along a ridge that gave Agathe a marvelous view of the deep curving valley below, a position that evidently gave her companion the sense of being in a pulpit or on a lecture platform. She stopped and with her hat, which all this time she had been swinging carelessly in her hand, she drew a line through the strangers argument: “So you have formed your own picture of me,” she said. “I can see it shining through your words, and it isn’t flattering.”

The tall gentleman seemed dismayed, for he hadn’t meant to hurt her, and Agathe looked at him with a friendly laugh. “You seem to be confusing me with the cause of the liberated personality, and a rather neurotic and unpleasant personality at that!” she maintained.

“I was only speaking of the underlying principle of the personal life,” he said
apologetically. “I must confess that the situation in which I found you suggested to me that you might want some helpful advice. The underlying principle of life is so widely misunderstood nowadays. Our entire modern neurosis, with all its excesses, arises solely from a flabby inner state in which the will is lacking, for without a special effort of will no one can achieve the integrity and stability that lifts a person above the obscure confusion of the organism!”

Here again were two words, “integrity” and “stability,” that echoed her old longings and self-accusations. “Do tell me what you mean by that,” she asked him. “Surely there can only really be a will when one has a goal?”

“What I mean doesn’t matter,” was the answer she received, in a tone both mild and brusque. “Don’t all the great ancient scriptures of mankind tell us with utmost clarity what to do and not to do?”
Agathe was disconcerted.

“To set up fundamental ideals of life,” her companion explained, “requires such a penetrating knowledge of life and of people, and such a heroic mastery of the passions and egotism, as has been granted to only very few individuals in the course of thousands of years. And these teachers of mankind have throughout the ages always taught the same truths.”

Agathe instinctively resisted, as would anyone who considers her young flesh and blood better than the bones of dead sages.

“But precepts formulated thousands of years ago can’t possibly apply to conditions today!” she cried.

“Those precepts are not nearly as foreign as is claimed by skeptics, who are out of touch with living experience and self-knowledge,” her chance companion answered, with bitter satisfaction. “Life’s deepest truths
are not arrived at in debate, as Plato already said. Man hears them as the living meaning and fulfillment of his self. Believe me, what makes the human being truly free, and what takes away his freedom, what gives him true bliss and what destroys it, isn’t subject to progress’—it is something every genuinely alive person knows perfectly well in his own heart, if he will just listen to it!”

Agathe liked the expression “living meaning,” but then something suddenly occurred to her: “Are you religious?” she asked him. She looked at her companion with curiosity. He gave no answer.

“You’re not a priest, by any chance...?” she continued, but was reassured by his beard, for the rest of his appearance suddenly suggested that surprising possibility. It must be said to her credit that she would not have been more astounded had he casually referred to “our sublime ruler, the divine Augustus.” She knew that religion plays a
great role in politics, but one is so used to not taking ideas bandied about in public life seriously that to expect the “Christian” parties to be composed of true believers is the same kind of exaggeration as expecting every postal clerk to be a philatelist.

After a lengthy, somewhat wavering pause, the stranger replied: “I would prefer not to answer your question; you are too remote from all that.”

But Agathe was seized with a lively curiosity.

“I’d like to know who you are!” she demanded to be told, and this was, after all, a feminine privilege that was not to be denied. He showed the same, slightly comical hesitation as before, when he had belatedly raised his hat to her. His arm seemed to twitch as if he were thinking of thus saluting her again, but then something in him stiffened, as though one army of thoughts had battled
another and won, instead of a trifling gesture being playfully performed.

“My name is Lindner, and I teach at the Franz Ferdinand Gymnasium,” he said, adding after a moment’s thought: “I also lecture at the University.”

“Then you might know my brother?” Agathe asked in relief, adding Ulrich’s name. “He read a paper there recently, if I’m not mistaken, at the Pedagogical Society, on Mathematics and the Humanities, or something like that.”

“Only by name. We’ve never met. Oh yes, I did attend that lecture,” Lindner admitted. He seemed to say it with a certain reserve, but Agathe’s attention was caught by his next question:

‘Tour father must have been the distinguished jurist?”
“Yes. He died recently, and I’m now staying with my brother,” Agathe said freely. “Won’t you come and see us?”

“I’m afraid I have no time for social calls,” Lindner replied brusquely, his eyes cast down in uncertainty.

“In that case I hope you won’t have any objections if I come to see you sometime,” Agathe said, paying no attention to his reluctance. “I do need your advice.” And since he had been calling her “Fraulein,” she said: “I’m married; Hagauer is my name.”

“Then you’re the wife of the noted Professor of Education Hagauer...!” Lindner cried. He had begun the sentence on a note of high enthusiasm, but it wavered and became hesitant. For Hagauer was two things: he was in education and he was a progressive in education. Lindner was actually opposed to his ideas, but how bracing it was to recognize, through the uncertain mists of a female
psyche, which has just proposed the impossible notion of inviting herself to a man’s house, the familiar form of an enemy; it was the drop from the second to the first of these sentiments that was reflected in his change of tone.

Agathe had noticed it. She did not know whether to tell Lindner of the situation between her husband and herself. If she told him, it might put an immediate end to everything between herself and this new friend, that much was clear. And she would have been sorry; precisely because there was so much about Lindner that made her laugh at him, he also made her feel that she could trust him. The impression, borne out by his appearance, that this man seemed to want nothing for himself oddly moved her to be forthright with him: he quieted all longing, and that made frankness quite natural.

“I’m about to get a divorce,” she finally admitted.
A silence followed. Lindner now had a downcast look. It put Agathe out of all patience with him. Finally, Lindner said with an offended smile: “I thought it must be something like that when I first caught sight of you!”

“Does that mean you’re opposed to divorce too?” Agathe cried, giving free rein to her irritation with him. “Of course, you’re bound to be against it. But it really does put you rather behind the times!”

“At least I can’t regard it as matter-of-factly as you do.” Lindner defended himself pensively, took off his glasses, polished them, put them on again, and contemplated Agathe. “It seemed to me you have too little willpower,” he stated.

“Willpower? My will, for what it’s worth, is to get a divorce!” Agathe cried, knowing it was not a very sensible answer.
“Please don’t misunderstand me,” Lindner gently corrected her. “I am of course willing to believe that you have good reasons. It’s only that I see things in a different light. The free and easy morals prevailing nowadays amount, in effect, to nothing more than a sign that the individual is chained hand and foot to his own ego and incapable of living and acting from any wider perspective. Our esteemed poets,” he added jealously, with an attempt at humor about Agathe’s perfervid pilgrimage to the poet’s grave, an attempt that only turned sour on his lips, “who play up to the sentiments of young ladies, and are therefore overestimated by them, have a far easier role to play than I, when I tell you that marriage is an institution of responsibility and the mastery of the human being over its passions! Before anyone dissociates himself from the external safeguards that mankind has wisely set up against its own undependability, he should
recognize that isolation from and disobedience to the greater whole do far more harm than the physical disappointments we so fear!"

“That sounds like a military code for archangels,” Agathe said, “but I’m not inclined to agree with you. Let me walk with you partway. You must explain how it is possible to think as you do. Which way are you going now?”

“I must get home,” Lindner answered.

‘Would your wife mind very much if I walked home with you? When we get back down to town we can take a taxi. I have plenty of time.”

“My son will be coming home from school,” Lindner said with defensive dignity. “Mealtimes are on a strict schedule with us, which is why I must be home on time. My wife died suddenly, some years ago,” he added, correcting Agathe’s mistaken
assumption, and with a glance at his watch he said with nervous impatience: “I must hurry!”

“Then you must explain it to me some other time. It is important to me!” Agathe insisted with feeling. “If you won’t come to see us, I shall look you up.”

Lindner caught his breath, but nothing came of it. Finally, he said: “But as a lady you can’t come calling on a man!”

“Oh, yes I can!” Agathe assured him. “I shall simply arrive one day, you’ll see. Though I can’t say when. There is no harm in it!”

With this, she said good-bye and took a path diverging from his.

“You have no willpower!” she said under her breath, trying to imitate Lindner, but the word “willpower” tasted fresh and cool in her mouth. It had overtones of pride,
toughness, and confidence; her heart beat higher; the man had done her good.
While Ulrich was alone at home, the War Ministry telephoned to ask whether His Excellency the Chief of the Department for Military, Educational, and Cultural Affairs could see him privately in half an hour, and thirty-five minutes later General Stumm von Bordwehr’s official carriage came dashing up the little drive.

“A fine kettle of fish!” the General cried out to his friend, who instantly noticed that this time the orderly with the intellectual bread was absent. The General was in full dress, decorations and all. “A fine mess
you’ve got me into!” he reiterated. “There’s a plenary session at your cousin’s this evening. I haven’t even had a chance to see my chief about it. And now suddenly the bombshell bursts—we have to be at the madhouse within an hour!”

“But why?” Ulrich asked, not unnaturally. “Usually that sort of thing is arranged ahead of time!”

“Don’t ask so many questions!” the General implored him. “Just go and telephone your little friend or cousin or whatever she is, and tell her we’re coming to call for her!”

Ulrich telephoned the grocery store where Clarisse was in the habit of doing her local shopping, and while he was waiting for her to come to the phone he heard about the misfortune the General was bemoaning. To make the arrangements for Clarisse to visit Moosbrugger, as a favor to Ulrich, Stumm
had turned to the Chief of the Medical Corps, who then got in touch with his celebrated colleague the head of the University Clinic, where Moosbrugger was awaiting a top-level opinion on his psychiatric status. However, through a misunderstanding by both these gentlemen, the appointment for the date and time of Clarisse’s visit had been made on the spot, as Stumm had been told with many apologies at the last minute, along with the error that he himself had been named as one of the visiting party that the famous psychiatrist was expecting with great pleasure.

“I feel quite ill!” he declared. This was a time-honored formula for his needing a schnapps. After he had tossed it off, he relaxed a little. “What’s a madhouse to me! It’s only because of you that I have to go!” he lamented. “Whatever will I say to that idiot professor when he asks me why I came along?”
At this moment a jubilant war whoop sounded at the other end of the line.

“Fine!” the General said fretfully. “But I also must absolutely talk to you about to-night. And I still have to report to my chief about it too. And he leaves the office at four!” He glanced at his watch and out of sheer hopelessness did not budge from his chair.

“Well, I’m ready,” Ulrich said.

‘Tour lovely sister isn’t coming?” Stumm asked in surprise.

“My sister is out.”

“Too bad.” The General sighed. ‘Tour sister is the most remarkable woman I have ever met.”

“I thought that was Diotima,” Ulrich said.
“She’s another,” Stumm replied. “Diotima is admirable too. But since she’s been going in for sex education I feel like a schoolboy. I’m happy to look up to her—God knows, a soldiers trade is a simple and crude kind of manual labor, as I always say, but precisely in the realm of sex it goes against one’s honor as an officer to let oneself be treated as a novice!”

By now they were in the carriage and being driven off at a brisk trot.

“Is your young lady pretty, at least?” Stumm inquired suspiciously.

“She’s quite an original, as you’ll see,” Ulrich replied.

“Now, as regards tonight”—the General sighed—”something is brewing. I expect something to happen.”

“That’s what you say every time you come to see me,” Ulrich protested, smiling.
“Maybe, but it’s true just the same. And tonight you’ll be present at the encounter between your cousin and Frau Professor Drangsal. I hope you haven’t forgotten everything I’ve told you about that. The Drangsal pest—that’s what your cousin and I call her between ourselves—has been pestering your cousin for such a long time that she’s got what she wanted: she’s been haranguing everyone, and tonight will be the showdown between them. We were only waiting for Arnheim, so that he can form an opinion too.”

“Oh?” Ulrich had not seen Arnheim for a long time, and had not known that he was back.

“Of course. Just for a few days,” Stumm said. “So we had to set it up—” He broke off suddenly, bounding up from the swaying upholstery toward the driver’s box with an agility no one would have expected of him. “Idiot!” he barked into the ear of the orderly
disguised as a civilian coachman who was driving the ministerial horses, and he rocked helplessly back and forth with the carriage as he clung to the back of the man he was insulting, shouting: “You’re taking the long way round!” The soldier in civvies held his back stiff as a board, numb to the General’s extra-military use of his body to save himself from falling, turned his head exactly ninety degrees, so that he could not see either his general or his horses, and smartly reported to a vertical that ended in the air that the shortest route was blocked off by street repairs, but he would soon be back on it. “There you are—so I was right!” Stumm cried as he fell back, glossing over his futile outburst of impatience, partly for the orderly’s benefit and partly for Ulrich’s. “So now the fellow has to take a detour, when I’m supposed to report to my chief this very afternoon, and he wants to go home at four o’clock, by which time he should have briefed
the Minister himself!...His Excellency the Minister has sent word to the Tuzzis to expect him in person tonight,” he added in a low voice, just for Ulrich’s ear.

“You don’t say!” Ulrich showed himself properly impressed by this news.

“I’ve been telling you for a long time there’s something in the air.”

Now Ulrich wanted to know what was in the air. “Come out with it, then,” he demanded. “What does the Minister want?”

“He doesn’t know himself,” Stumm answered genially. “His Excellency has a feeling that the time has come. Old Leinsdorf also has a feeling that the time has come. The Chief of the General Staff likewise has a feeling that the time has come. When a lot of people have such a feeling, there may be something in it.”
“But the time for what?” Ulrich persisted.

“Well, we don’t need to know that yet,” the General instructed him. “These are simply reliable indications! By the way,” he asked abstractedly, or perhaps thoughtfully, “how many of us will there be today?”

“How would I know?” Ulrich asked in surprise.

“All I meant,” Stumm explained, “is how many of us are going to the madhouse? Excuse me! Funny, isn’t it, that land of misunderstanding? There are days when there’s too much coming at one from all sides. So: how many are coming?”

“I don’t know who else will be coming—somewhere between three and six people.”

“What I meant,” the General said earnestly, “was that if there are more than three
of us, we’ll have to get another cab—you understand, because I’m in uniform.”

“Oh, of course,” Ulrich reassured him.

“I can’t very well drive in a sardine can.”

“Of course not. But tell me, what’s this about reliable indications?”

“But will we be able to get a cab out there?” Stumm worried. “It’s so far out you can hear the animals snoring.”

‘We’ll pick one up on the way,” Ulrich said firmly. “Now will you please tell me how you have reliable indications that it’s time for something to happen?”

“There’s nothing to tell,” Stumm replied. “When I say about something that that’s the way it is and it can’t be otherwise, what I’m really saying is that I can’t explain it! At most one might add that this Drangsal is one of those pacifists, probably because Feuermaul, who’s her protégé, writes poems
about ‘Man is good.’ Lots of people believe that sort of thing now.”

Ulrich was not convinced. “Didn’t you tell me the opposite just a little while ago? That they’re now all in favor of taking action, taking a strong line, and all that?”

“True too,” the General granted. “And influential circles are backing Drangsal; she has a great knack for that sort of thing. They expect the patriotic campaign to come up with a humanitarian action.”

“Really?” Ulrich said.

“You know, you really don’t seem to care about anything anymore! The rest of us are worried. Let me remind you, for instance, that the fratricidal Austro-German war of 1866 only happened because all the Germans in the Frankfurt Parliament declared themselves to be brothers. Not, of course, that I’m suggesting that the War Minister or the Chief of the General Staff might be worrying along
those lines; that would be nonsense. But one thing does lead to another. That’s how it is! See what I mean?”

It was not clear, but it made sense. And the General went on to make a very wise observation:

“Look, you’re always wanting things to be clear and logical,” he remonstrated with his seatmate. “And I do admire you for it, but you must for once try to think in historical terms. How can those directly involved in what’s happening know beforehand whether it will turn out to be a great event? All they can do is pretend to themselves that it is! If I may indulge in a paradox, I’d say that the history of the world is written before it happens; it always starts off as a kind of gossip. So that people who have die energy to act are faced with a very serious problem.”

“You have a point,” Ulrich said appreciatively. “But now tell me all about it.”
Although the General wanted to expand on it, there was so much on his mind in these moments, when the horse’s hooves had begun to hit softer ground, that he was suddenly seized by other anxieties.

“Here I am, decked out like a Christmas tree in case the Minister calls for me,” he cried, underlining it by pointing to his light-blue tunic and the medals hanging from it. “Don’t you think it could lead to awkward incidents if I appear like this, in full dress, in front of loonies? What do I do, for instance, if one of them decides to insult the Emperor’s uniform? I can hardly draw my sword, but it would be really dangerous for me not to say anything, either!”

Ulrich calmed him down by pointing out that he would be likely to wear a doctor’s white coat over his uniform. But before Stumm had time to declare himself fully satisfied with this solution they met Clarisse, impatiently coming to meet them in a smart
summer dress, escorted by Siegmund. She told Ulrich that Walter and Meingast had refused to join them. And after they had managed to find a second carriage, the General was pleased to say to Clarisse: “As you were coming down the road toward us, my dear young lady, you looked positively like an angel!”

But by the time he left the carriage at the hospital gate, Stumm von Bordwehr appeared rather flushed and ill at ease.
Clarisse was twisting her gloves in her hands, looking up at the windows, and fidgeting constantly while Ulrich paid for the cab. Stumm von Bordwehr protested Ulrich’s doing this, and the cabbie sat on his box with a flattered smile as the two gentlemen kept each other back. Siegmund brushed specks off his coat with his fingertips, as usual, or stared into space.

In a low voice, the General said to Ulrich: “There’s something odd about your lady friend. She lectured me the whole way about what will is. I didn’t understand a word!”

“That’s the way she is,” Ulrich said.
“Pretty, though,” the General whispered. “Like a fourteen-year-old ballerina. But why does she say that we came here in order to follow our ‘hallucination’? The world is ‘too free of hallucinations,’ she says. D’you know anything about that? It was so distressing, I simply couldn’t think of a word to say.”

The General was obviously holding up the departure of the cab only because he wanted to ask these questions, but before Ulrich could answer he was relieved of the responsibility by an emissary who welcomed the visitors in the name of the director of the clinic, and apologizing to the General for having to keep them waiting because of some urgent business, he led the company upstairs to a waiting room. Clarisse took in every inch of the staircase and the corridors with her eyes, and even in the little waiting room, with its chairs upholstered in threadbare green velvet so reminiscent of an old-
fashioned first-class waiting room in a railway station, her gaze roved about slowly almost the whole time. There the four of them sat, after the emissary had left, and found nothing to say until Ulrich, to break the silence, teased Clarisse by asking her whether the thought of meeting Moosbrugger face-to-face wasn’t making her blood run cold.

"Bah!" Clarisse said. "He’s only known ersatz women; it had to come to this."

The General had come up with a face-saving idea, something having belatedly occurred to him: "The will is now very up-to-date," he said. "We’re very much concerned with this problem in our patriotic action too!"

Clarisse gave him a smile and stretched her arms to ease the tension in them. "Having to wait like this, one can feel what’s coming in one’s arms and legs, as if one were looking through a telescope," she replied.
Stumm von Bordwehr gave it some thought, careful not to put a foot wrong again. “That’s true!” he said. “It may have something to do with the current cult of exercise and bodybuilding. We’re concerned with that also.”

At this point the Medical Director swept in with his cavalcade of assistants and nurses and a gracious word for everyone, especially Stumm; mumbled about something pressing, which would, regrettably, prevent him from taking them around himself, as he had intended; and introduced Dr. Friedenthal, who would take good care of them in his stead.

Dr. Friedenthal was a tall, slender man with a somewhat effeminate body and a thick mop of hair, who smiled at them, as he was introduced, like an acrobat climbing a ladder for a death-defying performance. When the director had gone, the white lab coats were brought in. “We don’t want to get the patients excited,” Dr. Friedenthal explained.
As Clarisse slipped into hers she experienced a strange surge of power. She stood there like a little doctor. She felt very much a man, and very white.

The General looked around for a mirror. It was hard to find a lab coat to fit his idiosyncratic proportion of girth to height; when they finally managed to get him into something that covered him completely, he looked like a child in an adult’s nightshirt. “Don’t you think I should take my spurs off?” he asked Dr. Friedenthal.

“Army doctors wear spurs too,” Ulrich pointed out.

Stumm made one last feeble and laborious effort to see what he looked like from behind, where the medical coverall was caught up in heavy folds above his spurs. Then they set out. Dr. Friedenthal enjoined them to keep calm no matter what they might see.
“So far so good!” Stumm whispered to his friend. “But I’m not really interested in any of this. Could use the time much better to talk with you about tonight’s meeting. Now look, you said you wanted me to tell you frankly what’s going on. It’s quite simple: the whole world is arming. The Russians have a brand-new field artillery. Are you listening? The French are using their two-year conscription law to build up an enormous army. The Italians...”

They had descended the same old-fashioned princely staircase they had climbed before and, after somehow turning off the main corridor, found themselves in a maze of small rooms and twisting passages with whitewashed beams protruding from the ceiling. These were mostly utility rooms and offices, cramped and dreary because of a shortage of space in the ancient building. Sinister figures, only some of whom wore institutional uniforms, populated them. One
door bore the inscription “Reception”; another, “Men.” The General’s talk dried up. He had a premonition that things could happen at any moment, requiring by their unprecedented nature great presence of mind. He could not help wondering what he would do if an irresistible need forced him to leave the group and he were to stumble, alone and without an expert guide in a place where all men are equal, upon a madman.

Clarisse, on the other hand, was walking a step ahead of Dr. Friedenthal. His having said that they had to wear these white coats so as not to alarm the patients buoyed her up like a life vest on the current of her impressions. She was mulling over some of her pet ideas. Nietzsche: “Is there a pessimism of strength? An intellectual predisposition to whatever is hard, sinister, evil, problematic in life? A yearning for the terrible as a worthy foe? Perhaps madness is not necessarily a symptom of degeneracy.” She was
not thinking this in so many words, but she remembered it as a whole; her thoughts had compressed it all into a tiny packet, admirably fitted to the smallest space, like a burglar’s tool. For her this excursion was half philosophy and half adultery.

Dr. Friedenthal stopped in front of an iron door and took a flat key from his pants pocket. When he opened the door they stepped out from the shelter of the building and were blinded by the brightness. At the same moment Clarisse heard a frightful shriek such as she had never heard before in her life. For all her pluckiness, she winced.

“Just a horse!” Dr. Friedenthal said, smiling.

And in fact they were on a road that led from the front gate, along the side of the administration building, and around to the kitchen yard of the institution. It was no different from other such roads, with old wheel
tracks and homely weeds on which the sun was blazing hotly. And yet all the others too, with the exception of Dr. Friedenthal, felt oddly disconcerted and—in a startled, confused fashion—almost indignant, to find themselves on a wholesome and ordinary road after having already survived a long, arduous passage. Freedom, at first blush, had something disconcerting about it, even though it was incredibly comforting; it actually took some getting used to again. With Clarisse, who was more vulnerable to the clash of contrasts, the tension shattered in a loud giggle.

Still smiling, Dr. Friedenthal strode ahead across the road and on the other side opened a small but heavy iron door in the high wall of a park. “This is where it begins,” he said gently.

And now they really found themselves inside that world to which Clarisse had felt herself inexplicably attracted for weeks, not
only with the shudder at something incommensurable and impenetrable, but as though she were fated to experience something there that she could not imagine beforehand. At first there was nothing to differentiate this world from any other big old park, with the greensward sloping up in one direction toward groups of tall trees, among which small white villa-like buildings could be seen. The sweep of the sky behind them gave promise of a lovely view, and from one such lookout point Clarisse saw patients with attendants standing and sitting in groups, looking like white angels.

General Stumm took this as the right moment to resume his conversation with Ulrich. “Now, let me prime you a bit more for this evening,” he began. “The Italians, the Russians, the French, and the English too, you know, are all arming, and we—”

“You want your artillery; I know that already,” Ulrich interrupted.
“Among other things!” the General continued. “But if you don’t ever let me finish, well soon be among the loonies and won’t be able to talk in peace. So, as I was saying, we’re in the middle of all this, in a very risky position from the military point of view. And in this fix we’re being badgered—I’m referring to the Parallel Campaign—to think of nothing but the goodness of man!”

“And your people are against it! I understand.”

“Not at all, on the contrary!” Stumm protested. “We’re not against it! We take pacifism very seriously! But we must get our artillery budget through. And if we could do that hand in hand with pacifism, so to speak, it would be the best safeguard against all those imperialistic misunderstandings that are so quick to assert that we’re endangering world peace! It’s true, if you like, that we’re in bed with La Drangsal, just a little. But we also have to proceed with caution because
her opposition, the nationalist movements, who now have their people inside the Campaign too, are against pacifism and in favor of getting our army up to scratch!”

The General had to cut himself short, with an expression of bitterness, for they had almost reached the top of the incline, where Dr. Friedenthal was awaiting his troop. The angels’ gathering place turned out to be lightly fenced in; their guide crossed it without paying it much attention, as a mere prelude. “A quiet’ ward,” he explained.

They were all women; their hair hung loose down to their shoulders, and their faces were repellent, with fat, blurred, puffy features. One of them came rushing up to the doctor and forced a letter on him. “It’s always the same thing,” Dr. Friedenthal explained to his visitors and read aloud: “ ‘Adolf, my love! When are you coming to see me? Have you forgotten me?’ “ The woman, about sixty, stood there with an apathetic
face and listened. “You’ll send it out right away, won’t you?” she begged. “Of course!” Dr. Friedenthal promised, then he tore the letter into pieces in front of her eyes and smiled at the nurse. Clarisse instantly challenged him: “How could you do this?” she asked. “These patients must be taken seriously!”

“Come along,” Dr. Friedenthal said. “There’s no point in wasting our time here. If you like, I’ll show you hundreds of such letters later. You must have noticed that the old woman didn’t react at all when I tore it up?”

Clarisse was disconcerted, because what Dr. Friedenthal said was true, but it confused her thoughts. And before she could straighten them out again, they were further disturbed when, on their way out, another old woman, who had been lying in wait for them, lifted up her skirt and exposed to the passing gentlemen her ugly old-woman’s
thighs up to her belly, above coarse woolen stockings.

"The old sow," Stumm von Bordwehr muttered, sufficiently outraged and disgusted to forget politics for a while.

But Clarisse had discovered a resemblance between the thigh and the face. The thigh probably showed the same stigmata of fatty physical degeneration as the face, but this gave Clarisse for the first time an impression of strange correspondences and a world that worked differently from what one could grasp with the usual categories. She also now realized that she had not noticed the transformation of the white angels into these women, and indeed that even while walking through their midst she had not been able to distinguish the patients from the nurses. She turned around and looked back, but because the path had curved behind a building, she could no longer see anything and stumbled after the others like a
child that turns its head away. From this point on, her impressions no longer formed the transparent flow of events that one accepts life to be, but became a foaming torrent with only occasional smooth patches that stuck in the memory.

“Another quiet ward, this time for men,” Dr. Friedenthal announced, gathering his flock at the entrance to a building, and when they paused at the first bed he presented its occupant to them in a considerately lowered voice as a case of “depressive dementia paralytica.”

“An old syphilitic. Delusions of sin and nihilistic obsessions,” Siegmund whispered, translating the terms for his sister. Clarisse found herself face-to-face with an old gentleman who, to all appearances, had once belonged to the upper reaches of society. He sat upright in bed, was perhaps in his late fifties, and had a very white skin. His well-cared-for and highly intelligent face was framed in
thick white hair and looked as improbably distinguished as the faces one finds described only in the cheapest novels.

“Couldn’t one do a portrait of him?” Stumm von Bordwehr asked. “The very model of intellectual beauty! I’d love to give the portrait to your cousin!” he said to Ulrich.

Dr. Friedenthal gave a sad smile and commented: “The noble expression is caused by a slackening of tension in the facial muscles.”

He demonstrated with a quick movement the unresponsive fixity of the man’s pupils, then led them onward. There was not enough time for all the available material. The old gentleman, who had nodded mournfully to everything said at his bedside, was still muttering in a low, troubled voice when the five of them stopped again, several beds farther on, to consider the next case Dr. Friedenthal had chosen for them.
This time it was someone who was himself engaged in art, a cheerful, fat painter whose bed stood close to a sunny window. He had paper and many pencils on his blanket, and busied himself with them all day long. Clarisse was immediately struck by the happy restlessness of his movements. “That’s the way Walter should be painting!” she thought. Friedenthal, seeing her interest, quickly snatched a sheet of paper from the fat man and handed it to Clarisse; the painter snickered and behaved like a serving girl who’d just been pinched. But Clarisse was amazed to see a sketch for a large composition, drawn with sure, accomplished strokes, entirely sensible to the point of banality, with many figures woven together in accurate perspective and a large hall, everything executed in meticulous detail, so that the whole effect was of something so salutary and professorial that it could have come from the National
Academy. “What amazing craftsmanship!” she cried impulsively.

Dr. Friedenthal responded with a flattered smile.

The artist gleefully made a rude noise at him.

“You see, that gentleman likes it! Show him some more, go on! Amazing how good it is, he said! Go on, show him! I know you’re only laughing at me, but he likes it!” He spoke good-humoredly, holding out the rest of his drawings to the doctor, with whom he seemed to be on easy terms although the doctor didn’t appreciate his work.

“We don’t have time for you today,” Dr. Friedenthal told him and, turning to Clarisse, summed up the case by saying: “He’s not schizophrenic; sorry he’s the only one we have here at the moment. Schizophrenics are often fine artists, quite modern.”
“And insane?” Clarisse said dubiously.

“Why not?” Dr. Friedenthal answered sadly.

Clarisse bit her lip.

Meanwhile Stumm and Ulrich were already on the threshold to the next ward, and the General was saying: “Looking at this, I’m really sorry I called my orderly an idiot this morning. Ill never do it again!” For the ward they were facing was a room with extreme cases of idiocy.

Clarisse had not yet seen this and was thinking: “So even academic art, so respectably and widely recognized, has a sister in Bedlam—a sister denied, deprived, and yet so much a twin one can barely tell the difference!” This almost impressed her more than Friedenthal’s remark that another time he might be able to show her expressionist artists. She made up her mind to take him up on it. Her head was down, and she was still
biting her lip. There was something wrong with all this. It seemed to her clearly wrong to lock up such gifted people; the doctors might know about diseases, she thought, but probably did not understand art and all it stood for. Something would have to be done, she felt. But it was not clear to her what. Yet she did not lose heart, for the fat painter had immediately called her “that gentleman”—it seemed to her a good omen.

Friedenthal scrutinized her with curiosity.

When she felt his gaze she looked up with her thin-lipped smile and moved toward him, but before she could say anything an appalling sight made her mind a blank. In this new ward a series of horrible apparitions crouched and sat in their beds, everything about their bodies crooked, unclean, twisted, or paralyzed. Decayed teeth. Waggling heads. Heads too big, too small, totally misshapen. Slack, drooping jaws from which
saliva was dribbling, or brutish grinding motions of the mouth, without food or words. Yard-wide leaden barriers seemed to he between these souls and the world, and after the low chuckling and buzzing in the other room, the silence here, broken only by obscure grunting and muttering sounds, was oppressive. Such wards for severe mental deficiency are among the most horrifying sights to be found in the hideousness of a mental institution, and Clarisse felt herself plunged headlong into a ghastly darkness that blotted out all distinctions.

But their guide, Friedenthal, could see even in the dark, and pointing to various beds, he explained: “That’s idiocy over there, and over here you have cretinism.”

Stumm von Bordwehr pricked up his ears. “A cretin is not the same as an idiot?” he asked.
“No,” the doctor said, “there’s a medical distinction.”

“Interesting,” Stumm said. “In ordinary life one would never think of such a thing.”

Clarisse moved from bed to bed. Her eyes bore into the patients, as she tried with all her might to understand, without succeeding in the least in gleaning anything from these faces that took no cognizance of her. All thought in them was extinguished. Dr. Friedenthal followed her softly and explained: “congenital amaurotic idiocy”; “tubercular hypertrophic sclerosis”; “idiotia thymica...”

The General, who meanwhile felt that he had seen enough of these “morons” and assumed that Ulrich felt the same way, glanced at his watch and said: “Now, where were we? We mustn’t waste time!” And rather unexpectedly he resumed: “So, if you’ll bear in mind: the War Ministry finds
itself flanked by the pacifists on one side and the nationalists on the other....”

Ulrich, not so quick to tear his mind away from his surroundings, gave him a blank stare.

“This is no joke, my friend!” Stumm explained. “I’m talking politics! Something’s got to be done. We’ve come to a stop once before already. If we don’t do something soon, the Emperor’s birthday will be upon us before we know it, and we’ll look like fools. But what is to be done? It’s a logical question, isn’t it? And summing up rather bluntly what I told you, we’re being pushed by one crowd to help them love mankind, and by the other to let them bully the rest of the world so that the nobler blood will prevail, or however you want to call it. There’s something to be said for both sides. Which is why, in a word, you should somehow bring them together so there’ll be no damage!”
“Me?” Ulrich protested at his friend’s bombshell, and would have burst out laughing in other circumstances.

“Certainly you—who else?” the General replied decisively. “I’ll do all I can to help, but you’re the campaign’s secretary and Leinsdorf’s right hand!”

“I can get you admitted here!” Ulrich announced firmly.

“Fine!” The General knew from the art of war that it was best to avoid unexpected resistance in the most unruffled manner possible. “If you get me in here I might meet someone who has found the Greatest Idea in the world. Outside they seem to have lost their taste for great ideas anyway.” He glanced at his watch again. “I hear they’ve got some people here who are the Pope, or the universe. We haven’t met a single one, and they’re the ones I was most looking forward to getting acquainted with. Your little
friend’s terribly conscientious,” he complained.

Dr. Friedenthal gently eased Clarisse away from the defectives.

Hell is not interesting, it is terrifying. If it has not been humanized—as by Dante, who populated it with writers and other prominent figures, thereby distracting attention from the technicalities of punishment—but an attempt has been made to represent it in some original fashion, even the most fertile minds never get beyond childish tortures and unimaginative distortions of physical realities. But it is precisely the bare idea of an unimaginable and therefore inescapable everlasting punishment and agony, the premise of an inexorable change for the worse, impervious to any attempt to reverse it, that has the fascination of an abyss. Insane asylums are also like that. They are poorhouses. They have something of hell’s lack of imagination. But many people who
have no idea of the causes of mental illness are afraid of nothing so much, next to losing their money, as that they might one day lose their minds; an amazing number of people are plagued by the notion that they could suddenly lose themselves. It is apparently an overestimation of their self-worth that leads to the overestimation of the horror with which the sane imagine mental institutions to be imbued. Even Clarisse suffered a faint disappointment, which stemmed from some vague expectation implanted by her upbringing. It was quite the contrary with Dr. Friedenthal. He was used to these rounds. Order as in a military barracks or another mass institution, alleviation of conspicuous pains or complaints, prevention of avoidable deterioration, a slight improvement or a cure: these were the elements of his daily activity. Observing a good deal, knowing a good deal, without having a sufficient explanation for the overall problems, was his
intellectual portion. These rounds through the wards, prescribing a few sedatives besides the usual medications for coughs, colds, constipation, and bedsores, were his daily work of healing. He felt the ghostly horror of the world he lived in only when the contrast was awakened through contact with the normal world, which did not happen every day, but visits are such occasions, and that was why what Clarisse got to see had been prepared not without a certain sense of theatrical production, so that no sooner had he aroused her from her absorption with one phenomenon that he immediately went on to something new and even more dramatic.

They had hardly left this ward when they were joined by several large men in crisp white uniforms, with hulking shoulders and jovial corporals’ faces. It happened so silently that it had the effect of a drum roll.

“Now were coming to a disturbed ward,” Dr. Friedenthal announced, and they
approached a screaming and squawking that seemed to issue from an immense birdcage. They stood in front of a door that had no handle, which had to be opened with a special key by one of the attendants. Clarisse started to enter first, as she had done up until now, but Dr. Friedenthal pulled her back roughly.

“Wait!” he said with emphasis, wearily, without apology.

The attendant who had opened the door had opened it only a crack, while covering the open space with his powerful body; after first listening and then peering inside, he hastily slipped in, followed by a second attendant, who took up a position at the other side of the entrance. Clarisse’s heart started to pound.

“Advance guard, rear guard, cover flank!” the General said appreciatively. And thus covered, they walked in and were
escorted from bed to bed by the two attending giants. What were sitting in the beds thrashed about, agitated and screaming, with arms and eyes, as if each of them was shouting into some private space that was for himself alone, and yet they all seemed to be caught up in a raging conversation, like alien birds locked in the same cage, each speaking the dialect of its own island. Some of them sat without restraints, while others were tied down to their beds with straps that allowed only limited movement of the hands.

“To keep them from attempting suicide,” the doctor explained, and listed the diseases: paralysis, paranoia, manic depression, were the species to which these strange birds belonged.

Clarisse again felt intimidated at first by her confused impressions and could not get her bearings. And so it came as a friendly sign when she saw someone waving to her excitedly from a distance, calling out
something to her while she was still many beds away. He was moving back and forth in his bed as if desperately trying to free himself in order to dash over to her, outshouting the chorus with his complaints and fits of rage, and succeeding in concentrating Clarisse’s attention on himself. The closer she came to him, the more she was troubled by her sense of his addressing himself only to her, while she was completely unable to understand a word of what he was trying to say. When they finally reached his bed, the senior attendant told the doctor something so softly that Clarisse could not hear, and Friedenthal, looking very grave, gave some instructions. But then he said something in a light vein to the patient, who was slow to react but then suddenly asked: ‘Who’s that man?’ with a gesture indicating Clarisse.

Friedenthal nodded toward Siegmund and answered that it was a doctor from Stockholm.
“No, that one!” The patient insisted on Clarisse. Friedenthal smiled and said she was a woman doctor from Vienna.

“No. That’s a man,” the patient contradicted him, and fell silent. Clarisse felt her heart thudding. Here was another who took her for a man!

Then the patient intoned slowly: “It is the seventh son of our Emperor.”

Stumm von Bordwehr nudged Ulrich.

“That is not so,” Friedenthal told him, and continued the game by turning to Clarisse, saying: “Do tell him yourself that he’s mistaken.”

“It’s not true, my friend,” Clarisse said in a low voice to the patient, so moved she could barely speak.

“You are the seventh son,” the patient replied stubbornly.
“No, no,” Clarisse assured him, smiling at him in her excitement as if she were playing a love scene, her lips stiff with stage fright.

“Yes you are!” the patient repeated, and looked at her in a way she could not find words for. She could not think of another thing to say, and just kept gazing helplessly with a fixed smile into the eyes of the lunatic who took her for a prince. Something remarkable was happening in her mind: the possibility was forming that he might be right. The force of his repeated assertion dissolved some resistance in her; in some way she lost control over her thoughts, new patterns took shape, their outlines looming from mist: he was not the first who wanted to know who she was and to take her for a “gentleman.” But while she was still gazing at his face, caught up in this strange bond, taking no account of his age or of any other vestiges of a normal life still left in his
countenance, something quite incomprehensible was beginning to happen in that face and in the whole person. It looked as though her gaze was too heavy for the eyes on which it rested; they began to slide away and fall. His lips, too, began to quiver, and like heavy drops merging more and more quickly, audible obscenities mixed themselves with a rush of jabbering. Clarisse was as stunned by this slithering transformation as if something were slipping away from her; she impulsively reached out to the miserable creature with both arms, and before anyone could interfere, the patient leapt to meet her: he cast off his bedclothes, knelt at the foot of the bed, and began to masturbate like a caged monkey.

“Don’t be such a pig!” the doctor said quickly and sternly, while the attendants instantly grabbed the man and his bedclothes and in a flash reduced both to a lifeless bundle on the bed. Clarisse had turned dark
red. She felt as dizzy as when the floor of an elevator all at once seems to drop away from under one’s feet. Suddenly it seemed to her that all the patients they had already passed were shouting at her back and the others, whom they had not yet seen, were shouting at her from in front. And as chance would have it, or the infectious power of excitement, a friendly old man in the next bed, who had been making good-natured little jokes while the visitors stood nearby, leapt up the instant Clarisse hurried past him, and began raving at them in foul language that formed a disgusting foam on his lips. On him, too, the attendants’ fists descended like a heavy press, crushing all resistance.

But the magician Friedenthal had even more tricks to conjure up. Under guard at the exit as they had been at the entrance, the visitors left this ward at the far end, and suddenly their ears seemed plunged into healing silence. They found themselves in a clean,
cheerful corridor with a linoleum floor, and encountered people in their Sunday best and attractive children, all greeting the doctor confidently and politely. They were visitors, waiting to get to see their relatives, and once again the impact of this healthy world was disconcerting; for a moment all these discreet and well-behaved people in their best clothes seemed like dolls, or extremely well-made artificial flowers. But Friedenthal passed through them hurriedly and announced to his friends that he was now about to take them to the ward for murderers and others of the criminally insane. The watchful looks and behavior of the attendants at the next iron gate did not bode at all well. They entered a cloistered courtyard surrounded by a gallery, resembling one of those gardens of modern design that have many stones and few plants. The empty air first seemed like a cube of silence; it was only after a while that one noticed figures sitting mutely along the
walls. Near the entrance some retarded boys were squatting, runny-nosed, dirty, motionless, as if a sculptor had had the grotesque idea of attaching them to the pillars flanking the gate. Near them, the first figure by the wall, sitting apart from the others, was an ordinary-looking man still in his dark Sunday suit, but without a collar; he must have just been admitted, and was indescribably moving in his impression of not belonging anywhere. Clarisse suddenly imagined the anguish she would cause Walter if she left him, and almost burst into tears. It was the first time this had ever happened, but she quickly suppressed it, for the other men past whom she was being escorted merely gave the impression of habitual submission to be expected in prisons: They greeted the doctor with shy politeness and made minor requests. Only one made a nuisance of himself with his complaints, a young man who emerged from heaven knew what oblivion.
He demanded to be released at once, and why was he here in the first place? When Dr. Friedenthal replied evasively that such requests were handled by the superintendent, not by him, the young man persisted; his pleas became repetitive, like links in a chain rattling past faster and faster; gradually, a note of urgency came into his voice and grew threatening, finally turning into brutish, mindless danger. At that point the giants pushed him back down on the bench, and he crept back into his silence like a dog, without having received an answer. By now Clarisse was used to this, and it merely became part of her general excitement.

There would have been no time for anything else, since they had reached the armored door at the far end of the courtyard, and the guards were banging on it. This was something new, for up to this point they had used great caution in opening doors but had not announced themselves. On this door they
banged their fists four times, and listened to the stirrings from the other side.

“That’s the signal for everyone inside to line up against the walls,” Dr. Friedenthal explained, “or sit on the benches along the walls.”

And indeed, as the door turned slowly, inch by inch, they could see that all the men who had been milling around quietly or noisily were behaving obediently, like well-drilled prisoners. Even so, the guards were so cautious as they entered that Clarisse suddenly clutched at Dr. Friedenthal’s sleeve and asked excitedly whether Moosbrugger was here. Friedenthal only shook his head. He had no time. He hastily admonished the visitors to stay at least two paces away from every prisoner. His responsibilities in this situation seemed to cause him some anxiety. They were seven against thirty, in a remote, walled courtyard full of insane men almost all of whom had committed a murder.
Those who are accustomed to carrying a weapon feel more exposed without it than others, so one could not hold it against the General, who had left his saber in the waiting room, that he asked the doctor: “Don’t you have a weapon on you?” “Alertness and experience!” Dr. Friedenthal replied, pleased at the flattering question. “It’s all a matter of nipping any potential disturbance in the bud.”

And in fact at the slightest move among the inmates to break ranks, the guards rushed in and thrust the offender back into place so swiftly that these attacks seemed to be the only acts of violence occurring. Clarisse did not approve of them. “What the doctors don’t seem to understand,” she thought, “is that although these men are shut in here together all day long without supervision, they don’t do anything to each other; it’s only we, coming from the world that is foreign to them, who may be in danger.” She
wanted to speak to one of them, suddenly imagining that she could certainly find a way to communicate properly with him. In a corner right near the entrance was a sturdy-looking man of medium height, with a full brown beard and piercing eyes; he was leaning against the wall with his arms folded, silently surveying the visitors’ activity with an angry expression. Clarisse stepped toward him, but Dr. Friedenthal instantly restrained her with a hand on her arm. “Not this one,” he said in a low voice. He chose another murderer for Clarisse and spoke to him. This was a short, squat fellow with a pointy head, shaved convict fashion, apparently known to the doctor as tractable, who instantly stood at attention and, answering smartly, showed two rows of teeth that dubiously suggested two rows of gravestones.

“Ask him why he’s here,” Dr. Friedenthal whispered to Clarisse’s brother, and
Siegmund asked the broad-shouldered man with the pointy head: “Why are you here?”

“You know that very well!” was the curt reply.

“No, I don’t know,” Siegmund—who did not like to give up too easily—Said rather foolishly. “So tell me why you’re here.”

“You know that very well!” The response was repeated with a stronger emphasis.

“Why are you being rude to me?” Siegmund asked. “I honestly don’t know why!”

“This lying!” Clarisse thought, and she was glad when the patient simply answered: “Because I choose! I can do as I like!” he insisted, and bared his teeth at them.

“Well, there’s no need to be rude for no reason,” the hapless Siegmund persisted, just
as unable as the insane man to come up with anything new.

Clarisse was furious with him for playing the stupid role of someone teasing a caged animal in a zoo.

"It's none of your business! I do as I like, get it? Whatever I like!" The mental patient barked like a sergeant and produced a laugh from somewhere in his face, but not his mouth or eyes, which were both charged with uncanny anger.

Even Ulrich was thinking: "I wouldn't care to be alone with this fellow just now." Siegmund was having a hard time standing his ground, since the madman had stepped up close to him, and Clarisse was wishing he would seize her brother by the throat and bite him in the face. Friedenthal complacently let the scene take its course, for after all, as a medical colleague Siegmund ought to be able to handle it, and Friedenthal was
rather enjoying the other’s discomfiture. With his sense of theater, he waited for the scene to reach a climax, and only when Siegmund was beyond uttering another word did he give the signal to break it off. But the desire to meddle was back in Clarisse; it had somehow grown stronger and stronger as the man drummed out his answers. Suddenly she could no longer hold back and, walking up to the man, said:

“I’m from Vienna!”

It made as little sense as a random sound one might entice from a bugle. She neither knew what she meant by saying it nor where the idea had come from, nor had she stopped to wonder whether the man knew what town he was in, and if he did know, her remark would be even more pointless. But she felt tremendously sure of herself as she said it. And in fact miracles still do happen, occasionally, and they have a partiality for insane asylums. As she spoke,
flaming with excitement, a glow came over him; his rock-grinder teeth withdrew behind his lips, and benevolence spread over the glare in his eyes.

“Ah, Vienna, city of dreams! A beautiful place!” he said with the smugness of the former petit bourgeois who has his clichés in order.

“Congratulations!” Dr. Friedenthal laughed.

But for Clarisse the episode had become an event.

“But this was not to be. They moved cautiously back through the two courtyards and were walking up an incline toward what appeared to be a distant isolated pavilion, when a guard who seemed to have been looking for them everywhere came running up to them.
He whispered to Friedenthal at some length, something important and disagreeable, to judge by the doctors expression as he listened and asked an occasional question. Finally, Dr. Friedenthal turned back to the others with a grave, apologetic air and told them that he had to go to another ward, to deal with an incident that would take some time, so that he would, regretfully, have to curtail their tour. He addressed himself primarily to the official personage in the General’s uniform beneath the lab coat; Stumm von Bordwehr gratefully assured him that he had seen enough of the outstanding organization and discipline of this institution, and that after what they had been through, one murderer more or less did not matter. Clarisse, however, had such a disappointed, stricken face that Friedenthal proposed to make up the visit to Moosbrugger, along with some other interesting cases,
some other time; he would give Siegmund a call as soon as a date could be arranged.

“Very kind of you”—the General thanked him on behalf of the group—”though for my part, I really can’t say whether other obligations will allow me to be present.”

With this reservation, a future visit was agreed upon, and Friedenthal set off along a path that soon took him over the rise and out of sight, while the others, accompanied by the attendant Friedenthal had left with them, headed back to the gate. They left the path and took a shortcut across the grassy slope between fine beeches and plane trees. The General had slipped out of his lab coat and carried it jauntily over his arm, as one might carry a raincoat on an outing, but nobody seemed to feel like talking. Ulrich showed no interest in being coached further for the evening’s reception, and Stumm was himself too preoccupied with what was awaiting him
at his office, though he felt called upon to make some amusing remarks to Clarisse, whom he was gallantly escorting. But Clarisse was absent-minded and quiet. “Perhaps she’s still embarrassed over that filthy pig,” he mused, feeling the need to apologize somehow for not having been in a position to offer his chivalric protection, but on the other hand, it was probably best to say no more about it. So the walk back passed in silence and constraint.

It was only when Stumm von Bordwehr had entered his carriage, leaving it to Ulrich to see Clarisse and her brother home, that his good spirits returned, and with them an idea that gave a certain shape to the whole depressing episode. He had taken a cigarette out of the big leather case in his pocket, and leaning back in the cushions and blowing the first little blue clouds into the sunny air, he thought comfortably: “Terrible thing, to be out of one’s mind like that. Come to think of
it, all the time we were there I didn’t see a single one of them having a smoke! People don’t realize how well off they are as long as they’re still in their right mind!”
A GREAT EVENT IS IN THE MAKING. COUNT LEINSDORF AND THE INN RIVER

This eventful day culminated in a gala reception at the Tuzzis’. The Parallel Campaign was on parade, in glory and brilliance: eyes blazed, jewels blazed, prominence blazed, wit blazed. A lunatic might conceivably conclude from this that on such a social occasion eyes, jewels, prominent names, and wit amount to the same thing, and he would not be far off the mark: everyone who did not happen to be on the Riviera or the north Italian lakes was there, except for those few who refused on
principle to recognize any “events” so late in the season.

In their place were quite a number of people whom no one had ever seen before. A long respite had torn holes in the guest list, and to fill it up again new people had been invited more hastily than was consonant with Diotima’s circumspect ways: Count Leinsdorf himself had turned over to her a list of people he wanted invited for political reasons, and once the principle of her salon’s exclusiveness had thus been sacrificed to higher considerations, she had no longer attached the same importance to it. His Grace was, in fact, the sole begetter of this festive gathering: Diotima was of the opinion that humanity could be helped only in pairs. But Count Leinsdorf held firmly to his assertion that “capital and culture have not done their duty by our historical development; we must give them one last chance!”
Count Leinsdorf was always coming back to this point.

"Tell me, my dear, haven’t you come to a decision yet?" he would ask. "It’s high time. All sorts of people are coming to the fore with destructive tendencies. We must give the cultural sector one last opportunity to restore the balance." But Diotima, deflected by the wealth of variation in the forms of human coupling, was deaf to all else.

Finally, Count Leinsdorf had to call her to order.

"You know, my dear, I hardly seem to know you anymore! We’ve given out the password ‘Action!’ to all and sundry; I myself had a hand—surely I may tell you in confidence that it was I who was behind the Minister of the Interior’s resignation. It had to be done on a high level, you understand; a very high level! But it had really become a scandal, and nobody had the courage to put a
stop to it. So this is just for your own ears,” he continued, “and now the Premier has asked us to bestir ourselves a bit with our Inquiry Concerning the Desires of the Concerned Sections of the Population with Respect to the Conduct of Home Affairs, because the new Minister naturally can’t be expected to have it at his fingertips; and now you want to leave me in the lurch, you who have always been the last to give up? We must give capital and culture a last chance! You know, it’s either that or...”

This somewhat incomplete final sentence was uttered so menacingly that there was no mistaking that he knew what he wanted, and Diotima obediently promised to hurry; but then she forgot again and did nothing.

And then one day Count Leinsdorf was seized by his well-known energy and drove straight to her door, propelled by forty horsepower.
“Has anything happened yet?” he asked, and Diotima had to admit that nothing had.

“Do you know the Inn River, my dear?” he asked.

Of course Diotima knew the Inn, second only to the Danube as Kakania’s most famous river, richly interwoven with the country’s geography and history. She observed her visitor rather dubiously, while doing her best to smile.

But Count Leinsdorf was in deadly earnest. “Apart from Innsbruck,” he said, “what ridiculous backwoods places all those little towns in the Inn Valley are, and what an imposing river the Inn is in our culture! And to think I never realized it before!” He shook his head. “You see, I happened by chance to look at a highway map today,” he said, finally coming to the point, “and I noticed that the Inn rises in Switzerland. I must
have known it before, of course, we all know it, but we never give it a thought. It rises at Majola, I’ve seen it there myself; a ridiculous little creek no wider than the Kamp or the Morava in our country. But what have the Swiss made of it? The Engadine! The world-famous Engadine! The Engad-Inn, my dear! Has it ever occurred to you that the whole Engadine comes from the name Inn? That’s what I hit upon today. While we, with our insufferable Austrian modesty, of course never make anything out of what belongs to us!”

After this chat Diotima hastened to arrange for the desired reception, partly because she realized that she had to stand by Count Leinsdorf, and partly because she was afraid of driving her high-ranking friend to some extreme if she continued to refuse.

But when she gave him her promise, Leinsdorf said:
“And this time, I beg of you, dearest lady, don’t fail to invite—er—that x you call Drangsal. Her friend Frau Wayden has been pestering me about this person for weeks, and won’t leave me in peace!”

Diotima promised this too, although at other times she would have regarded putting up with her rival as a dereliction of duty to her country.
When the rooms were filled with the radiance of festive illumination and the assembled company, an observer could note among those present not only His Excellency, together with other leading members of the high aristocracy for whose appearance he had arranged, but also His Excellency the Minister of War, and in the latter’s entourage the intensely intellectual, somewhat overworked head of General Stumm von Bordwehr. One observed Paul Arnheim (without the “Dr.”): simple and most effective; the observer had thought it over carefully—it’s
called “litotes,” an artful understatement, like removing some trifle from one’s body, as when a king removes a ring from his finger to place it on someone else’s). Then one observed everyone worth mentioning from the various ministries (the Minister of Education and Culture had apologized to His Excellency in the Upper House for not coming in person; he had to go to Linz for the consecration of a great altar screen). Then one noted that the foreign embassies and legations had sent an “elite.” There were well-known names “from industry, art, and science,” and a time-honored allegory of diligence lay in this invariable combination of three bourgeois activities, a combination that seized hold of the scribbling pen all by itself. That same adept pen then presented the ladies: beige, pink, cherry, cream...; embroidered, draped, triple-tiered, or dropped from the waist....Between Countess Adlitz and Frau Generaldirektor Weghuber was listed the
well-known Frau Melanie Drangsal, widow of the world-famous surgeon, “in her own right a charming hostess, who provides in her house a hearth for the leading lights of our times.” Finally, listed separately at the end of this section, was the name of Ulrich von So-and-so and sister. The observer had hesitated about adding “whose name is widely associated with his selfless service on behalf of that high-minded and patriotic undertaking,” or even “a coming man/’ Word had gone around long since that one of these days this protege of Count Leinsdorf was widely expected to involve his patron in some rash misstep, and the temptation to go on record early as someone in the know was great. However, the deepest satisfaction for those in the know is always silence, especially when it proceeds from caution. It was to this that Ulrich and Agathe owed the mere mention of their names as stragglers, immediately preceding those leaders of society and
the intelligentsia who are not named individually but simply destined for the mass grave of “all those of rank and station.” Many people fell into this category, among them the well-known professor of jurisprudence Councillor Herr Professor Schwung, who happened to be in the capital as a member of a government commission of inquiry, and also the young poet Friedel Feuermaul, for although his was known to be among the moving spirits behind this evening’s gathering, that was a far cry from the more substantial significance of a title or the triumphs of haute couture. People such as Acting Bank Director Leo Fischel and family—who had won admittance thanks to Gerda’s grueling efforts, without any help from Ulrich, in other words because of Diotima’s momentarily flagging attention—were simply buried in the corner of one’s eye. And the wife of an eminent jurist (who was well known but on such an occasion still below the threshold of
public notice), a lady whose name, Bonadea, was unknown even to the observer, was later exhumed for listing among the wearers of noteworthy gowns because her sensational looks aroused great admiration.

This impersonal seeing eye, the surveying curiosity of the public, was of course a person. There are usually quite a lot of them, but in the Kakanian metropolis at that time there was one who overtopped all the rest: Privy Councillor Meseritscher. Born in the Wallachian town of Meseritsch, whence his name, this publisher, editor, and news correspondent of the Parliamentary and Social Gazette, which he had founded in the sixties of the last century, had come to the capital as a young man, sacrificing his expectation of taking over his parents’ tavern in his native town in order to become a journalist, having been attracted by the political promise of liberalism that was then at its zenith. And before long he had made his contribution to
that era by founding a news agency, which began by supplying small local items of a police nature to the newspapers. Thanks to the industry, reliability, and thoroughness of its owner, this rudimentary agency not only earned the esteem of the papers and the police but was soon noticed by other high authorities as well, and used by them for placing items they wanted to publicize without taking responsibility, so that the agency soon found itself in a privileged position for tapping unofficial information from official sources. A man of great enterprise and a tireless worker, Meseritscher, as he saw this success developing, extended his activity to include news from the Court and Society; indeed, he would probably never have left Meseritsch for the capital if this had not been his guiding vision. Flawless reporting of “those present” was regarded as his specialty. His memory for people and what was said about them was extraordinary, and this
assured him of the same splendid relationship with the salon that he had with the prison. He knew Society better than it knew itself, and his unflagging devotion enabled him to make people who had met at a gathering properly acquainted with each other the very next morning, like some old cavalier in whom everyone has for decades been confiding all their marriage plans and the problems they were having with their dressmakers. And so, on every sort of great occasion, the zealous, nimble, ever-obliging, affable little man was a familiar institution, and in his later years it was only he and his presence that conferred indisputable prestige to such occasions.

Meseritschers career had reached a peak when the title Privy Councillor was bestowed upon him, and this involves an interesting peculiarity. Kakania was the most peace-loving of countries, but at some time or other it had decided, in the profound
innocence of its convictions, that, wars being a thing of the past, its civil service should be organized as a hierarchy corresponding to military ranks, complete with similar uniforms and insignia. Since then the rank of Privy Councillor corresponded to that of a lieutenant colonel in His Majesty’s Imperial and Royal Army. But even though this was not in itself an exalted rank, the peculiarity was that according to an immutable tradition, which, like everything immutable in Kakania, was modified only in exceptional cases, Meseritscher should really have been named an Imperial Councillor. An Imperial Councillor was not, as one might suppose from the term, superior to a Privy Councillor, but inferior: it only corresponded to the rank of captain. Meseritscher should have been an Imperial Councillor because that tide was given, other than to certain civil servants, only to those engaged in independent professions such as, for example, court barber or
coach builder, and, by the same token, writers and artists; while Privy Councillor was at the time an actual high-ranking title in the civil service. That Meseritscher was nevertheless the first and only member of his profession to be so honored expressed something more than the high honor of the title itself—indeed, even more than the daily reminder not to take too seriously whatever happens in this country of ours; the unjustified title was a subtle and discreet way of assuring the indefatigable chronicler his close association with Court, State, and Society.

Meseritscher had been a model for many journalists in his time, and was on the boards of leading literary associations. The story also went around that he had had made for himself a uniform with a gold collar, but only put it on, sometimes, at home. Chances are the rumor was untrue, because deep down Meseritscher had always preserved certain memories of the tavern trade in
Meseritsch, and a good tavernkeeper also knows the secrets of all his guests but doesn’t make use of everything he knows; he never brings his own opinions into a discussion but enjoys noting and telling everything in the way of fact, anecdote, or joke. And so Meseritscher, whom one met on every social occasion as the acknowledged memorializer of beautiful women and distinguished men, had himself never even thought of going to a good tailor; he knew all the behind-the-scenes intricacies of politics, yet had never dabbled in politics in even a single line of print; he knew about all the discoveries and inventions of his time without understanding any of them. He was perfectly satisfied to know that they existed and were “present.” He honestly loved his time, and his time reciprocated his affection to a certain degree, because he daily reported its presence to the world.
When Diotima caught sight of him as he entered, she immediately beckoned him to her side.

“My dear Meseritscher,” she said, as sweetly as she knew how. “You surely didn’t take His Excellency’s speech in the Upper House today as an expression of our position—you couldn’t have taken it literally?”

His Excellency, in the context of the Minister’s downfall and exasperated by his cares, had made a widely noticed speech in the Upper House in which he not only charged his victim with having failed to show the true constructive spirit of cooperation and strictness of principle, but also let his zeal carry him to making general observations that in some inexplicable fashion culminated in a recognition of the importance of the press, in which he reproached this “institution risen to the status of a world power” with pretty much everything with which a feudal-minded, independent, nonpartisan,
Christian gentleman could charge an institution that in his view is the dead opposite of himself. It was this that Diotima was diplomatically trying to smooth over, and Meseritscher listened pensively as she found increasingly fine and unintelligible language for Count Leinsdorf’s real point of view. Then suddenly he laid a hand on her arm and magnanimously interrupted her:

“My dear lady, how can you upset yourself like this?” he summed up. “His Excellency is a good friend to us, isn’t he? What if he did exaggerate? Why shouldn’t he, a gallant gentleman like him?’ And to prove that his relationship to the Count was unruffled, he added: “I’ll just go and greet him now!”

That was Meseritscher! But before he moved off he turned to Diotima once more and asked confidentially:

“What about Feuermaul, dear lady?”
Smiling, Diotima shrugged her beautiful shoulders. “Nothing so very earthshaking, my dear Councillor. We wouldn’t like it to be said that we rebuffed anyone who came to us in good faith!”

“Good faith—that’s rich,” Meseritscher thought on his way to Count Leinsdorf. But before he reached him, indeed even before his thoughts had reached a conclusion, his host stepped amicably into his path.

“My dear Meseritscher, my official sources have let me down again,” Section Chief Tuzzi began with a smile. “So I’m turning to you as our semi-official source of information. Can you tell me anything about this Feuermaul who’s here this evening?”

“What would I have to tell you, Herr Section Chief?” Meseritscher deprecated.

“I’m told he’s a genius.”
“Glad to hear it!” Meseritscher answered.

If the news is to be reported with speed and confidence, today’s news should not be too different from yesterday’s, or what one knows already. Even genius is no exception: real, acknowledged genius, that is, whose significance can be readily assessed in its own time. Not so the genius that is not instantly recognized by all and sundry! This sort of genius has something distinctly ungenial about it, a quality, moreover, that is not even solely its own, so that it is possible to misjudge it in every respect. Privy Councillor Meseritscher had a solid inventory of geniuses, which he tended with care and attention, but he was not keen on adding new items. The older and more experienced he grew, in fact, the more he had even formed the habit of regarding any rising artistic genius, especially in his neighboring field of literature, merely as a frivolous interference
with his own work of reportage, and he hated it in all righteousness until it became ripe for inclusion in his lists of “those present.” At that time Feuermaul still had a long way to go, and his way had yet to be smoothed for him. Privy Councillor Meseritscher was not quite sure he was in favor.

“They say he’s supposed to be a great poet,” Tuzzi repeated hesitantly, and Meseritscher retorted firmly: “Who says so? The critics on the book page? I ask you, Section Chief, what difference does that make? The specialists say these things, and what of it? Many of them say the opposite. We’ve even known the same experts to say one thing one day and something else the next. Does it really matter what they say? A real literary reputation has to have reached the illiterates; only then can you depend on it! Would you like to know what I think? What a great man does, apart from his arriving and leaving, is nobody’s business!”
He had worked himself up into a gloomy fervor, and his eyes were glued to Tuzzi’s. Tuzzi gave up and said nothing.

“What’s really going on here this evening, Section Chief?” Meseritscher asked him.

Tuzzi smiled absently and shrugged his shoulders. “Nothing. Nothing, really. A little ambition. Have you ever read any of Feuermaul’s books?”

“I know what he writes about: peace, friendship, goodness, et cetera.”

“So you don’t think too much of him?” Tuzzi said.

“Good Lord!” Meseritscher started wriggling. ‘Who am I to say...?’ At this point Frau Drangsal came bearing down on them, and Tuzzi had to take a courteous step or two in her direction. Meseritscher saw the chance to slip into a breach he had espied in the circle around Count Leinsdorf, and seizing it
before anyone else could waylay him, he dropped anchor beside His Grace.

Count Leinsdorf was talking with the Minister and some other men, but as soon as Meseritscher had paid them all his devout respects, His Grace turned slightly and drew him aside.

"Meseritscher," he said intently. "Promise me that there will be no misunderstandings; the gentlemen of the press never seem to know what to write. Now then: Nothing whatsoever has changed in our position since the last time. Something may change. We don't know about that. For the time being there must be no interference. So please, even if one of your colleagues should ask you, remember that this whole evening here is nothing more than a private party given by Frau Tuzzi."

Meseritscher's eyelids slowly and solicitously conveyed that he had understood
these top-level commands. And since one confidence deserves another, he moistened his lips, which then gleamed as his eyes should have done, and asked: “And what about Feuermaul, Your Excellency, if I may be permitted to ask?”

“Why on earth shouldn’t you?” Count Leinsdorf replied in surprise. “There’s nothing whatever to be said about Feuermaul! He was invited because Baroness Wayden wouldn’t leave us in peace until he was! What else should there be? Perhaps you know something?”

Up to this point Privy Councillor Meseritscher had not been inclined to take the Feuermaul question too seriously, but regarded it as one of the many social rivalries he ran into every day. But now that even Count Leinsdorf denied so energetically that there was anything in it, Meseritscher had to think again, and came to the conclusion that something important was in the wind. “What
can they be up to now?” he brooded as he wandered through the throng, pondering one by one the most daring possibilities of domestic and foreign policy. But after a while he decided abruptly: “There’s probably nothing to it,” and refused to let himself be distracted any longer from his job of reporting the news.

For however much it appeared to be in conflict with his mission in life, Meseritscher did not believe in great events; indeed, he did not hold with them. When one believes that one is living in a very important, very splendid, and very great period, one does not welcome the idea that anything especially important, splendid, and great has yet to happen in it. Meseritscher was no alpinist, but if he had been he would have said that his attitude was as correct as it was to put lookout towers on middling-high mountains but never on the really high peaks. Since such analogies did not occur to him, it was
enough to register a certain uneasiness and make up his mind that he would not mention Feuermaul in his column at all, not even by name.
A GREAT EVENT IS IN THE MAKING. MEETING SOME OLD ACQUAINTANCES

Ulrich, who had been standing beside his cousin while she was speaking with Meseritscher, asked her as soon as they were alone for a moment:

“Tm sorry I arrived too late; how was your first encounter with La Drangsal?”

Diotima raised her heavy eyelashes to give him a single world-weary glance and dropped them again.

“Delightful, of course. She’d been to see me. We’ll arrange something or other this evening. As if it made any difference!”
“You see!” Ulrich said, in the tone of their old conversations, as if to draw a final line under all that.

Diotima turned her head and gave her cousin a quizzical look.

“I told you already,” Ulrich said. “Now it’s almost all over, as if nothing had happened.” He needed to talk: when he had got home that afternoon, Agathe had been there but soon left again; they had spoken only a few brief words before they came to Diotima’s; Agathe had dressed with the aid of the gardener’s wife. “I did warn you!” Ulrich said.

“Against what?” Diotima asked slowly.

“Oh, I don’t know. Against everything!”

In fact, he no longer knew himself what he had not warned her against: her ideas, her ambition, the Parallel Campaign, love, intellect, the Jubilee Year, the world of business,
her salon, her passions; against the dangers of sensibility and of casually letting things take their course, against letting herself go too far and holding herself too much in check, against adultery and marriage. There was nothing he had not warned her against. “That’s how she is,” he thought. Everything she did looked ridiculous to him, yet she was so beautiful it made him sad.

“I warned you,” Ulrich repeated. “I hear that you’re no longer interested in anything but the scientific approach to sexual problems.”

Diotima ignored this. “Do you think this Drangsal’s protege is really gifted?” she asked.

“Certainly,” Ulrich replied. “Gifted, young, undeveloped. His success and this woman will be the ruin of him. In this country newborn babies are ruined by being told that they are people with fabulous instincts
that intellectual development would only rob them of. He sometimes comes up with good ideas, but can’t let ten minutes go by without making an ass of himself.” He leaned over to say in her ear: “Do you know anything specific about that woman?”

Diotima shook her head almost imperceptibly.

“She’s dangerously ambitious,” Ulrich said. “But not uninteresting from the point of view of your current researches. Where beautiful women used to wear a fig leaf, she wears a laurel leaf! I hate women like that!”

Diotima did not laugh, nor even smile; she merely inclined her head toward the “cousin.”

“And how do you find him as a man?” he asked.

“Pathetic,” Diotima whispered. “Like a lambkin running to premature fat.”
“What of it? The beauty of the male is only a secondary sexual characteristic,” Ulrich said. “What’s primarily exciting about him is the expectation of his success. Ten years from now Feuermaul will be an international celebrity; Drangsal’s connections will take care of that, and then she’ll many him. If he remains a celebrity, it’ll be a happy marriage.”

Diotima bethought herself and gravely corrected him: “Happiness in marriage depends on factors one cannot judge without first subjecting oneself to a certain discipline!” Then she abandoned him as a proud ship abandons the quay alongside which it has lain. Her duties as hostess bore her away from him with the barest nod, not even a glance, as she cast off her moorings. But she did not mean it unkindly; on the contrary, Ulrich’s voice had affected her like an old tune from her youth. She even wondered privately what she might learn about him by
subjecting his sexuality to the illumination of a scientific study. Oddly enough, in all her detailed research into these problems, she had never thought of connecting them with him.

Ulrich looked up, and through a gap in the festive tumult—a kind of optical channel through which Diotima’s gaze might have preceded his own just before she had taken her somewhat abrupt departure—he saw, in the room beyond the next, Paul Arnheim in conversation with Feuermaul, with Frau Drangsal standing benignly by. She had brought the two men together. Arnheim was holding the hand with the cigar raised, as though in an unconscious gesture of self-defense, but he was smiling most engagingly; Feuermaul was talking vivaciously, holding his cigar with two fingers and sucking at it between sentences with the greed of a calf butting its muzzle at the maternal udder. Ulrich could have imagined what they were
talking about, but he didn’t bother; he stayed where he was, in happy isolation, looking around for his sister. He discovered her in a group of men who were mostly strangers to him, and a cool chill ran through him despite his distractedness. But just then Stumm von Bordwehr poked him gently in the ribs with a fingertip, and at the same moment Hofrat Professor Schwung approached him on the other side but was stopped a few steps away by the intervention of one of his colleagues from the capital.

“So there you are at last!” the General murmured in relief. “The Minister wants to know what an ‘ethos’ is.”

“Why an ethos?”

“I don’t know. What’s an ethos?”

“An eternal truth,” Ulrich defined, “that is neither eternal nor true, but valid for a time to serve as a standard for people to go
by. It’s a philosophical and sociological term, and not often used.”

“Aha, that’ll be it,” the General said. “Arnheim, you see, was claiming that the proposition ‘Man is good’ is only an ethos. Feuermaul replied that he didn’t know what an ethos was, but man is good, and that’s an eternal truth! Then Leinsdorf said, ‘Quite right. There can’t really be any evil people, since no one can possibly will evil; these people are only misguided. People are rather nervous these days because in times like these we have so many skeptics who won’t believe in anything solid.’ I couldn’t help thinking he should have been with us this afternoon. Anyway, he also thinks that people who won’t realize what’s good for them have to be forced to. And so the Minister wants to know what an ethos is. I’ll just dash over to him and come right back. Don’t budge, so I can find you again! There’s something else I
must talk with you about, urgently, and then I’ll take you to the Minister.”

Before Ulrich could ask for particulars, Tuzzi slipped a hand around his arm in passing, saying: “We haven’t seen you here in ages!” Then he went on: “Do you remember my prediction that we’d have a pacifist invasion to deal with?” So saying, he gazed cordially into the General’s eyes, but Stumm was in a hurry and merely said that though his ethos as an officer was of another land, any sincere conviction...The rest of this sentence vanished with him, because he always found Tuzzi irritating, which is not conducive to good thinking.

The Section Chief blinked gaily at the General’s retreating form and then turned back to the “cousin.” “That business with the oil fields is only a blind, of course,” he said.

Ulrich looked at him in surprise.
“You don’t mean to say you haven’t heard about the oil fields?” Tuzzi asked.

“I have,” Ulrich answered. “I was merely surprised that you knew about them,” and, not to be impolite, added, “You really understood how to keep quiet about it!”

“I’ve known about them for quite some time,” Tuzzi said, flattered. “That this fellow Feuermaul is here this evening is of course Arnheim’s doing, by way of Leinsdorf. Have you read his books, incidentally?”

Ulrich admitted that he had.

“A dyed-in-the-wool pacifist!” Tuzzi said. “And La Drangsal, as my wife calls her, mothers him so ambitiously that she’ll kill for pacifism if she has to, even though it’s not really her line—artists are her line.” Tuzzi paused to consider, then revealed to Ulrich: “Pacifism is the main thing, of course; the oil fields are only a red herring; that’s why they’re pushing Feuermaul, with his
pacifism, to make everyone think: ‘Aha, that’s the red herring!’ and believe that what’s behind it is the oil fields! Neatly done, but much too clever to fool anybody. For if Arnheim has the Galician oil fields and a contract to supply the Army, we naturally have to protect our frontier. We also have to install oil bases for the Navy on the Adriatic, which will upset the Italians. But if we provoke our neighbors this way, the outcry for peace goes up, and so does the peace propaganda, and then when the Czar steps forward with some idea about Perpetual Peace, he’ll find the ground psychologically prepared for it. That’s Arnheim’s real objective!”

“And you’ve something against it?”

“Of course we have nothing against it,” Tuzzi said. “But as you may remember, I’ve already explained to you why there’s nothing so dangerous as peace at any price. We must defend ourselves against the dilettantes!”
“But Arnheim is a munitions maker!” Ulrich objected, smiling.

“Of course he is!” Tuzzi murmured with some exasperation. “For heaven’s sake, how can you be so naive about these things? He’ll have his contract in his pocket. At most, our neighbors will arm too. Mark my words: at the crucial moment, he’ll show his hand as a pacifist! Pacifism is a safe, dependable business for munitions makers; war is a risk!”

“It seems to me the military doesn’t really mean any harm,” Ulrich said, trying to mollify him. “They’re only using the business with Arnheim to bring their artillery up-to-date, nothing more. Today the whole world is only arming for peace, after all, so it only seems right to let the pacifists help.”

“And how do these people imagine that’s to be done?” Tuzzi inquired, ignoring the joke.
“I don’t think they’ve got that far yet; for the present they’re still searching their hearts.”

“Naturally!” Tuzzi agreed crossly, as though this were just what he had expected. “The military ought to stick to thinking about war and leave everything else to the department responsible. But before doing that, these gentlemen with their dilettantism would rather endanger the whole world! I tell you again: Nothing is so dangerous in diplomacy as loose talk about peace! Every time the demand for peace has reached a certain pitch and was no longer to be contained, it’s led straight to war! I can document that for you!”

Now Hofrat Professor Schwung had rid himself of his colleague and turned with great warmth to Ulrich for an introduction to their host. Ulrich obliged with the remark that one might say that this distinguished jurist condemned pacifism in the sphere of
the penal code as ardently as the authoritative Section Chief did in the political arena.

“But good gracious,” Tuzzi protested, laughing, “you’ve misunderstood me entirely!”

And Schwung too, after a moment’s hesitation, was sufficiently reassured to join forces with him, saying that he would not like his view of diminished responsibility to be regarded as in any way bloodthirsty or inhumane.

“Quite the opposite!” he said, spreading his voice in place of his arms like an old actor on the lecture platform. “It is precisely the pacification of the human being that requires us to be strict! May I assume that the Herr Section Chief has heard something about my most recent current efforts in this matter?” And he now turned directly to his host, who had heard nothing about the dispute as to whether the diminished responsibility of an
insane criminal is based exclusively in his ideas or exclusively in his will, and thus hastened all the more politely to agree with everything Schwung said. Schwung, well satisfied with the effect he had produced, then began to praise the serious view of life to which this evening’s gathering gave witness, and reported that he had often overheard in conversations here and there such expressions as “manly severity” and “moral soundness.” “Our culture is far too infested with inferior types and moral imbeciles,” he added by way of his own contribution, and asked: “But what is the real purpose of this evening? As I passed some of the groups, I’ve been struck by how often I’ve heard positively Rousseauistic sentiments about the innate goodness of man.”

Tuzzi, to whom this question was principally addressed, merely smiled, but just then the General came back to Ulrich, and Ulrich, who wanted to give him the slip,
introduced him to Schwung and called him the man best qualified among all those present to answer the question. Stumm von Bordwehr vehemently denied this, but neither Schwung nor even Tuzzi would let him go. Ulrich was already beating a jubilant retreat, when he was grabbed by an old acquaintance, who said:

“My wife and daughter are also here.” It was Bank Director Leo Fischel.

“Hans Sepp has passed his State Exam,” he said. “What do you say to that? All he has to do now is pass one more exam for his doctorate!

We’re all sitting in that corner over there “ He pointed toward the farthest room. “We know too few people here. Nor have we seen anything of you for a long time! Your father, wasn’t it...? Hans Sepp got us the invitation for this evening—my wife was dead set on it—so you see
the fellow isn’t entirely hopeless. They’re semi-officially engaged now, he and Gerda. You probably didn’t know that, did you? But Gerda, you see, that girl, I don’t even know whether she’s in love with him or has just got it into her head that she is. Won’t you come over and join us for a bit?”

“I’ll be along later,” Ulrich promised.

“Please do,” Fischel urged, and fell silent. Then he whispered: “Isn’t that our host? Won’t you introduce me? We haven’t had the opportunity. We don’t know either him or her.”

But when Ulrich made a move in that direction, Fischel held him back. “And how is the great philosopher? What’s he up to?” he asked. “My wife and Gerda are of course mad about him. But what’s this about the oil fields? The word now is that it was a false rumor, but I don’t believe it. They always deny it! You know, it’s the same as when my wife
is annoyed with a maid, then I keep hearing that the maid is untruthful, immoral, impertinent—nothing but defects of character, you see? But when I quietly promise the girl a raise, just to have peace in the house, then her character suddenly disappears. No more talk about character, everything’s suddenly in order, and my wife doesn’t know why. Isn’t it always like that? There’s too much economic probability in those oil fields for the denials to be believed.”

And because Ulrich held his peace, while Fischel wanted to return to his wife as the glorious bearer of inside information, he began once more:

“One has to admit it’s very nice here. But my wife would like to know what all the strange talk is about. And who is this Feuermaul anyway?” he added. “Gerda says he’s a great poet; Hans Sepp says he’s nothing but a careerist who’s taken everyone in!”
Ulrich allowed that the truth probably lay somewhere in between.

“Now, that’s well put!” Fischel said gratefully. “The truth always lies somewhere in between, which everyone forgets nowadays, they’re all so extreme! I keep telling Hans Sepp that everyone’s entitled to his opinions, but the only opinions that count are the ones that enable you to earn a living, because that means that other people appreciate your opinions too!”

There had been an impalpable but important change in Leo Fischel, but Ulrich unfortunately passed up the opportunity to look into it and merely hastened to leave Gerda’s father with the group around Section Chief Tuzzi. Here Stumm von Bordwehr had meanwhile grown eloquent, frustrated at his inability to pin Ulrich down, and so highly charged with things to say that they burst out by the shortest path.
“How to account for this gathering tonight?” he cried, reiterating Hofrat Schwung’s question. “I would assert, in the same judicious spirit in which it was asked: Not at all! I’m not joking, gentlemen,” he went on, not without a touch of pride. “This very afternoon I happened to ask a young lady whom I had to show around the psychiatric clinic of our University what it was she was actually interested in seeing, so we could explain it properly, and she gave me a very witty answer, exceptionally thought-provoking. What she said was: Tf we stop to explain everything, we will never change anything in the world.”

Schwung shook his head in disapproval.

“What she meant by that I don’t really know”—Stumm defended himself—”and I won’t take responsibility for it, but you can’t help feeling there is some truth in it. You see, I am, for instance, indebted to my friend here”—he gave a polite nod in Ulrich’s
direction—“who has so often given His Grace, and thereby the Parallel Campaign too, the benefit of his thoughts, for a great deal of instruction. But what is taking shape here tonight is a certain distaste for instruction. Which brings me back to my first assertion.”

“But isn’t what you want...?” Tuzzi said. “I mean, the word is that colleagues from the War Ministry hope to stimulate a patriotic decision here, a collection of public funds or some such thing, in order to bring our artillery up to strength. Naturally, a mere token demonstration, just to put some pressure on Parliament through public opinion.”

“That is certainly my understanding of some things I’ve heard tonight!” Hofrat Schwung concurred.

“It’s much more complicated, Herr Section Chief,” the General said.
“And what about Dr. Arnheim?” Tuzzi said bluntly. “If I may be quite candid: Are you sure that Arnheim wants nothing more than die Galician oil fields, which are tied up, as it were, with the artillery problem?”

“I can only speak of myself and my part in it, Section Chief,” Stumm said, warding him off, then repeated: “And it’s all much more complicated!”

“Naturally it’s more complicated,” Tuzzi said, smiling.

“Of course we need the guns,” the General said, warming to the subject, “and it may indeed be advantageous to work with Arnheim along the lines you suggest. But I repeat that I can only speak from my point of view as a cultural officer, and as such I put it to you: What’s the use of cannons without the spirit to go with them?’ “

“And why, in that case, was so much importance attached to bringing in Herr
Feuermaul?” Tuzzi asked ironically. “That is defeatism pure and simple!”

“Permit me to disagree,” the General said firmly, “but that is the spirit of the times! Nowadays the spirit of the times has two separate currents. His Grace—he’s standing over there with the Minister; I’ve just come from talking with them—His Grace, for instance, says that the call has to go out for action, that’s what the times demand. And in fact people are much less enchanted with the great idea of humanity than they were, say, a hundred years ago. On the other hand, there is of course something to be said for the point of view of loving mankind, but about that His Grace says that those who do not want what is good for them must in certain circumstances be forced to accept it! So His Grace is in favor of the one current, but without turning his back on the other.”
“I don’t quite follow that,” Professor Schwung demurred.

“It’s not easy to follow,” Stumm readily admitted. “Suppose we go back to the point that I see two currents at work in the mind of our period. The one states that man is good by nature, when he is left to himself, as it were—”

“How do you mean good?” Schwung interrupted. “Who can possibly think in such naive terms nowadays? We’re not living in the world of eighteenth-century idealism!”

“Well, I don’t know about that.” The General sounded rather nettled. “Just think of the pacifists, the vegetarians, the enemies of violence, the back-to-nature people, the anti-intellectuals, the conscientious objectors—I can’t call them all to mind off-hand—and all the people who put their faith in mankind, as it were; they all form one big current. But if you prefer,” he added in that
obliging way he had that made him so likable, “we can just as easily start out from the opposite point of view. Suppose we start with the fact that people must be regimented because they never do the right thing of their own accord; we might find it easier to agree on that. The masses need a strong hand, they need leaders who can be tough with them and don’t just talk; in a word, they need to be guided by the spirit of action. Human society consists, as it were, of only a small number of volunteers, who also have the necessary training, and of millions without any higher ambitions, who serve only because they must. Isn’t that so, roughly speaking? And because experience has gradually forced us to recognize this fact even here in our campaign, the first current—for what I’ve just been talking about is the second current—the first current, I say, is alarmed at the possibility that the great idea of love and faith in mankind might get lost altogether. Hence
there were forces at work, you see, that have sent Feuermaul into our midst to save what can still be saved at the eleventh hour. Which makes it all much easier to understand than we first thought, no?”

“And what’s going to happen then?” Tuzzi wanted to know.

“Nothing, I imagine,” Stumm replied. “We’ve had lots of currents in the campaign by now.”

“But there’s an intolerable contradiction between your two currents,” protested Professor Schwung, who as a jurist could not bear such ambiguity.

“Not if you look at it closely,” Stumm countered. “The one current is of course also in favor of loving mankind, provided you change it first by force. They differ on a technicality, you might say.”
Now Director Fischel spoke up: “As a latecomer to the discussion, I’m afraid I don’t have a complete picture. But if I may say so, it seems to me that respect for humanity is basically on a higher level than its opposite. This evening I’ve heard some incredible sentiments—not representative of this gathering, I’m sure, but still—credible sentiments about people of different convictions and above all of differing nationalities.”

With his chin clean-shaven between muttonchop whiskers and his tilted pince-nez, he looked like an English lord upholding the freedom of humanity and free trade; he did not mention that the disreputable sentiments in question were those of Hans Sepp, his prospective son-in-law, who was in his element in “the second current” of our times.

“Savage sentiments?” the General asked helpfully.
“Extraordinarily savage,” Fischel confirmed.

“Could they have been talking about ‘toughening up? It’s easy to misconstrue that kind of talk,” Stumm said.

“No, no,” Fischel exclaimed. “Utterly nihilistic, positively revolutionary views! Perhaps you’re out of touch with our rebellious younger generation, Herr Major General. I’m surprised that such people are admitted here at all.”

“Revolutionary views?” Stumm asked, not at all pleased, and smiling in as chilly a manner as his plump face would allow. “I’m afraid I must admit, Herr Direktor, that I’m by no means an out-and-out opponent of revolutionary views. Short of an actual revolution, of course. There’s often a good deal of idealism in that sort of thing. And as for admitting them here, our campaign, which is intended to draw the whole country together,
has no right to turn away constructive forces, in whatever mode they may express themselves!”

Leo Fischel was silent. Professor Schwung was not much interested in the views of a dignitary who was outside the ranks of the civilian bureaucracy. Tuzzi had been dreaming: “first current...second current.” It reminded him of two similar expressions, “first reservoir...second reservoir,” but he could not remember them precisely, or the conversation with Ulrich in which they had come up; yet it stirred in him an incomprehensible jealousy of his wife, which was connected to this harmless General by intangible links he could not begin to disentangle. Awakened to reality by the silence, he wanted to show the representative of the military that he was not to be sidetracked by digressions.

“All in all, General,” he began, “the military party wants—”
“But, my dear Section Chief, there is no military party!” Stumm immediately broke in. “People are always talking about a military party, but by its very nature the military is above party!”

“Let’s say the military hierarchy, then,” Tuzzi replied, chafing at the interruption. “You were saying that what the army needs is not just guns but the spirit to go with them; by what spirit will you be pleased to have your guns loaded?”

“That’s going too far, Section Chief!” Stumm protested. “It all started with my being asked to explain tonight’s gathering to these gentlemen, and I said one really couldn’t explain anything; that’s all I’m taking my stand on! If the spirit of the times really has two such currents as I have described, neither of them favors ‘explanation’; today we favor instinctual energies, dark forces in the blood, and the like. I certainly
don’t go along with that, but there’s something in it!”

At these words Fischel began to fume again, finding it immoral for the military to even consider making terms with the anti-Semites in order to get their guns.

“Come now, Herr Director,” Stumm tried to pacify him. “In the first place, a little anti-Semitism more or less hardly matters when people are already so anti to begin with: the Germans anti the Czechs and the Magyars, the Czechs anti the Magyars and the Germans, and so on, everybody against everybody else. Second, if anyone has always been international, it has been the Austrian Army Officers Corps: you need only look at the many Italian, French, Scottish, and Lord knows what other names; we even have an Infantry General von Kohn, he’s a corps commandant in Olmutz!”
“All the same, I’m afraid you’ve bitten off more than you can chew,” Tuzzi broke in on this diversion. “You’re both internationalist and war-minded, but you want to deal with the nationalist movements and the pacifists as well: that’s almost more than a professional diplomat could manage. Conducting military politics with pacifism is the task confronting the greatest diplomatic experts in Europe at this moment!”

“But we’re not at all the ones who are playing politics!” Stumm protested again, in a tone of weary complaint over so much misunderstanding. “His Grace simply wanted to give capital and culture one last chance to join forces—that’s the whole reason for this evening. Of course, if the civilian sector can’t come to some kind of accord, we would find ourselves in a position—”

“In what position? That would be interesting to hear, indeed!” Tuzzi cried, a bit too eager to fan the flame.
“Well, in a difficult position, of course,” Stumm said with caution and modesty.

While the four gentlemen were engaged in this discussion, Ulrich had long since unobtrusively slipped away to find Gerda, giving a wide berth to the group around His Grace and the Minister to avoid a summons from that quarter.

He caught sight of her from some way off, sitting by the wall beside her mother, who was gazing stiffly into the salon. Hans Sepp was standing at her other side, with an uneasy, defiant look. Since her last miserable encounter with Ulrich, Gerda had grown even thinner, looking more barren of feminine charms the closer he came, and yet, by the same measure, more banefully attractive, her head on those slack shoulders standing out against the room. When she caught sight of Ulrich her face flushed scarlet, only to turn paler than ever, and she made an involuntary movement with her upper body like
someone with a sharp pain in the heart who is somehow unable to press a hand to the spot. He had a fleeting vision of the scene when, wildly intent on his animal advantage in having aroused her physically, he had abused her confusion. There that body was sitting, visible to him beneath her dress, receiving orders from her humiliated will to hold itself proudly high, but trembling the while. Gerda was not angry at him, he could see, but she wanted to be done with him at all costs. He unobtrusively slowed down, trying to savor this to the full, and this sensuous tarrying seemed in keeping with the relationship between these two people, who could never quite come together. When Ulrich was very close to her, aware of nothing now but the quivering in the uplifted face awaiting him, he felt in passing something weightless, like a shadow or a gust of warmth; and he perceived Bonadea, who had passed by him in silence but hardly without intent, and in
all probability had been following him. He bowed to her. The world is beautiful if one takes it as it is: For a second the naïve contrast between the voluptuous and the meager, as expressed in these two women, loomed as large to him as that between pasture and rock at the timberhne, and he felt himself stepping down from the Parallel Campaign, even though with a guilty smile. When Gerda saw this smile slowly sinking down toward her outstretched hand, her eyelids quivered.

At this moment Diotima noticed that Arnheim was taking young Feuermaul to meet His Grace and the War Minister, and, skilled tactician that she was, she thwarted all encounters by ordering the servants in with trays of refreshments.
A COMPARISON

Such conversations as those just reported went on by the dozen, and they all had something in common, which is not easy to describe but that cannot be passed over if one lacks Privy Councillor Meseritscher’s flair for giving a dazzling account of a party just by making lists: who was there, wearing what, and saying this and that—all those things that are, in fact, considered by many to be the truest narrative art. So Friedel Feuermaul was not really being a miserable toady, which he never was, but merely finding the right word for the time and place when he said of Meseritscher, while standing in front of him: “He’s really the Homer of our
era! No, I mean it,” he added, when Meseritscher tried to brush it off. “That epic, imperturbable ‘and* with which you link all persons and events strikes me as having real greatness!” He had got hold of Meseritscher because the editor of the *Parliamentary and Social Gazette* had been reluctant to leave without paying his respects to Arnheim; but this still did not get Feuermaul’s name into print “among those present.”

Without going into the finer distinctions between idiots and cretins, suffice it to say that an idiot of a certain degree is not up to forming the concept “parents,” even though he has no trouble with the idea of “father and mother.” This same simple additive, “and,” was Meseritschers device for relating social phenomena to one another. Another point about idiots is that in the basic concreteness of their thinking they have something that is generally agreed to appeal to the emotions in a mysterious way; and
poets appeal directly to the emotions in very much the same way, insofar as their minds run to palpable realities. And so, when Friedel Feuermaul addressed Meseritscher as a poet, he could just as well—that is, out of the same obscure, hovering feeling, which, in his case, was also tantamount to a sudden illumination—have called him an idiot, in a way that would have had considerable significance for all mankind. For the element common to both is a mental condition that cannot be spanned by far-reaching concepts, or refined by distinctions and abstractions, a mental state of the crudest pattern, expressed most clearly in the way it limits itself to the simplest of coordinating conjunctions, the helplessly additive “and,” which for those of meager mental capacity replaces more intricate relationships; and it may be said that our world, regardless of all its intellectual riches, is in a mental condition akin to idiocy; indeed, there is no avoiding this
conclusion if one tries to grasp as a totality what is going on in the world.

Not that those who are the first to proclaim or who come to share such a view have a monopoly on intelligence! It simply doesn’t depend in the least on the individual, or on the pursuits he is engaged in—and which were indeed being engaged in, with more or with less shrewdness, by all those who had come to Diotima’s on this evening. For when General Stumm von Bordwehr, for instance, during the pause caused by the arrival of refreshments, got into a conversation with His Grace in the course of which he argued in a genially obstinate and respectfully daring tone: “With all due respect, Your Grace, permit me to disagree most strongly; there is more than mere presumption in people who are proud of their race; there is also something appealingly aristocratic!” he knew precisely what he meant by these words, but not so precisely what he conveyed
by them, for such civilities are wrapped in an extra something that is like a pair of thick gloves in which one must struggle to pick up a single match out of a full box. And Leo Fischel, who had not budged from Stumm's side after he noticed that the General was moving impatiently toward His Grace, added:

“People must be judged not by their race but on their merit!”

What His Grace replied was logical; disregarding Director Fischel, who had only just been introduced to him, he answered Stumm:

“What does the middle class need race for? They've always been up in arms about a court chamberlain needing sixteen noble ancestors, and now what are they doing themselves? Trying to ape it, and exaggerating it to boot! More than sixteen ancestors is sheer snobbery!” For His Grace was upset, and therefore it was quite logical for him to
express himself in this fashion. Man is indisputably endowed with reason; the problem is only how he uses his reason in the company of others.

His Grace was vexed by the intrusion of “national” elements into the Parallel Campaign, although he himself had brought it about. Various political and social considerations had driven him to it; he himself recognized only “the national populace.” His political friends had advised him: “There’s no harm in listening to what they have to say about race and purity and blood—who takes what anyone says seriously anyway?”

“But they’re talking about human beings as if they were beasts!” Count Leinsdorf had objected; he had a Catholic view of human dignity, which prevented him from seeing that the principles of the chicken farm and of horse breeding could be equally well applied to God’s children, even though he was a great landowner. To this his friends
had replied: “Come now, you’ve no need to brood about it. And anyhow it’s probably better than their talking about the good of mankind and all that revolutionary drivel from abroad, as they’ve been doing.” His Grace had finally seen the light on this point. But His Grace was also vexed because this fellow Feuermaul, whom he had forced Diotima to invite, was merely bringing fresh confusion into the Parallel Campaign and was a disappointment to him. Baroness Wayden had praised Feuermaul to the skies, and he had finally yielded to her insistence. “You’re quite right,” Leinsdorf had conceded. “The way things are going just now, we can easily be accused of Germanizing. And there may be no harm, as you say, in inviting a poet who says that we have to love all mankind. But don’t you see, I can’t really spring that on Frau Tuzzi!” But the Baroness would not give an inch and must have found new and effective arguments, for at the end of
their conversation Leinsdorf had promised to make Diotima invite Feuermaul. “Not that I like doing it,” he had said, “but a strong hand does need the right word to get its message across; I must agree with you there. And it’s also true that things have been moving too slowly recently; we haven’t had the right spirit!”

But now he was dissatisfied. His Grace was far from thinking that other people were stupid, even if he did think himself more intelligent than they were, and he could not comprehend why all these intelligent people taken together made such a poor impression on him. Indeed, life as a whole made this impression on him, as though all the intelligence in individuals and in official institutions—among which he was known to count religion and science—somehow added up to a state of total unaccountability. New ideas that one had not heard of before kept popping up, aroused passions, and then
vanished again after running their course; people were always chasing after some leader or another, and stumbling from one superstition to the next, cheering His Majesty one day and giving the most disgusting incendiary speeches in Parliament the next, and none of it ever amounted to anything in the end! If this could be miniaturized by a factor of a million and reduced, as it were, to the dimensions of a single head, the result would be precisely the image of the unaccountable, forgetful, ignorant conduct and the demented hopping around that had always been Count Leinsdorf’s image of a lunatic, although he had hitherto had little occasion to think about it. Glumly he stood here now, in the midst of the men surrounding him, and reflected that the whole idea of the Parallel Campaign had been to bring out the truth behind all this, and he found himself unable to formulate some vague idea about faith that was there in his mind; all he could
feel was something as pleasantly soothing as the shade of a high wall—a church wall, presumably.

“Funny,” he said to Ulrich, giving up his thought after a while. “If you look at all this with some detachment, it somehow reminds you of starlings—you know, the way they flock together in autumn in the fruit trees.”

Ulrich had come back after seeing Gerda. Their conversation had not lived up to its promising beginning; Gerda had not managed to utter more than brief, laborious answers hacked off from something that stuck like a hard wedge in her breast, while Hans Sepp talked all the more; he had set himself up as her watchdog and let it be known at once that he was not to be intimidated by his decadent surroundings.

“You don’t know the great racial theorist Bremshuber?” he had asked Ulrich.

“Where does he live?” Ulrich had asked.
“In Schärding on the Laa,” Hans Sepp had told him.

‘What does he do?’ Ulrich had asked.

“What difference does that make?” Hans had said. “New people are coming to the top! He’s a druggist.”

Ulrich had said to Gerda: “I hear you’re now formally engaged.”

And Gerda had replied: “Bremshuber demands the ruthless suppression of all alien races; that’s surely less cruel than toleration and contempt!” Her lip had trembled again as she forced out this sentence that was so badly patched together from broken bits of thought.

Ulrich had merely looked at her and shaken his head. “I don’t understand that,” he had said, holding out his hand to say good-bye, and now, standing beside
Leinsdorf, he felt as innocent as a star in the infinity of space.

“But if you don’t regard it with detachment”—Count Leinsdorf slowly continued his new thought, after a pause—”then it keeps circling around in your head like a dog trying to catch its tail! Now I’ve let my friends have their way with me,” he added, “and I’ve let the Baroness Wayden have her way, and if you go around listening to what we’re saying here, each separate bit sounds quite sensible, but in the nobler spiritual context we’re looking for, it sounds really rambling and incoherent!”

Around the War Minister and Feuermaul, whom Arnheim had brought over, a group had formed in which Feuermaul was holding forth, loving all mankind, while a second, more distant group was collecting around Arnheim, who had moved away; in it Ulrich saw Hans Sepp and Gerda some while later. Feuermaul could be heard
proclaiming: “We don’t learn about life by studying it in books, but through kindness. We must believe in life!” Frau Professor Drangsal stood ramrod straight behind him and pressed his point home by saying:

“After all, Goethe was no Ph.D.!”

In her eyes, Feuermaul bore a strong resemblance to Goethe. The War Minister also held himself very straight and smiled tenaciously, as he was accustomed to doing when graciously acknowledging the salute of parading troops.

Count Leinsdorf asked Ulrich: “Tell me, who is this Feuermaul?”

“His father owns some factories in Hungary,” Ulrich answered. “I think it has something to do with phosphorus, since none of the workers lives past forty. Occupational disease: necrosis of the bone.”
“Hmm, I see, but the son?” Leinsdorf was unmoved by the factory workers’ fate.

“He was slated to go to the university; law, I believe. The father is a self-made man, and he took it hard that his son was not interested in studying.”

“Why wasn’t he interested in studying?” Count Leinsdorf persisted; he was being very thorough today.

“Who knows?” Ulrich shrugged. “Probably *Fathers and Sons*. When the father is poor, the sons love money; when Papa has money, the sons love mankind. Hasn’t Your Grace heard about the father-son problem in our day?”

“Yes, I’ve heard about it. But why is Arnheim playing the patron to this young man? Has it anything to do with those oil fields?”
“Your Grace knows about that?” Ulrich exclaimed.

“Of course; I know everything,” Leinsdorf said patiently. “But what I still don’t understand is this: That people should love each other, and that it takes a firm hand in government to make them do it, is nothing new. So why should it suddenly be a case of either/or?”

Ulrich answered: ‘Your Grace has always wanted a spontaneous rallying cry arising from the entire nation; this is the form it’s bound to take!”

“Oh, that’s not true!” Count Leinsdorf disagreed spiritedly, but before he could go on they were interrupted by Stumm von Bordwehr, coming from the Arnheim group with a burning question for Ulrich.

“Excuse me for interrupting, Your Grace,” he said. “But tell me,” he turned to Ulrich, “can one really claim that people are
motivated entirely by their feelings and never by their reason?”

Ulrich stared at him blankly.

“There’s one of those Marxists over there,” Stumm explained, “who seems to be claiming that a person’s economic substructure entirely determines his ideological superstructure. And there’s a psychoanalyst denying it and insisting that the ideological superstructure is entirely the product of man’s instinctual substructure.”

“It’s not that simple,” Ulrich said, hoping to wriggle out of it.

“That’s just what I always say! It didn’t do me a bit of good, though,” the General answered promptly, keeping his eyes fixed on Ulrich. But now Leinsdorf entered the discussion.

“Now there, you see,” he said to Ulrich, “is something rather like the question I was
about to raise myself. No matter whether the substructure is economic or sexual, well, what I wanted to say before is: Why are people so unreliable in their superstructure? You know the common saying that the world is crazy; it is getting all too easy to believe it’s true!”

“That’s the psychology of the masses, Your Grace,” the learned General interposed again. “So far as it applies to the masses it makes sense to me. The masses are moved only by their instincts, and of course that means by those instincts most individuals have in common; that’s logical. That’s to say, it’s illogical, of course. The masses are illogical; they only use logic for window dressing. What they really let themselves be guided by is simply and solely suggestion! Give me the newspapers, the radio, the film industry, and maybe a few other avenues of cultural communication, and within a few years—as my friend Ulrich once said—I
promise I’ll turn people into cannibals! That’s precisely why mankind needs strong leadership, as Your Grace knows far better than I do. But that even highly cultivated individuals are not motivated by logic in some circumstances is something I find it hard to believe, though Arnheim says so.”

What on earth could Ulrich have offered his friend by way of support in this scattered debate? like a bunch of weeds an angler catches on his hook instead of a fish, the General’s question was baited with a tangled bunch of theories. Does a man follow only his feelings, doing, feeling, even thinking only that to which he is moved by unconscious currents of desire, or even by the milder breeze of pleasure, as we now assume? Or does he not rather act on the basis of reasoned thought and will, as we also widely assume? Does he primarily follow certain instincts, such as the sexual instinct, as we assume? Or is it above all not the sexual
instinct that dominates, but rather the psychological effect of economic conditions, as we also assume today? A creature as complicated as man can be seen from many different angles, and whatever one chooses as the axis in the theoretical picture one gets only partial truths, from whose interpretation the level of truth slowly rises higher—or does it? Whenever a partial truth has been regarded as the only valid one, there has been a high price to pay. On the other hand, this partial truth would hardly have been discovered if it had not been overestimated. In this fashion the history of truth and the history of feeling are variously linked, but that of feeling remains obscure. Indeed, to Ulrich’s way of thinking it was no history at all, but a wild jumble. Funny, for instance, that the religious ideas, meaning the passionate ideas, of the Middle Ages about the nature of man were based on a strong faith in man’s reason and his will, while today many
scholars, whose only passion is smoking too much, consider the emotions as the basis for all human activity. Such were the thoughts going through Ulrich’s head, and he naturally did not feel like saying anything in response to the oratory of Stumm, who was in any case not waiting for an answer but only cooling off a bit before returning to Arnheim’s group.

“Count Leinsdorf,” Ulrich said mildly. “Do you remember my old suggestion to establish a General Secretariat for all those problems that need the soul as much as the mind for a solution?”

“Indeed I do,” Leinsdorf replied. “I remember telling His Eminence about it, and his hearty laugh. But he did say that you had come too late!”

“And yet it’s the very thing you were feeling the lack of, Your Grace,” Ulrich continued. “You notice that the world no longer
remembers today what it wanted yesterday, that its mood keeps changing for no perceptible reason, that it’s in a constant uproar and never resolves anything, and if we imagined all this chaos of humanity brought together in a single head, we’d have a really unmistakable case of recognizable pathological symptoms that one would count as mental insufficiency....”

“Absolutely right!” cried Stumm von Bordwehr, whose pride in everything he had learned that afternoon had welled up again. “That’s precisely the configuration of...well, I can’t think of the name of that mental disease at the moment, but that’s it exactly!”

“No,” Ulrich said with a smile. “It’s surely not the description of any specific disease; the difference between a normal person and an insane one is precisely that the normal person has all the diseases of the mind, while the madman has only one!”
“Brilliantly put!” Stumm and Leinsdorf cried as with one voice, though in slightly different words, and then added in the same way: “But what does that mean exactly?”

“It means this,” Ulrich stated. “If I understand by morality the ordering of all those interrelations that include feeling, imagination, and the like, each of these takes its relative position from the others and in that way attains some sort of stability; but all of them together, in moral terms, don’t get beyond the state of delusion!”

“Come, that’s going too far,” Count Leinsdorf said good-naturedly. And the General said: “But surely every man has to have his own morals; you can’t order anyone to prefer a cat to a dog...?”

“Can one prescribe it, Your Grace?” Ulrich asked intently.

“Well, in the old days,” Count Leinsdorf said diplomatically, although he had been
challenged in his religious conviction that “the truth” existed in every sphere. “It was easier in the old days. But today...?”

“Then that leaves us in a permanent state of religious war,” Ulrich pointed out.

“You call that a religious war?”

“What else?”

“Hmm...not bad. Quite a good characterization of modern life. Incidentally, I always knew that there’s not such a bad Catholic secretly tucked away inside you.”

“I’m a very bad one,” Ulrich said. “I don’t believe that God has been here yet, but that He is still to come. But only if we pave the way for Him more than we have so far!”

His Grace rejected this with the dignified words: “That’s over my head.”
A GREAT EVENT IS IN THE MAKING. BUT NO ONE HAS NOTICED

The General, however, cried: Tm afraid I must get back to His Excellency the Minister at once, but you absolutely will have to explain all that to me—I won’t let you off! I’ll join you gentlemen again soon, if I may.”

Leinsdorf gave the impression of wanting to say something—his mind was clearly hard at work—but he and Ulrich had hardly been left alone for a moment when they found themselves surrounded by people borne toward them by the constant circulation of the guests and the charisma of His Grace. There could, of course, be no more talk about what Ulrich had just said, and no
one besides him was giving it a thought, when an arm slipped into his from behind; it was Agathe.

“Have you found grounds for my defense yet?” she asked in a maliciously caressing tone.

Ulrich took a grip on her arm and drew her aside from the crowd around them.

“Can’t we go home?” Agathe asked.

“No,” Ulrich said. “I can’t leave yet.”

“I suppose,” she teased him, “that times to come, for whose sake you’re keeping yourself pure here, won’t let you go?”

Ulrich pressed her arm.

“Isn’t it greatly in my favor that I don’t belong here but in jail?” she whispered in his ear.

They looked for a place where they could be alone. The party had reached the
boiling point and was impelling the guests to constantly circulate. On the whole, however, the twofold grouping was still distinguishable: around the Minister of War the talk was of peace and love, and around Arnheim, at the moment, about how the German love of peace flourished best in the shadow of German power.

Arnheim lent a benevolent ear to this, because he never snubbed an honest opinion and was especially interested in new ones. He was worried that the deal for the oil fields might run into opposition in Parliament. He was certain of the unavoidable opposition of the Slavic contingent, and hoped he could count on the pro-German faction to support him. On the Ministry level all seemed to be going well, except for a certain antagonism in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but he did not regard this as particularly significant. Tomorrow he was going to Budapest.
There were plenty of hostile “observers” around him and other leading personages. They were easily spotted in that they always said yes to everything and were unfailingly polite, while the others tended to have different opinions.

Tuzzi was trying to win one of them over by asserting: “What they’re saying doesn’t mean a thing. It never means anything!” His listener, a member of Parliament, believed him. But this did not change his mind, made up before he had come, that something fishy was going on here.

His Grace, on the other hand, spoke up on behalf of the evening’s seriousness by saying to another skeptic: “My dear sir, ever since 1848 even the revolutions have been brought about by nothing more than a lot of talk!”

It would be wrong to regard such differences as no more than acceptable variants on
the otherwise usual monotony of life; and yet this error, with all its grave consequences, occurs almost as frequently as the expression “It’s a matter of feeling,” without which our mental economy would be unthinkable. This indispensable phrase divides what must be in life from what can be.

“It sets apart,” Ulrich said to Agathe, “the given order of things from a private, personal preserve. It separates what has been rationalized from what is held to be irrational. As commonly used, it is an admission that we are forced to be humane on major counts, but being humane on minor counts is suspiciously arbitrary. We think life would be a prison if we were not free to choose between wine or water, religion or atheism, but nobody believes in the least that we have any real option in matters of feeling; on the contrary, we draw a line, ambiguous though it may be, between legitimate and illegitimate feelings.”
The feelings between Ulrich and Agathe were of the illegitimate land, although they did no more than talk about the party as, still arm in arm, they looked in vain for a private corner, while experiencing a wild and unacknowledged joy in being reunited after their estrangement. By contrast, the choice between loving all one’s fellow human beings, or first annihilating some of them, obviously involved doubly legitimate feelings, or it would not have been so eagerly debated in Diotima’s house and in the presence of His Grace, even though it also split the company into two spiteful parties. Ulrich maintained that invention of “a matter of feeling” had rendered the worst possible service to the cause of feeling, and as he undertook to describe to his sister the curious impression this evening’s affair had awakened in him, he soon found himself saying things that unintentionally took up where their talk of the
morning had broken off and were apparently intended to justify it.

“I hardly know where to start,” he said, “without boring you. May I tell you what I understand by ‘morality’?”

“Please do,” Agathe said.

“Morality is regulation of conduct within a society, beginning with regulation of its inner impulses, that is, feelings and thoughts.”

“That’s a lot of progress in a few hours!” Agathe replied with a laugh. “This morning you were still saying you didn’t know what morality was!”

“Of course I don’t. That doesn’t stop me from giving you a dozen explanations. The oldest reason for it is that God revealed the order of life to us in all its details....”

“That would be the best,” Agathe said.
“But the most probable,” Ulrich said emphatically, “is that morality, like every other form of order, arises through force and violence! A group of people that has seized power simply imposes on the rest those rules and principles that will secure their power. Morality thereby tends to favor those who brought it to power. At the same time, it sets an example in so doing. And at the same time reactions set in that cause it to change—this is of course too complicated to be described briefly, and while it by no means happens without thought, but then again not by means of thought, either, but rather empirically, what you get in the end is an infinite network that seems to span everything as independently as God’s firmament. Now, everything relates to this self-contained circle, but this circle relates to nothing. In other words: Everything is moral, but morality itself is not!”
“How charming of morality,” Agathe said. “But do you know that I encountered a good person today?”

The change of subject took Ulrich by surprise, but when Agathe began telling him of her meeting with Lindner, he first tried to find a place for it in his train of thought. “You can find good people here by the dozen too,” he said, “but I’ll tell you why the bad people are here as well, if you’ll let me go on.”

As they talked they gradually edged their way out of the throng and reached the anteroom, and Ulrich had to think where they might turn for refuge: Diotima’s bedroom occurred to him, and also Rachel’s little room, but he did not want to set foot in either of them again, so he and Agathe remained for the time being among the unpeopled coats that were hanging there. Ulrich could not find a way to pick up the thread. “I really ought to start again from the
beginning,” he said, with an impatient, helpless gesture. Then suddenly he said:

“You don’t want to know whether you’ve done something good or bad; you’re uneasy because you do both without a solid reason!”

Agathe nodded.

He had taken both her hands in his.

The matte sheen of his sister’s skin, with its fragrance of plants unknown to him, rising before his eyes from the low neckline of her gown, lost for a moment all earthly connection. The motion of the blood pulsed from one hand into the other. A deep moat from some other world seemed to enclose them both in a nowhere world of their own.

He suddenly could not find the ideas to characterize it; he could not even get hold of those that had often served him before: “Let’s not act on the impulse of the moment
but act out of the condition that lasts to the end.” “In such a way that it takes us to the center from which one cannot return to take anything back.” “Not from the periphery and its constantly changing conditions, but out of the one, immutable happiness.” Such phrases did come to mind, and he might well have used them if it had only been as conversation. But in the direct immediacy with which they were to be applied to this very moment between him and his sister, it was suddenly impossible. It left him helplessly agitated. But Agathe understood him clearly. And she should have been happy that for the first time the shell encasing her “hard brother” had cracked, exposing what was inside, like an egg that has fallen to the floor. To her surprise, however, her feelings this time were not quite ready to fall into step with his. Between morning and evening lay her curious encounter with Lindner, and although this man had merely aroused her wonder
and curiosity, even this tiny grain sufficed to keep the unending mirroring of reclusive love from coming into play.

Ulrich felt it in her hands even before she said anything—and Agathe made no answer.

He guessed that this unexpected self-denial had something to do with the experience he had just had to listen to her describing. Abashed and confused by the rejection of his unanswered feelings, he said, shaking his head:

“It’s annoying how much you seem to expect from the goodness of such a man!”

“I suppose it is,” Agathe admitted.

He looked at her. He realized that this encounter meant more to his sister than the attentions paid to her by other men since she had been under his protection. He even knew this man slightly. Lindner was a public figure
of sorts; he was the man who, at the very first session of the Parallel Campaign, had made the brief speech, received with embarrassing silence, hailing the “historical moment” or something similar: awkward, sincere, and pointless....On impulse Ulrich glanced around, but he did not recall seeing the man tonight, for he had not been asked again, as Ulrich knew. He must have come across him elsewhere from time to time, probably at some learned society, and have read one or another of his publications, for as he concentrated his memory, ultramicroscopic traces of images from the past condensed like a repulsive viscous drop into his verdict: “That dreary ass! The more anyone wants to be taken seriously, the less one can take such a man seriously, any more than Professor Hagauer!” So he said to Agathe.

Agathe met it with silence. She even pressed his hand.
He felt: There is something quite contradictory here, but there’s no stopping it.

At this point people came into the anteroom, and the siblings drew slightly apart.

“Shall I take you back in?” Ulrich asked.

Agathe said no and looked around for an escape.

It suddenly occurred to Ulrich that the only way they could get away from the other guests was by retreating to the kitchen. Three batteries of glasses were being filled and trays loaded with cakes. The cook was bustling about with great zeal; Rachel and Soliman were waiting to be loaded up, standing apart and motionless and not whispering to each other as they used to do on such occasions. Little Rachel dropped a curtsy as they came in, Soliman merely saluted with his dark eyes, and Ulrich said: “It’s too stuffy in there; can we get something to drink here?”
He sat down with Agathe on the window seat and put a glass and a plate down for show so that in case anyone should see them it would look as if two old friends of the family were having a private chat. When they were seated, he said with a little sigh: “So it’s merely a matter of feeling whether one finds such a Professor Lindner good or insufferable?”

Agathe was concentrating on unwrapping a piece of candy.

“Which is to say,” Ulrich went on, “that the feeling is neither true nor false. Feeling has remained a private matter! It remains at the mercy of suggestion, fantasy, or persuasion. You and I are no different from those people in there. Do you know what these people want?”

“No. But does it matter?”
“Perhaps it does. They are forming two parties, each of which is as right or as wrong as the other.”

Agathe said she could not help thinking that it was better to believe in human goodness than only in guns and politics, even if the manner of the belief was absurd.

‘What’s he like, this man you met?’

“Oh, that’s impossible to say. He’s good!” his sister answered with a laugh.

“You can no more depend on what looks good to you than on what looks good to Leinsdorf,” Ulrich responded testily.

Both their faces were tense with excitement and laughter; the easy flow of humorous civility blocked deeper countercurrents. Rachel sensed it at the roots of her hair, under her little cap, but she was feeling so miserable herself that her perception was much dimmer than it used to be, like a
memory of better days. The lovely curve of her cheeks was a shade hollow, the black blaze of her eyes dulled with discouragement. Had Ulrich been in a mood to compare her beauty with that of his sister, he would have been bound to notice that Rachel’s former dark brilliance had crumbled like a piece of coal that had been run over by a heavy truck. But he had no eyes for her now. She was pregnant, and no one knew it except Soliman, who showed no understanding of the disastrous reality and responded with nothing but childish romantic schemes.

“For centuries now,” Ulrich went on, “the world has known truth in thinking and accordingly, to a certain degree, rational freedom of thought. But during this same time the emotional life has had neither the strict discipline of truth nor any freedom of movement. For every moral system has, in its time, regulated the feelings, and rigidly too, but only insofar as certain basic
principles and feelings were needed for whatever action it favored; the rest was left to individual whim, to the private play of emotions, to the random efforts of art, and to academic debate. So morality has adapted our feelings to the needs of moral systems and meanwhile neglected to develop them, even though it depends on feelings: morality is, after all, the order and integrity of the emotional life.” Here he broke off. He felt Rachel’s fascinated stare on his animated face, even if she could no longer quite muster her former enthusiasm for the concerns of important people.

“I suppose it’s funny how I go on talking about morality even here in the kitchen,” he said in embarrassment.

Agathe was gazing at him intently and thoughtfully. He leaned over closer to his sister and added softly, with a flickering smile: “But it’s only another way of expressing an
impassioned state that takes up arms against the whole world!"

Without intending to, he was reenacting their confrontation of the morning, in which he had played the unpleasant role of the lecturing schoolmaster. He could not help it. For him morality was neither conformism nor philosophic wisdom, but living the infinite fullness of possibilities. He believed in morality’s capacity for intensification, in stages of moral experience, and not merely, as most people do, in stages of moral understanding, as if it were something cut-and-dried for which people were just not pure enough. He believed in morality without believing in any specific moral system. Morality is generally understood to be a sort of police regulations for keeping life in order, and since life does not obey even these, they come to look as if they were really impossible to live up to and accordingly, in this sorry way, not really an ideal either. But morality
must not be reduced to this level. Morality is imagination. This was what he wanted to make Agathe see. And his second point was: Imagination is not arbitrary. Once the imagination is left to caprice, there is a price to pay.

The words twitched in his mouth. He was on the verge of bringing up the neglected difference between the way in which various historical periods have developed the rational mind in their own fashion and the way they have kept the moral imagination static and closed off, also in their own fashion. He was on the verge of talking about this because it results in a line that rises, despite all skepticism, more or less steadily through all of history's transformations, representing the rational mind and its patterns, and contrasting with a mound of broken shards of feelings, ideas, and potentials of life that were heaped up in layers just the way they were when they came into being, as eternal
side issues, and that were always discarded. And also because a further result is that this finally adds up to any number of possibilities for forming an opinion one way or another, as soon as they are extended into the realm of principles; but that there is never a possibility of bringing them together. And because it follows that the various opinions lash out at each other since they have no way of communicating. And because it follows, finally, that the emotional life of mankind slops back and forth like water in an unsteady tub. Ulrich had an idea that had been haunting him all evening, an old idea of his, incidentally, but everything that had happened this evening had somehow simply confirmed it, and he wanted to show Agathe where her error lay and how it could be put right, if everyone agreed. Actually, it was only his painful intention to prove that one could not, on the whole, even trust the discoveries of one’s own imagination.
Agathe now said, with a little sigh, as a hard-pressed woman gets in one last, quick defensive move before surrendering:

“So one has to do everything ‘on principle’ is that it?”

And she looked at him, responding to his smile.

But he answered: “Yes, but only on one principle!”

This was something quite different from what he had meant to say. It again came from the realm of the Siamese twins and the Millennium, where life grows in magical stillness like a flower, and even if it were not a mere flight of fancy, it pointed to the frontiers of thought, which are solitary and treacherous. Agathe’s eyes were like split agate. If at this instant he had said only a little more, or touched her with his hand,
something would have happened—something that was gone a moment later, before she even knew what it was. For Ulrich did not want to say any more. He took a knife and a piece of fruit and began to peel. He was happy because the distance that had separated him from his sister shortly before had melted into an immeasurable closeness; but he was also glad that at this moment they were interrupted.

It was the General, who came peering into the kitchen with the sly glance of a patrol leader surprising the enemy encampment. “Please forgive the intrusion,” he called out as he entered, “but as it’s only a tête-à-tête with your brother, dear lady, it can’t be too great a crime!” And turning to Ulrich, he said: “They’re looking for you high and low.”

And Ulrich told the General what he had meant to say to Agathe. But first he asked: “Who are they?”
“I was supposed to bring you to the Minister!” Stumm said reproachfully.

Ulrich waved that aside.

“Well, it’s too late anyway,” the good-natured General said. “The old boy just left. But on my own account, as soon as Madame has chosen some better company than yours, I shall have to interrogate you about what you meant with that ‘religious war’—if you’ll be so kind as to remember your own words.”

“We were just talking about that,” Ulrich said.

“How very interesting!” the General exclaimed. “Your sister is also interested in moral systems?”

“It’s all my brother talks about,” Agathe corrected him, smiling.

“That was virtually the whole agenda this evening!” Stumm sighed. “Leinsdorf, for instance, said only a few minutes ago that
morality is just as important as eating. I can’t see it myself.” So saying, he bent with relish over the candies Agathe handed him. It was supposed to be a joke. Agathe said, to comfort him: “Neither can I.”

“An officer and a woman must have morals, but they don’t like to talk about it,” the General went on improvising. “Don’t you agree, dear lady?”

Rachel had brought him a kitchen chair, which she was zealously dusting off with her apron when these words of his stabbed her to the heart; she nearly broke into tears.

Stumm was prompting Ulrich again: “Now then, what’s this about the religious war?” But before Ulrich could say anything, he forestalled him, saying: “Actually, I have the feeling that your cousin is also prowling around looking for you, and I have my military training to thank for finding you first. So I must make the most of my time. Things are
not going well in there! It’s supposed to be our fault. And your cousin—how shall I put it? She’s simply let go of the reins. Do you know what they’ve decided?"

“Who decided?”

“A lot of people have already left. Some have stayed and are paying very close attention,” the General described the situation. “There’s no telling who is deciding.”

“In that case it might be better if you told me first what they’ve decided,” Ulrich said.

Stumm von Bordwehr shrugged his shoulders. “All right. But luckily it’s not a resolution in the sense of committee business,” he elucidated. “Since all the responsible people had left in time, thank heaven. So it’s only what you might call a special-interest proposal, a suggestion, or a minority vote. I shall take the line that we have no official knowledge of it. But you’d better tell
your secretary to watch the minutes so none of this gets into the record. Do forgive me,” he said to Agathe, “for talking business like this!”

“But what happened?” she urged him on.

Stumm made a wide, sweeping gesture. “Feuermaul...if you remember the young man we really only invited because—how shall I put it?—because he is an exponent of the spirit of the times, and because we had to invite the opposing exponents anyway. We had hoped that nevertheless, and with the added stimulus of intellectual debate, we’d be able to get down to talking about the things that, unfortunately, really matter. Your brother knows about it, dear lady; the idea was to get the Minister together with Leinsdorf and Arnheim, to see whether Leinsdorf has any objections to... certain patriotic views. And all in all I’m not really dissatisfied.” He turned confidentially to
Ulrich. “So far so good. But while this was going on, Feuermaul and the others…” Here Stumm felt obliged to add for Agathe’s benefit: “...that is, the exponent of the view that man is basically a good and peace-loving creature who responds best to kindness, and those who expound approximately the opposite view, that it takes a strong hand and all that to keep order in the world. This Feuermaul got into an argument with these others, and before anyone could stop them they had agreed on a joint proposal!”

“A joint proposal?” Ulrich was incredulous.

“That’s right. Perhaps I seem to be making light of it”—Stumm sounded rather pleased with himself at the unintended comic effect of his story—”but nobody could have predicted anything of the sort. And if I tell you what their resolution was, you won’t believe it! Since I was supposed to visit Moosbrugger this afternoon in a semi-official
capacity, the whole Ministry will refuse to believe that I wasn’t the one who put them up to it!”

Here Ulrich burst out laughing, and he interrupted him the same way from time to time as Stumm went on with his story; only Agathe understood why, while his friend commented somewhat huffily each time that he seemed to be wrought up. But what had happened corresponded far too much to the pattern Ulrich had just laid out for his sister for him not to find it hilarious.

The Feuermaul group had appeared on the scene at the very last moment to save what could still be saved. In such cases the object tends to be less clear than the intention. The young poet Friedel Feuermaul—who was called Pepi by his intimates, and who went about trying to look like the young Schubert, for he doted on everything having to do with Old Vienna, though he had been born in a small provincial town in
Hungary—happened to believe in Austria’s mission, and he believed besides in mankind. It was obvious that an undertaking like the Parallel Campaign that did not include him would from the beginning have made him uneasy. How could a humanitarian project in an Austrian key, or an Austrian project in a humanitarian key, flourish without him? It is true that he had said this, with a shrug, only in private to his friend Frau Drangsal, but she, the widow of a celebrity and a credit to her country, as the hostess presiding over a spiritual beauty salon overshadowed only during the last year by Diotimas, had repeated it to every influential person with whom she came in contact. Hence a rumor had begun to make the rounds that the Parallel Campaign was in peril, unless...This “unless” and the peril naturally enough remained rather undefined, for first Diotima had to be made to invite Feuermaul, and after that one would see. But the news of
some danger apparently connected with the patriotic campaign was noted by those alert politicians who acknowledged no fatherland, but only an ethnic motherfolk living in enforced wedlock with the State as an abused wife; they had long suspected that the Parallel Campaign would only produce some new form of oppression. And even though they were civil enough to conceal this suspicion, they attached far less importance to the intention of diverting it—for there had always been despairing humanists among the Germans, but as a whole they would always be oppressors and bureaucratic parasites!—than to the useful hint that even Germans admitted how dangerous their people’s nationalism was. Consequently Frau Drangsal and the poet Feuermaul felt buoyed up by sympathies for their aims, which they accepted without bothering to investigate, and Feuermaul, who was a recognized man of feeling, was obsessed with the notion that
something compelling about love and peace had to be said to the Minister of War in person. Why the Minister of War, and what he was expected to do about it, remained unclear; but the idea itself was so dazzlingly original and dramatic that it really needed no additional support. On this point they had even won the approval of Stumm von Bordwehr, the fickle General, whose devotion to culture sometimes took him to Frau Drangsal’s salon, unbeknownst to Diotima; it was his doing, moreover, that the original perception of Arnheim the munitions maker as part of the danger gave way to the view of Arnheim the thinker as an important element of everything good.

So far all had gone as befitted the participants, even including the fact that, despite Frau Drangsal’s help, the Ministers encounter with Feuermaul unfolded as is usual in the course of human events, producing nothing more than some flashes of
Feuermaulian brilliance, to which His Excellency lent a tolerant ear. But Feuermaul was far from spent, and because the troops he could summon to arms consisted of literary men young and old, councillors, Hofrate, librarians, and some pacifists, in short, people of all ages and in all sorts of positions, united in their feeling for their old Fatherland and its mission in the world—a sentiment as readily marshaled in the cause of bringing back the historic three-horse omnibus as in that of Viennese porcelain—and because all these faithful had in the course of the evening made many diverse contacts with their opponents, who also did not go around showing their claws, many discussions had sprung up in which opinions crisscrossed wildly in all directions. Such was the temptation facing Feuermaul when the Minister of War had finished with him and Frau Drangsal’s attention had been distracted for a while through some unknown occurrence.
Stumm von Bordwehr could only report that Feuermaul had got into an extremely lively exchange with a young man who, from his description, might well have been Hans Sepp. The young man was in any case one of those who find a scapegoat on which to blame all the evils they cannot cope with themselves; nationalist arrogance is only that special case of it in which honest conviction makes one choose a scapegoat not of one’s own breed and as unlike oneself as possible. Now, everyone knows what a great relief it is when one is upset to work off one’s anger on someone, even if it has nothing to do with him; but it is less well known that this also applies to love. For love, too, must often be worked off in the same way on someone not really involved, for lack of a more suitable outlet. Feuermaul, for instance, was an industrious young man who could be quite unpleasant in the struggle for his own advantage, but his love-goat
happened to be “Man,” and the moment he thought of Man in general, there was no restraining his unsatisfied benevolence. Hans Sepp, on the other hand, was basically a decent fellow who could not even bring himself to deceive Director Fischel, and so his scapegoat was “non-German man,” on whom he blamed everything beyond his power to change. Lord knows what they had started to talk to each other about; they must have instantly mounted their respective goats and charged at each other, for as Stumm put it:

“I’ve really no idea how it happened; suddenly they were surrounded, and the next minute there was a real crowd, and finally everyone still here was standing around them.”

“Do you know what they were arguing about?” Ulrich asked him.

Stumm shrugged his shoulders. “Feuermaul shouted at the other fellow: ‘You want
to hate, but you can’t do it! Because we’re all born with love inside!’ or something like that. And the other one shouted back at him: ‘And you want to love? But that’s something you’re even less capable of, you—you—’ Well, I can’t really say exactly; I had to hold myself a bit apart, because of my uniform.”

“Oh,” Ulrich said. “I see the point.” He turned to Agathe, trying to catch her eye.

“No—the point was the resolution!” Stumm reminded him. “There they were, ready to bite each other’s heads off, and then, as if nothing had happened, they agreed to make common cause, and I do mean common!”

With his rounded figure, Stumm gave the impression of unwavering gravity. “The Minister left on the spot,” he reported.

“But what was it they agreed on?” Ulrich and Agathe asked.
“I can’t exactly say,” Stumm replied, “because of course I took off myself before they were finished. Besides, it’s always hard to remember that sort of thing clearly. It’s something in favor of Moosbrugger and against the army.”

“Moosbrugger? How on earth...” Ulrich laughed again.

“How on earth?” the General echoed venomously. “It’s easy for you to laugh, but I’m the one who’s going to be called on the carpet for it! At the very least it’ll mean days of paperwork! How does anyone know ‘how on earth’ with such people? Maybe it was that old professor’s fault, the one who was talking to everyone in favor of hanging and against leniency. Or it could have been because the papers have been making such a fuss again lately about the problem of that monster. Anyway, they were suddenly talking about him. This has got to be undone again!” he declared with unwonted severity.
At this moment the kitchen was invaded in quick succession by Arnheim, Diotima, and even Tuzzi and Count Leinsdorf. Arnheim had heard voices in the foyer. He had been on the point of slipping away quietly, hoping that the disturbance would enable him to escape another heart-to-heart talk with Diotima; and tomorrow he would be leaving town again for some time. But his curiosity made him glance into the kitchen, and since Agathe had seen him, politeness prevented him from withdrawing. Stumm instantly besieged him with questions about how things stood.

"I can even give it to you verbatim," Arnheim replied with a smile. "Some of it was so quaint that I simply had to write it down on the sly."

He drew a small card from his wallet and slowly read, deciphering his shorthand, the contents of the proposed manifesto:
“The patriotic campaign has passed the following resolution, as proposed by Herr Feuermaul and Herr—’ I didn’t catch the other name. ‘Any man may choose to die for his own ideas, but whoever induces men to die for ideas not their own is a murderer!’ That was the proposal,” he added, “and my impression was that it was final.”

“That’s it!” the General exclaimed. “That’s the way I heard it too! They’re enough to make you sick, these intellectual debates!”

Arnheim said gently: “It’s the desire of young people today for stability and leadership.”

“But it wasn’t only young people,” Stumm said in disgust. “Even baldheads were agreeing!”

“Then it’s a need for leadership in general,” Arnheim said with a friendly nod. “It’s widespread these days. Incidentally, the
resolution was borrowed from a recent book, if I remember rightly.”

“Indeed?” Stumm said.

“Yes,” Arnheim said. “And of course we’ll pretend it never happened. But if we could find a way to direct the sentiment it expresses into some useful channel, it would certainly be of help.”

The General appeared somewhat relieved and, turning to Ulrich, asked:

“Do you have any idea what could be done?”

“Of course!” Ulrich said.

Arnheim’s attention was diverted by Diotima.

“In that case,” the General said in a low voice, “fire away! I would prefer it if we could remain in control.”
“You have to focus on what actually happened,” Ulrich said, taking his time. “These people aren’t so far wrong, you know, when one of them accuses the other of wanting to love if he only could, and the other retorts that it’s the same with wanting to hate. It’s true of all the feelings. Hatred today has something companionable about it, and on the other hand, in order to feel what would really be love for another human being—I maintain,” Ulrich said abruptly, “that two such people have never yet existed!”

“That’s certainly most interesting,” the General interrupted quickly, “especially as I completely fail to understand how you can assert such a thing. But I have to write a protocol tomorrow about everything that happened here tonight, and I implore you to bear this in mind! In the army, what counts most is being able to report progress; a certain optimism is indispensable even in defeat—that’s part of the profession. So how
can I report what happened here as a step forward?"

“Write,” Ulrich advised him with a wink, “that the moral imagination has taken its revenge!”

“But you can’t write that sort of thing in the military!” Stumm replied indignantly.

“Then let’s put it another way,” Ulrich said seriously, “and write: All creative periods have been serious. There is no profound happiness without a profound ethos. There is no morality that is not derived from a firm basis. There is no happiness that does not rest on a strong belief. Not even animals live without morality. But today human beings no longer know on what—”

Stumm broke in on this calmly flowing dictation too: “My dear friend, I can speak of a troop’s morale, or morale in battle, or a woman’s morals; but always only in specific instances. I cannot discuss morality without
such a restriction in a military report, any more than I could imagination or God Almighty. You know that as well as I do!”

Diotima saw Arnheim standing at the window of her kitchen, an oddly domestic sight after they had exchanged only a few circumspect words during the entire evening. Paradoxically, it only made her suddenly wish to continue her unfinished chat with Ulrich. Her mind was dominated by that comforting despair which, breaking in from several directions at once, had almost become sublimated into an amiable and serene state of expectation. The long-foreseen collapse of her Council left her cold. Arnheim’s faithlessness also left her, as she thought, almost equally indifferent. He looked at her as she came in, and for a moment it brought back the old feeling of a living space in which they were united. But she remembered that he had been avoiding her for weeks, and the thought “Sexual coward!” stiffened her knees
again so that she could move toward him regally.

Arnheim saw it: her seeing him, her faltering, the distance between them melting; over frozen roads connecting them in innumerable ways hovered an intimation that they might thaw out again. He had moved away from the others, but at the last moment both he and Diotima made a turn that brought them together with Ulrich, General Stumm, and the rest, who were on the other side.

In all its manifestations, from the inspired ideas of original thinkers to the kitsch that unites all peoples, what Ulrich called the moral imagination, or, more simply, feeling, has for centuries been in a state of ferment without turning into wine. Man is a being who cannot survive without enthusiasm. And enthusiasm is that state of mind in which all his feelings and thoughts have the same spirit. You think it is rather the opposite, that it
is a condition in which one overpowering feeling—of being carried away!—sweeps all the others along with it? You weren’t going to say anything at all? Anyway, that’s how it is. Or one way it is. But there is nothing to sustain such an enthusiasm. Feelings and thoughts become lasting only with each other’s help, in their totality; they must somehow be aligned with each other and carry each other onward. And by every available means, through drugs, liquor, fantasies, hypnosis, faith, conviction, often even through the simplifying effect of stupidity, man is always trying to achieve a condition like it. He believes in ideas not because they are sometimes true but because he needs to believe; because he has to keep his feelings in order. Because he must have an illusion to stop up the gap between the walls of his life, through which his feelings would otherwise fly off in every direction. The answer is probably at least to seek the conditions of an authentic
enthusiasm, instead of giving oneself up to transient delusory states. But although, all in all, the number of choices based on feeling is infinitely greater than those based on clear logic, and every event that moves mankind arises from the imagination, only the purely rational problems have achieved an objective order, while nothing deserving the name of a joint effort, or even hinting at any insight into the desperate need for it, has been done for the world of feeling and imagination.

This was more or less what Ulrich said, interspersed with understandable protests from the General.

All Ulrich saw in the events of the evening, even though they had been impetuous enough and were destined through malicious misrepresentation to have grave consequences, was the example of an infinite disorder. Feuermaul seemed at this moment to matter to him as little as the love of mankind, nationalism as little as Feuermaul, and
Stumm was asking him in vain how to distill a sense of some tangible progress out of an attitude so very personal.

‘Why don’t you simply report;’ Ulrich responded, “that it’s the Millennial War of Religion. And that people have never been as unprepared to fight it as now, when the rubble of ineffectual feelings,’ which every period bequeaths to the next, has grown into mountains without anything being done about it. So the War Ministry can sit back and serenely await the next mass catastrophe.”

Ulrich was foretelling the future, with no inkling of it. His concern was not with real events at all; he was struggling for his salvation. He was trying to throw in everything that could get in its way, and it was for that reason that he laughed so much and tried to mislead them into thinking he was joking and exaggerating. He was exaggerating for Agathe’s benefit, carrying on his
long-standing dialogue with her, not just this most recent one. Actually, he was throwing up a bulwark of ideas against her, knowing that in a certain place there was a little bolt, and that if this bolt were drawn back, everything would be flooded and buried by feeling. In truth he was thinking incessantly of this bolt.

Diotima was standing near him and smiling. She sensed something of Ulrich’s efforts on behalf of his sister, and was sadly moved; she forgot sexual enlightenment, and something in her opened up: it was doubtless the future, but in any case, her lips were slightly open too.

Arnheim asked Ulrich: “And you think...that something might be done about it?” The tone of his question suggested that he had caught the seriousness behind the exaggeration, but that he regarded even the seriousness as an exaggeration.
Tuzzi said to Diotima: “Something must in any case be done to prevent this affair from leaking out.”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Ulrich said in reply to Arnheim. “Today we are facing too many possibilities of feeling, too many possible ways of living. But isn’t it like the kind of problem our intellect deals with whenever it is confronted with a vast number of facts and a history of the relevant theories? And for the intellect we have developed an open-ended but precise procedure, which I don’t need to describe to you. Now tell me whether something of the kind isn’t equally possible for the feelings. We certainly need to find out what we’re here for; it’s one of the main sources of all violence in the world. Earlier centuries tried to answer it with their own inadequate means, but the great age of empiricism has done nothing of its own, so far....”
Arnheim, who caught on quickly and liked to interrupt, laid his hand on Ulrich’s shoulder as if to restrain him. “This implies an increasing relationship with God!” he said in a low tone of warning.

“Would that be so terrible?” Ulrich asked, not without a hint of mockery at such premature alarm. “But I haven’t gone that far yet!”

Arnheim promptly checked himself and smiled. “How delightful after a long absence to find someone unchanged. Such a rarity, these days!” he said. He was genuinely glad, in fact, once he felt safe again behind his defensive front of benevolence. Ulrich might, after all, have very well taken him up on that rash offer of a position, and Arnheim was grateful that Ulrich, in his irresponsible intransigence, disdained touching the earth with his feet. “We must have a talk about this sometime,” he added cordially. “It’s not clear
to me how you conceive of applying our theoretical attitude to practical affairs.”

Ulrich knew very well that it was still unclear. What he meant was not a life of “research,” or a life “in the light of science,” but a “quest for feeling” similar to a quest for truth, except that truth was not the issue here. He watched Arnheim moving over to Agathe. Diotima was standing there too; Tuzzi and Count Leinsdorf came and went. Agathe was chatting with everyone and thinking: “Why is he talking with all these people? He ought to have left with me! He’s cheapening what he said to me!” She liked many of the things she heard him say from across the room, and yet they hurt her. Everything that came from Ulrich was hurting her again, and for the second time that day she suddenly felt the need to get away from him. She despaired of ever being able, with her limitations, to be what he wanted, and the prospect that they would soon be
going home like any other couple, gossiping about the evening behind them, was intolerable.

Meanwhile Ulrich was thinking: "Arnheim will never understand that." And he added: "It is precisely in his feelings that the scientist is limited, and the practical man even more so. It's as necessary as having your legs firmly planted if you intend to lift something with your arms." In ordinary circumstances he was that way himself; the moment he began thinking about anything, even if it was about feeling itself, he was very cautious about letting any feeling into it. Agathe called this coldness, but he knew that in order to be wholly otherwise one has to be prepared to renounce life, as if on a mortal adventure, for one has no idea what its course will be! He was in the mood for it, and for the moment no longer feared it. He gazed for a long time at his sister: the lively play of conversation on the deeper, untouched face.
He was about to ask her to leave with him, but before he could move, Stumm had come back and was intent on talking with him.

The good General was fond of Ulrich. He had already forgiven him his witticisms about the War Ministry, and was actually rather taken with the phrase “religious war”: it had such a festively military air, like oak leaves on a helmet, or shouts of hurrah on the Emperor’s birthday. With his arm pressed to Ulrich’s, he steered him out of earshot of the others. “You know, I like what you said about all events originating in the imagination,” he said. “Of course, that’s more my private opinion than my official attitude,” and he offered Ulrich a cigarette.

“I’ve got to go home,” Ulrich said.

“Your sister is having a fine time; don’t disturb her,” Stumm said. “Arnheim’s outdoing himself to pay court to her. But what I was going to say: the joy seems to have gone
out of mankind’s great ideas. You ought to put some life back into them. I mean, there’s a new spirit in the air, and you’re the man to take charge!”

“What gives you that idea?” Ulrich asked guardedly.

“That’s how it strikes me.” Stumm passed over it and went on intently: “You’re for order too; everything you say shows it. And so then I ask myself: which is more to the point—that man is good, or that he needs a firm hand? It’s all tied in with our present-day need to take a stand. I’ve already told you it would put my mind at rest if you would take charge of the campaign again. With all this talk, there’s simply no knowing what may happen otherwise!”

Ulrich laughed. “Do you know what I’m going to do now? I’m not coming here any-more!” he said happily.
“But why?” Stumm protested hotly. “All those people will be right who’ve been saying that you’ve never been a real power!”

“If I told them what I really think, they would really say so.” Ulrich answered, laughing, and disengaged himself from his friend.

Stumm was vexed, but then his good humor prevailed, and he said in parting: “These things are so damned complicated. Sometimes I’ve actually thought it would be best if a real idiot came along to tackle all these insoluble problems—I mean some sort of Joan of Arc. A person like that might be able to help!”

Ulrich’s eyes searched for his sister but did not find her. While he was asking Diotima about her, Leinsdorf and Tuzzi returned from the salon and announced that everyone was leaving.
“I said all along,” His Grace remarked cheerfully to the lady of the house, “that what those people were saying was not what they really meant. And Frau Drangsal has come up with a really saving idea; we’ve decided to continue this evening’s meeting another time. Feuermaul, or whatever his name is, will read us some long poem he has written, so things will be much quieter. I of course took it upon myself, on account of the urgency, to say I was sure you’d agree!”

It was only then that Ulrich learned that Agathe had suddenly said good-bye and left the house without him. She had left word that she had not wanted to disturb him.