Lou Andreas-Salomé

Ma
Ein Portrait
(1904)

English Translation by Madeleine Schmitz

Excerpt of the first chapter

1.

The Iberian Mother of God went for a ride.

She was lifted into the carriage by reverent hands from the depths of her shimmering, blue-gold candlelit temple in front of the entrance to the Beautiful Square at the Kremlin.[1]

There she sat in the magnificent four-in-hand carriage, her seasoned equipage, sprawled on the front seat. Two priests sat opposite her in rich scarlet robes holding out the cross and thurible before them.

One of the many small bells in the Kremlin rang and rang. Now and then a single low bell chime, droning on long and as if dreamy, interrupted this bright ringing. It endlessly and tirelessly rang high above the snowy streets with urgent monotony into the winter wind.

The masses circled the carriage as closely as they could; young faces, old faces, and the bearded ones bowed in equal humble eagerness to catch a kiss on the miraculous image, or at least the frame next to it.

A couple of elegant officers who came here from the Voskresenskaya Square stopped in the middle of the roadway, knelt into the snow, and solemnly crossed themselves with serious, almost stern, faces.

The Iberian Mother went out daily to satisfy people's wishes for her blessing, yet often her presence in a home had to be requested weeks in advance for her to find the time.

The impressive coachman—his head uncovered despite the numbing cold—slowly maneuvered his four horses through the masses of people.

Many remained standing, their longing gaze following him. Pilgrims camped out in front of the small temple, their cloth-wrapped feet in their bast shoes, Staffs in hand. With their hopes, they now turned to the copy of the image that hung as a substitute in the religious sanctuary, and they prayed in front of it while offering burning wax candles.

Thus, candlelight after candlelight shone inside to an elevated brilliance, which looked, from the outside, like a mighty yellow shimmering sun standing like a secret in the middle of a daily routine of street life, waving and waving.

The Mother of God in her majestic four-in-hand carriage did not have to compete with the other equipages. On the contrary, those who saw her passing could easily believe her to be not only the Great Lady of Moscow, but the epitome of the Holy Mother of Moscow herself. What was otherwise to be found gliding past on the hard-frozen snow now almost seemed like a lowly sled. They were even accessible to people of low rank for a few Kopeken coins. Women with kit and caboodle, or simple farmers wearing sheepskin coats high around their ears were present in great numbers. Rarely, a Troika would hastily pass, chimes happily ringing from the three-horse-drawn carriage—possibly a song started by the occupants of the carriage. A song the way they would sing it in the tea houses accompanied by a harp, or during the warm summer nights in front of the village huts.

The music wondrously trembled into one with the endlessly resonating bell tone, even if it happened to be a dance song. Even then it had to sound homely and familiar to the Iberian mother.

And even among the pedestrians, she, above all, encountered her very own children, children of the people. Not the proletariat of big cities, as they like to fill the more remote alleys, but the people—the people at home on their wide streets and squares. These people walked along in their own status-befitting

[1] "Schöner Platz." From "красный," today "red," but archaic for "beautiful."

clothing, not in the cast-off clothes of the rich or in imitation of them. This traditional outfit was so dominating that those dressed differently, the ordinary person, almost got lost under it.

The Old Moscow—especially in the early winter twilight of such an afternoon hour—looked almost as if it were a giant village at the bottom of its heart, trustingly built around the all-powerful glory and sanctity of the Kremlin Heights. The houses looked up to the great Kremlin in red and green and blue on their roofs or masonry, in colors such as those that children love most to add to their picture pages. And in red and green and blue he answered them from the heights of his domes and palaces, paternally adapted to them, merged with them, and nevertheless still painted with colorful stars or stripes in the middle of his gold.

But with the gold, he outdid them, outshone them; with the gold, he drowned out everything as if with a loud song of praise, so that they immediately lay there beneath him again, very small and completely mute despite their elegant colors. And it was a different gold at any hour, at every hour a royal one however, from the first dawn that rose over Moscow until deep into the deepest night, for there was none deep enough to extinguish the gold completely. It was always there, whether broadly unfolded in his self-evident shine or secretly gathered, like a candle from within, that only stealthily betrays itself. It was always there, present to all, from the outermost tips of the crosses of the cathedrals to the innermost hidden darkness of the church chambers, and even down into the closed carriage in which the Iberian woman drove through the streets, ceremonially surrounded by flashes of gold sparks and the multicolored gleam of her exquisite jewelry.

She drove only a short distance when it seemed that she arrived at her destination in a side street of Tverskaya. She was lifted out—among a new crowd of people, who prayed quietly, crossed themselves, and tried to plant a kiss—to be carried to those who were fervently waiting: those for whom her visit was intended and whose tears she was to dry, whose agony she was to banish, or whose jubilation over a stroke of luck she was to consecrate and bless.

Leaning on each other, the two young women stood at the window of a wooden rental house diagonally across the street and observed the scene happening on the street/below.

“Oh, Russia— Russia! It is as if I have gone back to Asia,” said the older one while shaking her head, “it is sad! I wonder that you only laugh at this, Sophie.”

Sophie turned away from the window because there was nothing else left to see. She replied in a soft, placating little voice: “It is not so bad. Maybe there is still a little bit of the Middle Ages left. It can, though, become something very exciting at times. At that point I won’t laugh either. – You just don’t have to be a student freshly arrived from abroad.”

“We have no reason whatsoever to be so enthusiastic about these Middle Ages, Sophie. Are we Russians? And even if we were —”

Sophie had gone to the other window, where a rocking chair stood next to a group of tall, well-cared-for, leafy plants.

“Even if we are not exactly Russian, we are still at home here,” she said hesitantly. “And actually, I sometimes wish even more that we were Russian! If we were, for example, we would have been raised in a strictly Russian Grammar school; at least I, little sister.”

“Why—?!”

Sophie was left owing the answer to this surprising question.

Her delicate figure stretched long in the rocking chair, and she lay her blonde head with its two shimmering braids circling her head like a wreath so far against the back of the chair that her gaze turned upward at the ceiling, rather than at her sister.

Only after a short break did she remark distractingly: “By the way: this low ceiling aside—don’t you also find, Cita, that our current apartment feels so tremendously homey? I was so happy when we had to move into this good part of the neighborhood only because of Ma’s many lessons that she has been teaching.”

Cita crouched down on the window ledge and stroked her hand through her wavy, ragged short-cut, very dark blond hair in one of her hasty, idiosyncratic movements.

“Certainly; you two have it very comfortable,” she admitted absentmindedly, “but it should be difficult even for the most problematic apartment to have an uncomfortable effect when our mom lives in it and furnishes it. —But that she chose this neighborhood is also good regardless of the lessons. Most of the houses she knows are not located far from here. I mean, that is good—especially for later.”

“What do you mean ‘for later’?”

Cita lifted her beautiful boyish[2] head and gazed at her sister. “Don’t you understand me? For later, when she is alone here because you will also be studying somewhere abroad…medicine”

Sophie laughed, amused, as if her sister had made a joke. “The things you can come up with! No one would think of that even remotely in their dreams!” She remarked, rocking softly in her rocking chair.

Cita unwillingly drew her thin dark eyebrows together. “Oh, Sophie, leave that nonsense behind which you are hiding. Certainly somebody, namely yourself, thinks of it in their dreams and when awake. And evidently for this single reason, you suddenly lament not having a strictly Russian grammar school education. You deliberate in your perplexity: could I at least here, if not abroad –”

“Yes, leaving Ma— that’s just what I won’t do!” Sophie interjected agitatedly.

Cita countered very calmly, “It is time for you to know what you yourself want. You are nineteen and have had your high school diploma since Easter. I had already moved on at that age. And I will have received my doctorate in a year and a half, if not sooner.”

“My God, you don't need to parade your achievements!” said Sophie sensitively, “—just as Ma paved all the ways for you. Even before father’s favorite sister bequeathed each of us with our little inheritance—”

“I am not parading my achievements. Ma was gracious, in every way. It spurs me on all the more energetically to reach my goal.”

“Well, and what next? I altogether do not believe that female attorneys these days have even the slimmest chances,” Sophie explained in the tone of a forced lack of admiration, rocking even faster.

“Maybe not today. But tomorrow. Or the day after tomorrow for all I care. We women are working for a better future. And in the meantime, I will make it through one way or another. Don’t believe that the only thing I am capable of is just talking shop on legal matters.”

“Oh no, hopefully not. That would also be quite horrible for our Ma.”

They both remained silent.

Cita stepped away from the window and began to slowly walk back and forth whereby she folded her arms behind her back and hung her head a little like a great scholar.

She stopped for several moments in front of her mother’s desk, which stood crosswise, occupying a third of the room.

It was covered with books and composition notebooks; out of the middle of this daily work rose an Italian olive-wood frame with carved and crafted lockable doors. The recently deceased husband hid himself behind these doors.

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[2] “Bubenkopf,” translated here as “boy-like head,” denotes that she has a short hairstyle similar to that found in (young) men.

On the wall behind hung several etchings by his hand, framed in simple, dark slats of wood: these originated from the years of his short marriage, from the time that was rife with happiness and rife with artistic hopes, spent down in Italy.

On the other wall behind the desk a whole group of family portraits, very old ones among them, were put together with obvious piety. Two of them are pale little pastel pictures: the maternal grandfather, Martin, with a mighty black necktie, gray hair brushed forward, and an intelligent, almost distinguished head. Alongside him the attractive old grandmother, from whom Cita and Sophie received a good bit of gracefulness as an inheritance.

“It would have been a thousand times better for Ma not to have been stuck here,” slipped out of Cita’s mouth.

She stood up and observed the pictures. “She should have become something more with her aptitude, her talents. But indeed, here in Russia, where she merely has to show the rich merchant’s children the ropes —”

Sophie had her eyes closed.

“Poor dear Ma,” she said quietly, “dear God, she just couldn’t have studied law. We two poor little worms would have starved to death quickly enough. – At least there were livable possibilities here in Russia, and the connections from their grandfather being a school director, and ultimately also Aunt Ottilie —. But it must have been difficult and horrible.”

Sophie interrupted her in an afflicted tone: “You and I, we are ungrateful monsters! Us, with our dumb ambition.”

Cita walked back and forth again with her arms crossed. It impatiently escaped her: “Your logic is simply dreadful. Exactly the opposite must be inferred: indeed, Ma continues to live in both of us; through us she must gain something for herself. After all, that is truthfully the only rational way of a parent's love for their child.”

“Well, I do not know if that is a parent’s love for their child. – and if this love needs to be so rational,” Sophie mumbled.

Cita sighed, remarking, “You often speak like a very uneducated person. If only I didn’t know so well where that comes from: it is very simply disquietude—you resist against your better judgment. The purest cowardice."

“I won’t tolerate that!” Sophie shouted indignantly.

The rocking chair toppled over, and she began to cough.

The sister relented. “Forgive me. I didn’t want to offend you. You are right: that is not allowed. Rather, we women must stand firmly together. We must be each other’s best friend. I was scolding you as your friend, little sister, for your own good. I am full of longing and ambition for you— I want to help you, and not only with words. No, no, you shall be able to rely on my guidance.”

Sophie remained silent. Her eyes were full of tears, and again she remained owing the answer out of fear of revealing her tears through her voice.

Cita did not want to push her any further. She slowly stepped towards the wide bookshelf, made from brown painted birchwood, simple in its construction, that took over the back wall at eye level, and pulled out a book.

There was no longer enough light in the room to read; still, she took volume after volume and leafed through them, distraught.

All sorts of books from grandfather, the academic, were still to be found here—his lifetime collection. And some of it, too, was probably practically forced upon the mother by her job as a teacher.

But for the most part, the rows of books stood crowded and were filled with the highest treasures that the human spirit has discovered. All laboriously acquired volume for volume— used, worn out, and enjoyed, volume for volume.

The girl came in and brought the lamp.

She was still very young and a little stupid, a sheepish-looking person who undecidedly remained standing and gazed at Sophie questioningly.

Silently, Sophie rose from her comfortable chair and left the room with her. One could not let Stanjka arrange the late lunch alone. For as often as one tried to deliver many helpful instructions, Stanjka would become gloomy and begin to cry. She would then sit on a little bench by the stove, complaining and praying to Mother God through her tears, whom she loudly called upon to be her witness that it was certainly not given to her to prepare a pleasant and tasty lunch well.

The small picture of a saint, brown and unrecognizable behind his bare pewter frame, hung in the kitchen corner according to instructions. He was always watching and, therefore, must have known it fully.

It was not clear to Stanjka that the picture was, incidentally, not Mother God, but rather Saint Nikolaus. Or at least she did not question it any further. When she did not need to perform "higher" work, and was instead allowed to handle the simplest tasks, then she remained in a radiant mood and mastered everything to her heart's content.

The doorbell rang loudly and urgently while Sophie was still working around the kitchen.

Cita went to open the apartment door. Her mother stood there, still a little out of breath from her brisk walk.

"I truly forgot to bring my key with me; I had to ring the doorbell," she said and hastily entered, "What a wind outside, child. Sophie didn't go outside unnecessarily?"

"Absolutely no, Ma. How tired you must be today, you poor thing."

Cita most caringly took her light gray fur coat from her and kissed her.

"I thank you, child. You both must certainly be as hungry as wolves, eh? I walked as fast as I could," the mother remarked as she stripped the fur overshoes from her feet.

"So! Now I am human again! The end of the day's work[3] is ringing in and the work is done for today," she said happily, "—and completely done for today: I do not need to leave again in the evening. We want to heartily enjoy it, children."

Whoever heard her voice in the still unlit front hallway could easily assume a young creature behind it. All of the overexertion, all of the abuse of this voice could not take away its idiosyncratic sweetness. But the forty years were visible in the facial features. Even single gray hairs mixed themselves into the temple of the full, soft brown hair that Cita possessed in a lighter shade, and they stubbornly tried to turn into curls here and there for her mother as well—as far as the simple knot deep in her neck would allow.

The mother did not quite reach her eldest in height, and her lithe figure had formerly shown a decided tendency towards fullness; now, however, her daily work thwarts any attempt at that. That's how she remains skinny, closer to scrawny, and could, therefore, upon glancing at her, appear girlish.

[3] There is no direct translation for "Feierabend." It denotes the time when the work day is over with a celebratory tone to it: "Feier" means celebration and "Abend" means evening.

After the mother disappeared into her bed chambers to make herself appear a little more human, as she called it, Cita went about setting the table in the small narrow dining nook next to the living room. She was, though, still full of thought, and distracted from the task at hand.

This narrow dining room, called “the nook” for a reason, came short of furniture when the apartment was furnished. The mother had put a few trunks in the room, and around the table simple stools of the same rustic simplicity. At the great flea market held by the Moscow people on Sunday mornings, she acquired a piece of folk art here and there, through which the poor nook received a certain glamour— a wooden board carved with lace patterns, dazzling paintings on a gold background, and an original chair whose entire back frame was made out of a red lacquered krummholz, resembling the harness Russian horses wear.

In front of the only window, where the red chair was carefully placed in a representative manner, hung colorfully stitched small Russian cloths as curtains, and even the table’s coarse linen cloth was adorned with the same colorful peasant embroidery.

Instead of the dark tight street dress, the mother was wearing a comfortable, deep red, velvet leisure suit when she entered again. She joined her daughter at the table, and, without her noticing, moved every utensil, arranging them in a different, more pleasing way.

But then, when she took a plate with all kinds of fruit that Cita had placed in the middle of the table, and carefully began freeing the oranges and the long, pale Crimean apples of their thin paper shells to organize them in a crystal bowl, the daughter noted with a smile: “So much effort for that little appearance, Ma, tired as you are. Do the fruits taste better now?”

The mother nodded as she reciprocated the smile. Leaning over the bowl, she inhaled the cool fragrance of the fruit.

“They taste better by all means,” she said, “besides, they make you enjoy your life more for a moment while you are consuming them. Indeed, you don’t only eat them to nourish yourself, isn’t that true?”

She straightened up and grabbed her eldest tenderly around the shoulder when Cita did not answer.

“But you should not by any means plague yourself with housework while you’re here, you, my lovely little professor. You have a Sybarite as a mother. You arrived rather worn out, and you should do nothing but let yourself be comfortable— be lazy. At least for the time being— until after Christmas.”

She quietly added with a suppressed sigh: “Indeed, I’ll lose you soon enough, again.”

She ran her hand over her eyes as if to chase away the disturbing thought. When Sophie came in somewhat heated and hurried, followed by Stanjka, she nodded to the younger daughter cheerfully again.

“So, to the table, kids! Let’s enjoy our dinner,” she said, and lifted the lid of the steaming tureen with red beetroot soup in which saucisson and ham slices were swimming.

Sophie kissed her mother before sitting down across from her.

“I did not go to the girls’ classes because you did not want me to due to the weather. Therefore, I practiced violin for quite a while and later sat over the books that Doctor Tomasow had just brought me,” she reported about her day. “He certainly has more exquisite things in his library, though he says that I shall stick to these works first.”

“Do blindly as he says,” the mother noted, “but why are you eating so little, child? Don’t you take sour cream with your soup? I fear that standing around in the hot kitchen is not good for you; it robs you of your appetite.”

“Oh no! I’m still eating.”

Cita was tempted to say: “The famous household work is just not as healthy as is broadcasted.”

But she remained silent. It was so terribly difficult to utter a sarcastic-colored word with the necessary self-confidence in Ma’s presence.

It would have been an injustice, for the mother would not have noticed the sarcasm in it. She lacked the receptive organ for sarcasm. She would have met it with open arms, literally as it were, and countered: “Do you really think so, child?” and would then have tried, with united strength, with Cita’s help, to find out what needs to be done, and whether she herself should cook first, each time she came home from the many hours—.

The mother interrupted her thought process. When the dish of fish arrived at the table and she began serving, she said, “In the near future, on my way home, I will look for a big Christmas tree. It is about time to look around for one. The prices rise the last few days before the festive evening. – This time, we must have the most beautiful one that ever existed.”

Both girls automatically looked at one another as if by agreement.

“A tree—?” Sophie asked and poked around the fish on her plate.

“Yes, surely. Don’t you think so? Why not, my children?”

“We didn’t have one last year either.”

“No. Though that was because of various coincidences. We couldn’t be elsewhere than at Aunt Ottilie’s house. And then we were indeed so painfully separated and forsaken without our Cita.”

Cita threw a thankful glance at the mother.

“Absolutely we can have a tree; why not, Sophie?” she remarked, “If Ma would like to have one, then we definitely want one— the most beautiful one. —But what will we do with this tree, Ma? Isn’t a tree technically only for kids?”

The mother subtly smiled.

“Let us be children for one night, dearest. Since we are together, we have plenty of reasons for it— we have been richly gifted.”

Cita remained silent. Sophie answered for her: “I know what Cita means. Indeed, the whole world wants to feel like a child. So unabashedly happy. But if you attempt this on purpose, then it will never happen. One is not, after all, a child. You cannot pretend and make it look natural, it will just be so unnatural –”

“That is also completely normal,” Cita interjected, busily eating fish, “because one cannot completely forget the difficulty, the very seriousness of life. One only pushes it into the background for an evening. Yes, you can do it artificially. But life still stands behind that.” She was full of eagerness to say more about that; however, a fishbone came in between.

It almost slipped out of the mother: “Huh—you children! Are you really already making life into the ‘bad guy’ as the reason for everything? Are you really always in such a fearfully chilling and serious mood?”

But she did not say it. She feared that the girls could suspect that she was secretly grinning at them both from the bottom of her soul.

She also feared that the girls might take her for being terribly superficial. The latter was even more likely.

She looked at both these serious ones with a deep glance full of kindness.

“Nevertheless, we want to try and pretend as though life is quite acceptable as we sit in front of our plates; what do you both think? For hygienic reasons!” she suggested with spirit, and the smile from the depths of her soul quietly rose and played cautiously around her mouth.

The fish course had been carried out, and as they started eating the fruit, an unexpected guest entered.

"Oh, Ottilie, you! How lovely of you. You'll get your cup of coffee immediately, a strong one," the mother said.

"Only for a brief moment! I was just in your neighborhood," her sister responded and greeted her, "you know, one never actually finds you at home, otherwise I wouldn't come so seldomly."

A whole draft of winter air blew into the room with her. She had not even taken off her hat and gloves.

Sophie pushed the chair—which possessed a yoke as its backrest— out of the corner by the window and to the table, for her aunt would only very reluctantly sit on the short-legged stools.

"Thank you," the latter remarked and nodded to her as she sat down, "it is really your only chair; at least it has a backrest, even though it makes you feel half like a horse. Well, that doesn't matter. It is cozy here with you, as it is every time."

She said this with a kind of affectionate jealousy. It really was cozy, above all, with such a cheerful warmth hanging in the air.

Yet Marianne sat in her deep red house suit, which did not constrict her anywhere and yet strangely decorated her like a picture of peace and contentment. She was truly celebrating the end of the day's work. She sat there and exhaled peace and gratitude with every breath, like the fragrance of invisible flowers.

"God, yes, you have it well! When I arrive home, I must first put Andrjuscha to bed. During which he has lately started screaming."

"Doesn't your nursemaid take care of all that, Aunt Ottilie?" Cita asked and peeled an orange for her aunt.

"I do not like to depend on her; I always have to do everything myself. But again, it would be too ungrateful if I were to complain. No, these are indeed such sweet duties. One likes to wear oneself out for them. One is, after all, in this world for them.

"You are also one of the most conscientious mothers there are," the mother confirmed. "And such mothers always have plenty to do, even with the most extensive help; they can never actually say, 'now I will rest.'"

"Yes, you see: that is how it is, that is always what I claim!" her sister exclaimed in a quite lively manner, and loosened her hat bands.

Filling out the hat, her dark blond hair lay smoothly combed back from her forehead, full soft hair like Marianne's, though more strongly turned gray than the latter's, despite Ottilie being younger by a year.

Absent-mindedly, Marianne extinguished the oil lamp's small flame under the coffee maker and filled the shallow little tea cups. Her thoughts involuntarily drifted very far back in time when she also had to bring her little ones to bed, to bathe, to feed, and to care for them.

Such little offspring as Ottilie's are something delightful. Seeing them growing up is delightful, but also especially delightful are the little ones –.

"My husband is soon traveling to Petersburg," the sister said, "naturally there is no thought that I could accompany him. Well, I'll get used to it. There will be no social entertainment for me until my Inotschka is completely grown up. But I surely wish for her that she would get to know more than just the merchant circles of Moscow."

Sophie shouted: “Oh, to what extent should it be any better there? I like Moscow. One is neither abroad nor in Russia when in Petersburg. Terribly long streets, and what a fog—!”

“Aunt Ottilie is quite right,” Cita remarked, “at least one is in Europe there! At least one approximately knows which century one is actually writing, while here —”

Aunt Ottilie nodded.

“Yes, you notice it everywhere: not only when one has the intellectual need, but also when one buys modern dress fabric,” she confirmed, “everything is there: the Newa, the court, everything official and everything at all modern. We are as if set back a century here. The Russians have everything backwards in general.”

“Not all of them. What about Tomasow?” Sophie said.

Cita had to laugh.

“No, but he is really the only one!” she admitted. “Really the only one I looked forward to. Such luck, that he is our dearest, closest friend.”

“Well, well! Just your doctor by nature?” the aunt mumbled, but Sophie interrupted her in a lively manner: “Oh, you are very much mistaken[4]! We need him even more when we are healthy, isn’t that true, Ma?”

The mother looked up.

“Are you talking about Tomasow? Yes, good heavens, what should we do without him?”

Her sister threw her a restrained look.

“But dearest Marianne! Surely that is a little exaggerated.”

Ma gently said: “no, it is barely exaggerated. Only I can judge that. After all, it is such an old, long-established friendship. It originates from the very first time I came back here. The children were six or seven years old at that time. Count it yourself.”

“Oh well, Marianne, I know that. But indeed the most important part that happened was that he helped you as a doctor. That he helped you organize your life. Back then, when you over-exerted yourself so terribly. And when he then perhaps also helped you to develop some good relationships —”

Ma quietly made a dismissive gesture with her hand.

“Leave it,” she begged, “what you are identifying there is just the very surface. And I can’t talk about the other part. Not without profaning it.”

Aunt Ottilie made her most closed-off face.

“Really, Marianne, sometimes I do not understand you; how can you speak like this! You, who took your life into your hands with such tremendous independence, who asserted herself with such energy from her own strength; why do you sometimes speak like this? Completely like some small, dependent woman, who owes everything to everyone and was helped to everything by others. Well, you know, if that is so—”

“— It is so,” Ma said, smiling politely.

“Yes, then I need to tell you: then ours need not appear so lowly next to yours, since ultimately, we also contribute our piece of work in life.”

“Yes, of course!” Marianne said, and she laughed.

“But we are, for one, raving about Doctor Tomasow,” Sophie explained in a rush to convert her aunt, “he is quite extraordinarily intelligent, you must know.”

“Yes, that he is,” Cita confirmed emphatically.

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[4] This German phrase, “da bist du aber schief gewickelt” is an expression meant to suggest that someone is very mistaken, wrong, or fooling themselves.

"That is still quite a doubtful virtue," the Aunt reckoned somewhat coldly, "but for you silly heads, as you are still at a point where a person needs only to be learned or intellectual for you to worship him—!" She ironically lifted her eyes to the ceiling.

Cita abruptly stood up.

"I just feel sorry for you, Aunt Ottilie!" she expressed with a very telling shrug, which was not exactly well-mannered. And, turning away demonstratively, she directed her attention outside the room, where the bell just rang.

Her aunt had turned dark red, though she restrained herself; only her eyes showed a heightened, steely shimmer.

She ignored Cita with a demanding glance at their mother.

"Well, I really do not know, Marianne; do your parenting principles permit this tone—?" she inquired, and her attitude became more measured.

But at that moment, Marianne, too, had directed her attention toward the hallway.

One could hear the front door closing again, a muffled question, a clearing of the throat.

"That is Doctor Tomasow!" Sophie shouted.

She ran out.

Aunt Ottilie had already gotten up from the chair with the horse yoke as the backrest.

"But dear Ottilie! You won't leave because of this —?"

"Certainly not, my good Marianne; you seem to forget that I merely came for a moment and am in a hurry; some other time, then," the sister said in a somewhat forced manner and said goodbye to Cita almost imperceptibly.

"Well, however you wish. Come, let us go outside through the living room; see, we can chat a bit more there, for the kids are now dragging our doctor into the 'nook'; I bet they will pour him the cold coffee leftovers."

Marianne slowly went through the living room—which was now only lit by an oil lamp with a dark green glass dome from the desk—with her arm around Ottilie's shoulder. She had pushed the door to the 'nook' shut.

"Well—? Now you won't be bothered by the doctor anymore?"

"Oh, I was truly not thinking of him anymore! What amazes and distresses me is something entirely different," Ottilie remained standing in the middle of the room, and, looking at the sister with big eyes, added with accentuated slowness, "You are letting your daughter get the best of you[5], my poor Marianne."

Marianne quietly and impishly laughed, she grabbed the sister at her arm and shook her in amused petulance: "Oh you poor, you poor—! Can't you let go of the careless words of the young gal[6]? Of course, she should not have said it like that. But certainly, this small, weak arrow cannot hit and wound us—? An arrow from such youthfully fierce, youthfully overzealous hands?"

"But you should have reprimanded it. That alone is what it is all about."

"Reprimand—immediately? In front of you? Humiliate my twenty-one-year-old daughter over a trivial matter in front of you? No, how could you even say that, Ottilie! You must also remember that Cita already —"

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[5] The German expression, "Du läßt dir deine Töchter über den Kopf wachsen" literally translated as "letting your daughter grow over your head," suggests that she is letting her daughter get the better of her—take advantage of her or outsmart her.

[6] The original German "Mädel" denotes more than just someone who is a young girl. It is a casual, slang word that can also be used in demeaning ways, though it is not in this instance.

“Already studying abroad! Yes, yes, I know that! Just that is the misfortune. And once she is a ‘Doctor,’ my heavens, then she may do whatever she likes,” Ottilie nervously interrupted.

Marianne vehemently shook her head.

“I did not mean just now because she is studying abroad. I meant only because she already stands firm and capable in so many aspects and is worthy of every trust, like a mature person,” she said warmly and with calm pride.

Her sister sighed. She tied her hat bands and turned around to go.

“It is fruitless to argue with you, Marianne. We won’t agree, after all. I see the mistake too clearly. You always go too far with everything; you have always done that. You grasp everything with such inner fervor, you give yourself so completely to it! It wasn’t any different with your marriage, I believe—”

“You are correct!” Marianne answered very quietly, and a dark glow entered her eyes.

“And the consequence?! Well, I do not want to talk about this. But you were lying so completely broken on the ground— this ghastly time. One cannot just call that widow’s grief. And now with your daughters. They are literally above everything to you. They are everything—all of your marrow and your blood.”

“Yes, Ottilie. That is how it is. Isn’t that how it should be?”

Ottilie had already grabbed the door handle to the hallway. She let it go one more time, turned herself completely to her sister, and said half loudly: “No! No, — do you see, that’s exactly it: it should not be that way. One does not need to savor things all the way to the ground. One must hold back, otherwise one is lost. Otherwise one loses all footing.”

“Oh you! That would be a sad lesson! After all, one does not live unless to surrender oneself. One lives, after all, only as much as one loves.”

Marianne said it fervently.

Behind the door to the nook, one could hear joking and laughing. A jumble of Russian and German.

Ottilie replied with a lowered voice and a trace of bitterness, “That is not worth a thing. And she who wears herself out in such a way degenerates with time. What does she retain that is untouched, that is her own? — But go now, please, go in with the others. They are waiting in there for you.”

“They are not waiting! I’ll give you your fur,” Marianne remarked and escorted her sister outside. In her mind, however, she was still in the conversation. She wanted to shout, “One thing is worth it: the kids! Why nothing but only raise them? From the first to the last day, why not rejoice and find greatest happiness through them? Ask your daughter! — She would be more content with me than with you.”

“Give my regards to Inotschka!” she only said.

“She will only blush when I tell her. She blushes about everything. It is really almost her only language; and she can speak three languages so well, at that. Do you want to maybe have tea with us tomorrow evening, when you return from your lessons? You haven’t done it in so long. Truthfully, we see each other basically only because you teach Nikolai on Monday afternoons.”

“Yes, I will come,” Marianne said. “I can sleep in on Sunday, after all.”

They kissed each other, and Ottilie left.

Pensively, Marianne remained standing in the vestibule, still thinking about the conversation. She looked at the ground as if she was searching for something. She tried to recall something from deep down within her.

How did Ottilie say it? ‘Otherwise, one degenerates with time.’ There were people who considered Ottilie ‘deep.’ So that is what it was. She did not invest herself, simply lived with three-quarters of herself— maybe not even with that.

But was it always like that? No, certainly not. Once, as children, they had resembled each other much more than nowadays, and had felt the same together and simultaneously. Only much later did her sister have to stop living to the fullest and invest herself wholeheartedly; she ignored her temperament — ‘reserved’ it— for what? And how, on earth, did one do that —?

Marianne had gone back into the living room and sat in front of the open upright piano on which Sophie’s violin lay.

Distraught, she quietly struck a few chords.

She thought about Inotschka. Oh, how she would have liked to devote herself to her as well. She would have liked to have counted her among her pupils.

But she herself felt that it was not possible. Even against her knowledge and will, she would have turned her influence against that of the parents at any moment.

Inotschka, half-grown, still skinny, with her all too serious eyes and such a soft mouth—a mouth in need of kisses—remained at the forefront of her imagination while she struck the quiet, dark notes.

Above all, she did not even notice that the door to the nook was opened.

Both girls and Doctor Tomasow silently pushed themselves into the doorframe.

And then a cheerful laughter woke Marianne out of her reflections. She looked around. All three stood there and laughed at her.

She laughed along with them without further ado.

“Come right in. Aunt Ottilie left,” she said.

She always spoke German in front of Tomasow, as she did with the children amongst themselves.

“Yes, of course! She has been gone for a while. But what are you hiding from us, Ma? Are we not allowed to know your secret thoughts that our laughter pulled you out of?” Sophie teasingly asked.

“Indeed. I was thinking about why I was letting you happily get the better of me, you children,” Marianne responded, and she extended her hand to welcome her friend.

Sophie indignantly threw her hands over her head, but Cita inquired with interest: “Well, and the result was, Ma—?”

“It was—only keep on growing up, growing up!” Marianne said, laughing, and her eyes shone affectionately.

Doctor Tomasow glanced through half-sunken eyelids towards her. His beardless face, which often so openly carried every wrinkle and every furrow in the features of a man in his late forties, was not chatty regarding his silent thoughts. He is lean, with a Slavic, short nose and energetic chin lines: his outline took after a Russian barbarian’s face, had been marked by life, spiritualized, and stilled in its expression as if shut closed. Short, dense, and prematurely graying, the hair above his free forehead curled almost completely upright.

Both young girls must have known him well. When he didn’t interfere with their joking conversation with their mother, they swiftly glanced at one another and retreated back into their rooms in unison. That is, into Sophie’s own kingdom, which was beyond the corridor, facing the courtyard where Cita was now a well-liked guest.

The mother’s gaze followed them as they left after a few cheerfully exchanged words: Cita with her steady, balanced stride first and Sophie behind her, who once more gracefully turned and smiled.

Marianne lifted her eyes to Doctor Tomasow once the door was closed behind them.

"Isn't it true that Sophie is looking thin at her shoulders? She coughs."

He answered calmly: "Aren't we all looking like this during this time of year. You [Sie] are a little too anxious with the kid, Marianne."

"Yes, she reminds me so of —, he too was frail."

She stepped up close to him, thinking that she perceived a hesitant expression on Tomasow's face.

"Tomasow! When, no, when; you [Sie] must never keep something from me, never —."

And she suddenly turned pale.

"But! But!" he said with his insistent, persuading voice. He took her hands, like a child's, in his. "Don't let harmless, common conditions affect you [Sie] like a horse gone wild. —Your [Sie] hands suddenly turned freezing cold. Colder blood would be better. —In fact, Sophie is absolutely healthy. I can vouch for this. The similarity that you [Sie] just suggested is just her delicate skin pigmentation that is a natural result of such a blonde type; it guarantees Sophie a strikingly beautiful complexion for a long time to come, with some care. Well, she is gorgeous enough already, in my eyes. A lovely, good, beautiful kid you have in her, Marianne."

She listened attentively, endless faith in her eyes.

His figure, though wide in the shoulders and indiscernibly slanted, towered over Marianne a good deal. She did not seem average height, instead almost small next to him, and when she had to lift her eyes like this to him while speaking, one could think the age difference between them was more substantial than it was in reality.

"But it is good for Sophie that she is here with me, and I can care for her down to every insignificant thing—don't you [Sie] find that too? Though Cita is indeed so excellently taken care of by the family that she lives with in Berlin; I do also correspond with the people, and still, that would not be for Sophie."

She looked at him questioningly the whole time.

Tomasow shrugged his shoulders.

"Of course, she wouldn't have it nearly as good anywhere in the world other than being cared for by her mother. However, that is self-evident. Why do you [Sie] even ask in the first place?"

"I really do not know," Marianne mumbled; "I do not know why she is the child of mine I am constantly anxious for. There is so much fear in my love for her—. That is why I sometimes need to hear from you [Sie] that her health doesn't worry you."

"No. If there is one, it is you from time to time, Ma," he said with a quiet, almost forgiving smile and freed her hand.

Far too often, he liked to call her by this nickname arising from the fact that the children, ever since their childhood, had sometimes taken the liberty of dubbing their mother "Marianne" like a good companion, which Tomosaw found most indicative already then. Now and again, however, the astonishment of others left her pausing in the middle of their undertaking. The last that remained of Marianne's name was what a good-willed person could take as an attempt at the word 'mama.'

"And the singularity of the syllable befits her," Tomasow thought to himself, "— this single tone as a name, as if one is only able to chant just the one syllable, which one does not quite want to name or cannot express. Far, far behind the single tone rests and resonates the whole —."

Marianne walked over to the desk and turned the oil lamp brighter.

"Are you [Sie] still standing at my back? That is uncanny," she said, her head turning back, and she then tiredly settled herself down in front of the desk onto the old Luther chair that she had inherited from her father, the school director.

Tomasow pulled the tall rocking chair standing next to some planters a little closer over to her.

He took from the cigarettes that Marianne offered him and silently lit one.

"I think that, in the end, I returned home from abroad the last time specially because of that, such a horrible cosmopolitan I was already threatening to become," he then remarked.

"For what? For our small talk."

"Strictly speaking, it is not even small talk, as you are often not very talkative, especially when you [Sie] are tired in the evening, or when you start taking notes in your dreadful blue school notebooks."

Marianne leaned herself back and turned her face to him. She said smilingly, "Well, then you just sit and rejoice in how endlessly brave and well-behaved I am. Indeed, this must be a joy for you [Sie]! Afterall, who taught me to prevail in this school-notebook-existence."

"Are you talking about me?!" Tomasow's face had an expression of disbelief. "Quite the contrary, I tried my utmost best to make clear to you [Sie] all the difficulties and disruptions such a profession would entail when you [Sie] plunged yourself into the grueling endeavor."

"Indeed. And, by those means, armed me for it; those means taught me not to give up after the first defeat. I knew so definitely that You [Sie] will be at my side and help me up again, oh, that was a good feeling, believe you [Sie] me."

Tomasow smoked silently.

It wasn't quite like that. In reality, he had never trusted her to have the strength to fight for survival. A fight that she, with a lion's heart, took up for herself and the little ones. No, in the beginning, he could not have, by any means, assumed that she was up for such a life.

He helped her with his advice and support only temporarily at that time. He helped her as he himself wished to remain close to her.

However, later, when she would be at the absolute end of her strength, being pushed to the breaking point, yes, back then, he had imagined a completely different ending. A completely different one—.

Almost without realizing it, deep entrenched in these memories, Tomasow's gaze fixated on the closed, olive wood frame that stood in the middle of the desk.

Marianne had followed the direction of his gaze.

"May I?" he asked.

Without answering, she extended her hand, took the frame from the desk, and handed him the well-known picture.

He peered attentively at the young, soulful face in the frame— a beardless young face. The similarity to Sophie was indeed unmistakable, though not in the temerity of the forehead and the chin.

But something so tender lay over the whole thing —.

Tomasow bent even more deeply over the picture and remarked, "When I imagine how you [Sie] must have looked back then—and how this looks here—I easily get the feeling: look, two kids whom one wants to protect."

She smiled indiscernibly.

"We didn't need protection. Against nothing. Indeed, we had one another."

"Admittedly. But who of you [Sie] protected whom?"

"Each one the other. —Oh, there is only one unbelievable thing, that one is left behind when the other is gone. How is this even allowed? — poor people, for whom this is just so."

He rose to place the picture back on the desk.

"No such words, Marianne! No such outbursts, not even for a second! You [Sie] know from your own experiences, that life sprouts again, time and time again."

"Yes, life: that is defined by my children."

Tomasow took a seat in the rocking chair again. After a pause during which he smoked silently, he slowly said: "it has always seemed to me as if there is a strong need in you [Sie] for there to be a superiority beside you— someone to look up to. You have so much of a child somewhere in you, Marianne. That is perhaps why I find it so difficult to imagine you [Sie] side by side — by 'his' side."

She leaned back and nestled deeply in her chair and stared as if spellbound at the frame. A slight red laid on her cheeks.

"Oh, above us— indeed there was so much above both of us!" she said with half a voice. "Why the need for another superiority? We transformed, entwined in one another, together under such lofty dreams, against such lofty goals. And I always believed: how we lived there, only that is life. It arched around us like the sky from all sides, to which we gave ourselves. And so every crumb of earth was a home to us."

Again Tomasow thought: 'just like two children.' Though he did not respond with anything.

But Marianne turned her head to him and suddenly extended her hand to him: "You [Sie] judge based on times after I had lost him," she remarked, "Yes, I needed someone above me then, however. I needed advice, help, and footing. A footing having lost my homeland, an orientation in the complete unknown. I needed you [Sie] then. I could not be alone, so entirely alone in the dark. Often, I still think: when overcoming the most bitter experience, if only a warm human voice persuades, commands, and orders me to do so. I do not know if all women's hearts are so weak. I am."

He had accepted her hand and held it, held it for a moment in his, looking at it. Very lightly, he stroked his fingers over the back of her hand, which had become a little rough from the wind and the cold of this week, which drove Marianne incessantly to the streets.

He knew that she possessed a nervous aversion against rough, reddened hands or chapped lips. When she was young and happy, she must certainly, even under little material circumstances, have groomed herself with delight, like a pretty person before a celebration.

Tomasow lowered her hand and stood up.

"What is the matter with you [Sie]? You [Sie] want to leave already? Wait a little longer, and, best of all, stay for some tea," Marianne suggested, "Sophie so very much wants to perform, show you her progress with the violin, just for you, — would you [Sie] like that? That would make her rather happy."

"Yes, why not?"

Tomasow stepped away from the window and looked ahead.

Marianne opened the door to the hallway, called something to the girls, and then returned to him again.

"What are you looking at so adamantly?" she asked and stepped closer to him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I am only observing what is lined up between the double panes in the window," he replied and motioned to a number of covered glass containers, "like soldiers with paper helmets on their head. Don't you [Sie] find those things ugly?"

"They are only ugly until they bloom. Then they come into the room, and the paper caps come off. And then they are Hyacinths!" she said consolingly with a smile.

But Tomasow was displeased.

"Hyacinths? What for? Do you actually like the all-too-sweet fragrance? Surely, they are not your favorite flowers in the end, Marianne?"

"Favorite flowers? I prefer roses; I prefer them most of all. You [Sie] know what, I would love to possess a whole greenhouse and a conservatory to go with it!" she said mischievously, "Such a Hyacinth under its paper cap now is my greenhouse. You don't have to hold it too close under your nose, but rather spread the glasses well around the room, and then it'll be fine. It resembles spring and fragrance after all! And I don't like being totally without them any more than I like being without music."

"Indeed because of the Hyacinths, the double panes are not glued shut during the winter like the rest," Sophie remarked, who had come inside and was searching for her violin.

Tomasow lit a fresh cigarette and sat down near the window. He studied Marianne.

"How much self-indulgent pleasure is left in her after all. Even after all this time!" he thought. "Unspent, pent-up! How entertaining it must be to release that, to liberate it. Even still now."

She sat in her former place again, her head tilted a little. While she waited for Sophie to light the candles on the music stand and begin, she seemed to be daydreaming— perhaps in thoughts that the short talk with Tomasow earlier about her marital luck might have awakened in her. That's how it seemed to him.

Something soft lay over her features, a reflection as if out of her youth. One would hardly have taken her for the mother of the two grown girls at that very moment.

Cita had entered quietly and still waited at the hallway door so as not to disturb the first violin notes. She too glanced over at Marianne, and it occurred to her how beautiful her mother is— how gentle and beautiful she looked just now.

It touched her with a warm, childlike pride. Her dark eyes shone with joy.

During a moment in which the violin playing paused, she approached Marianne's chair from behind. And with one of her spontaneous, sudden movements, she embraced the mother and kissed her at the tilted neck.

Just then, Cita turned halfway towards Tomasow, whose gaze intently rested on her mother. Cita involuntarily looked over to him with a pretty expression, as if nestling close to Marianne, she wanted to say delightedly: "How lovely and beautiful she is, isn't that true? Don't you want to kiss her to death on the spot?"

Then suddenly, her eyes darkened.

Some kind of inexplicable self-consciousness came over her. She bowed her head, as if protective, against her mother's head and blushed slowly all over her face.

Meanwhile, Tomasow absentmindedly listened to the violin playing. He loved and understood music—musical in his nature like almost all Russians. But today, he did not feel Sophie's music which still demanded forbearance.

Yes, yes! That the children were there had kept Marianne so inaccessible and made her so prematurely serious. It made her at times touchingly beautiful, this seriousness down beneath all cheerfulness, yet too serious— all too serious for him.

Tomasow met Cita's gaze —who seemed to look at him inquiringly—at this consideration. She still stood leaning against the mother's chair as if protecting him.

"Like a young policeman!" Tomasow thought to himself.

At the same time, he confessed to himself that it was these kids alone who restored Marianne's faith to live again.

Back then, the violent pain regarding the death of her husband seemed to have killed the mother in her as well. When she was brought to Russia—with her two dearest little things—then she was not willing to keep living. She could not live. And amongst her relatives, one began to talk of mental disorders and of transferring her to a mental institution.

Tomasow saw Marianne for the first time back then, during these first abominable, despairing times of her pain.

He, himself, being very out of sorts, had just come from abroad. After years of stimulating fulfillment and interesting work in Vienna and Paris, everything at home seemed so stale and insipid, so completely stock-still. He couldn't breathe, there was no air—and least of all, he couldn't see himself permanently settling back into his medical practice here.

He was led to Marianne on one of these days.

Cowering on the floor of her room, the brown hair thick and scraggy around her poor face—the face of a shocked and hurting child—completely mute and very starved, as she refused to take food; that is how he saw her for the first time.

What struck and captivated him from the very beginning was the strength of this temperament, which stormed against death, inwardly seeming to chase away its prey continually. Tomasow thought that he had never seen such a struggle of the soul—a struggle against the inescapable—as he now saw in front of him day after day since he started devoting his medical care to Marianne.

Her relatives were sincerely sorry for her, but to them, the marriage was crazy to begin with. Both spouses so young, both barely mature for the great jubilance and great seriousness that they expected from living together; and, the young artist had by no means enough money or fame when he courted Marianne. Sensible people did not understand how, as for everything, he also needed to be close to her. And he was not allowed to teach them any better, because just when he began to succeed, he had to die.

Marianne, however, was incapable of understanding this; no, never ever was she able to grasp that life could be against her dearest partner, that it could let him die— abandon him.

Marianne moved to the countryside on Tomasow's advice. In a village by Moscow, an old relative moved with her into a small country house close to an overgrown park that belonged to a former private estate.

Spring had just begun— late northern spring. Endless plains in its first flush of green, vast budding birch forests, a calm lake surrounded by trees—.

There in the loneliness, there in the spring whose lush beauty pained her to death and tore her soul bloody with its magic, Marianne's most difficult moments raged unreservedly.

Perhaps she recovered with the same strength from which she suffered; she tasted her pain far too strongly and fervently to not heal herself from it one day.

A primitive small wooden bridge led from the porch of the country house over somewhat swampy water and directly to the grassy paths of the old park. Countless swarms of mosquitoes buzzed through it during the summer and maintained a fine dark note in the air; the fragrance lifted warm and humid from the shady grasses and over the lushly overgrown flowers, and here and there stood a collapsed, mossy stone bench build against sparse birch trunks. Tomasow drove out here every day. When he came, both little girls would run out to meet him, Annunziata, the older one with lively big jumps, and the younger one, Sophie, who always walked hastily and frequently tripped over her own small legs until she, at last, managed the distance and reached her friend, not without crying bitterly.

In the city and in his own affairs, Tomasow busied himself with all kinds of complicated troubles: how he would relate to the homeland, how he would settle into her, and why she still lacked so much that had long been on the agenda in the more culturally mature countries abroad? But here, in this dark summer park, with Marianne and her kids, the importance of culture and intellectual questions regularly faded from his mind. In the forefront stepped life in its most elemental, simple meaning— life in the face of death and the question of whether it could be endured. It seemed to him that life must be something beautiful because he saw Marianne quietly return to it— very quietly at first, as she began to play with her kids.

Even before she knew how to care of them and think, she played with them as though she, herself, were not much more than a weak kid. And thus she already had answered the big question for herself.

The first thought that later took complete possession of her was obvious and primitive as well: the urge to work for the daily bread. For the moment this worry was taken care of for her by others, and in case of need one also promised to take the children from her.

She wanted to stay together with them and feed them herself. This gave her the strength she needed.

Tomasow remembered well the decisive conversations about this, at a bench in the park on an unbearably hot summer afternoon filled with threats of thunderstorms. He responded to everything that Marianne wished, happy to even have her healed–so far that she had strong wishes and worries. He offered himself to do all of the first necessary steps in the matter.

Then Marianne lifted little Sophie onto her lap and leaned down to Cita who curiously listened, pressed at her knee, and she declared softly: “Now Ma will get an awful lot to do, all for her kids! And the more she does, the more beautiful and greater they shall become, from day to day! Isn’t that glorious, you kids?”

Cita’s small ears must have heard only the sounds not the actual words; a sound so unaccustomedly joyful that it must have reminded them of something quite distant, sweet, somewhat forgotten, a jubilation which had once shone through all of the mother’s words, as if they were just as many caressing promises.

So she vehemently clapped her hands and repeated after her mother: “Glorious, kids!”

And Marianne sat with a trace of a smile for the first time in the muggy stormy air and under the motionless tree, like on the eve of better, more festive days.

Tomasow, though, thought almost with disgust about the numbing, unnerving work life that now should lay before her. And in the face of this smile, thoughts about more beautiful possibilities for the future pushed themselves to the forefront —.

“Just don’t underestimate the difficulties of the matter too much either!” he remarked after a pause with a hesitant warning. “It is not certain that you [Sie] are ready for these brutal demands on your resilience.”

Marianne lifted her head and looked at him with a sanguine trust in her face. Her hand lay on Cita’s hair.

“That I am not a match for them I know very well!” she said calmly. “But you [Sie] will help me get beyond my few capabilities. —don’t you [Sie] want to help me do that?”

“I certainly will if you [Sie] don’t shy away from it yourself on closer inspection.”

In Marianne’s eyes emerged an expression like an anguished memory of the struggles of her soul she survived.

She mumbled, “I shied away from everything—from every minute because it wanted to be lived to the fullest. And wasn’t that at the same time a brutal demand: to live—? I know that it will still sometimes catch up with me—that I then feel overburdened. I want to but can’t; I will most certainly still often be afraid of life —.” She broke off, a shiver passed over her. However, then she slowly added, “That is why someone who knows me must break my fear and my resistance—must help me for the sake of both little ones.”

— In this very moment he understood how close he had become with her during those difficult times, as the one who needs to be uninvolved, not affected, who had devoted himself to her medically and as a human being with strict objectivity. He understood how much she attributed to his help, even though this had to a large extent been the help from her own nature.

He was supposed to help her cope with life from now on; at the same time, he lived his own life in indecisive disunion —.

And nevertheless: he began to believe that he would succeed with her being there. Such a strong appeal to his strength that intervenes and plans emanated from these calm, trusting eyes; a strong joy entailed by the responsibility that they stirred in him, as if all of the capabilities of his soul were targeting one goal.

And strangely enough, at the same time, he never sensed it so bitterly as in this hour, not himself non-ambivalent and uniform with full drive rooted in the ground of his homeland. Had he not already in his youth—in his young naivete to be ready for everything—only ever bumped into the hard, high wall of the existing conditions; wasn’t he supposed to find his full development abroad; should he not, dragged back by homesickness, have had to refrain from bringing to bear in his homeland precisely those insights and advances of which it was most obviously in need: how differently his life would have been summed up for him as a man, as a human being! How often would it have contained a similarly strong and stronger appeal to his efficiency!

But he never spoke of this to anyone; abroad he spoke only quietly of his homeland, and then gently, as of a suffering kid whom strangers are forbidden to even touch; and at home he could not talk of his years abroad with the enthusiasm they possessed for him, because here all of his words involuntarily came out as though they had been merely egotistic pleasures, though it was to him at least as much a zealous and serious life of work.

He therefore kept silent, distrusted people, and, in return, they no longer really trusted him.

— — He looked at Marianne absorbed in such thoughts while he sat on the stone bench under the birch trees in the old, dense park.

She was looking straight over the meadows into the distance, the head tilted forward a little, the hands slightly folded in her lap. The loose, pinned-up bun left the gentle curve of the neckline wonderfully exposed.

Not a single train of self-conscious independence in the collected posture, and yet something like comfort and faith.

It filled him with astonishment!

Whatever might occur in life, the last thing he would be able to do is look at another person so faithfully, being fully convinced that this person will save his soul.

This was the first step for her reawakening to life, as if by chance—the involuntary.

The very first thing she found again was a calm, trusting attitude —.