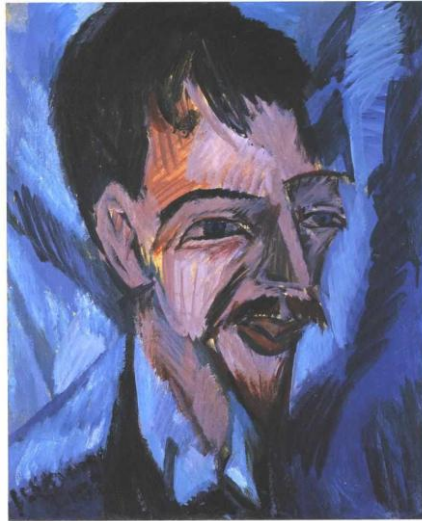




Alfred Döblin

STAUFFER AND THE WOMEN

A novella from *November 1918*, omitted from the Woods translation published by Fromm International.

Translation © C D Godwin 2021

The dramatist Erwin Stauffer is introduced, almost in passing, at the Writers' Congress towards the end of *November 1918* Vol. 1: [*Citizens and Soldiers*](#) (pp. 211-213, excerpted here as the Prologue).

The novella is then distributed throughout the three subsequent volumes:

Vol. 2 *Verratenes Volk* (VV) = *A People Betrayed*

Vol. 3: *Heimkehr der Fronttruppen* (HdF) = *The Troops Return*

(vols 2 + 3 = Woods APB),

Vol. 4: *Karl & Rosa* (= Woods K&R)

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PROLOGUE

The Intellectuals' Congress

(From *Citizens and Soldiers* 1918, pp. 211-213)

After fist-shaking exchanges of insults, the manifesto was endorsed by a barely visible majority, which opponents at once rejected as an artefact of chance. It ended with a lengthy debate on procedural rules and statutes, with proposals for amending the statutes continuing late into the night.

As it grew late, towards midnight, and the session continued with only a few still in attendance, there appeared in the overheated room among the disordered chairs the dramatist Stauffer, an elderly amiable gentleman, small, with a soft dark moustache. Stauffer had been spotted now and then at the congress, always keeping silent. He wrote novellas and well-received plays, mostly set in the Middle Ages, some allegorical, finely chiselled works in rhyme. He was very retiring. Now he sat down next to a tall young lyricist, a lively man with a big dark woolly head, one of those new poets of humanity. They chatted. Head against the windowsill, the very elegant Stauffer, who already inclined to a certain stoutness, listened with mild weariness to the silver-tongued poet, a true apostle of new things. As he listened he became invigorated. He followed attentively, anxiously even, the words that flowed so effortlessly from the lips of the man opposite. Clearly he was learning something. The tall hymnodist was complimenting his older colleague for having taken the trouble to descend from his lofty belvedere. "Spoken without the least irony. I am a true admirer of yours. I have paid close attention to all your writings."

Stauffer: "You say lofty belvedere. You mean ivory tower." He thanked the younger man for the proffered cigarette. "Of course, what else can you mean. And you are not far wrong, in some respects. I feel it myself."

"And that is why you are especially welcome here."

With a great cry of joy and a hearty laugh, a sturdy athletic man approached from the front, much younger than the quiet dramatist. His face was flushed, his light brown hair hung untidily over his forehead and ears, his little eyes look out with a cunning shrewdness. It was the much-read and very active novelist Wilhelm Morgen. "What! Stauffer in the lion's den?" And he actually hugged the shy visitor, who had stood up with an embarrassed smile. Morgen gushed: "A stroke of genius, your coming here. Stauffer, what if we were all to stand in the corner sulking and not taking part! Wonderful, wonderful. Do you come here often?"

Stauffer replied bashfully that he had turned up a couple of times. Morgen threw up his hands in horror: "And you never made contact with us and never put your name on the attendance list and never came forward to the committee table where you'd have been welcomed with open arms?" And in a quiet but furious voice he related, one arm on the lyricist's shoulder, the other on Stauffer, how things had gone with him and how he'd come through. Had he not been typecast as a conservative, a patriot?

“And I make no apology. We’ve all made mistakes. And I still have certain old predilections. A man can’t change just like that. But for that very reason, full speed ahead! Don’t keep to the sidelines. People need us.”

“Quite right!” the lyricist applauded.

Morgen: “I began as a monarchist. How many of us did not. Does it make sense to be a monarchist today? Play a Cinderella role, like the Carlists in Spain, or the supporters of Mary Stuart in England? Ridiculous, ridiculous. Go along with it, that’s the watchword, and the right one, honestly.”

“Exactly what I think,” the tall lyricist added, tapping Morgen on the arm. “Naturally, I had no need to change course first.” Morgen crowed with delight. He let go of them both: “That’s why you are also our flag-bearers, our flame, the pillar of fire in the desert, no anti-Semitic allusion intended. For you ought to know, Stauffer, what he wrote recently, I know it by heart: ‘Arouse thyself, man from the masses. Come away from the doltish, the desiccated. Abandon the sad heaps, leave the past behind. Come to me, brother!’” The lyricist gave a smug smile. “You’ve remembered it perfectly. It begins: ‘I see thee that mournest in thy lonely room.’”

Stocky Morgen suddenly offered Stauffer his short firm hand in a sober and businesslike manner: “Anyway, Stauffer, it was a splendid idea for you to come here.” He had noticed that a vote was being taken up front, and dashed off. The young lyricist gave a knowing nod at his back: “That man went with one bound from monarchist to confirmed democrat.”

Stauffer: “A whirlwind. Such vigour.”

The lyricist: “Of course there are opportunists too.”

They stood silent, side by side. The lyricist waited for the famous visitor to make some kind of statement. Then he forced a smile, excused himself and left. Stauffer bowed politely. Left alone he gazed across rows of empty chairs to the front, where a small crowd was arguing. He drew back the curtain, looked out on the dark Tiergarten.

No one noticed him leave.

EPISODE 1

(VV p. 238-248; Woods APB p. 166)

OLD LETTERS

It was already deep in the night when the dramatist and novelist Stauffer started awake. Still fully dressed, among a disorder of books, he had fallen asleep in the armchair. The three flames in the ceiling light dazzled him. He pulled out his watch, half past two. Bitter taste, mouth gummed up. Tall packing chests over by the chaise longue. He planned to move out on 1st December, away from the Bavarian quarter of Berlin, out and away. Damn the revolution, every evening the neighbourhood, Spichernstrasse, was in uproar. He’d had enough.

He sits so stiffly, stout man in his armchair massaging his left arm; it's gone to sleep. The writing desk is within reach. His eye falls on the big open packet under the table lamp. It came into his hands towards midnight, seemed to be just letters, then he succumbed to weariness, and slept.

He shifts closer to the desk, pulls a sheet from the packet, reads. He has no idea who wrote it. Addressed by his first name, Erwin, at the sign-off he's embraced and kissed. It ends with a big flourishing K. He doesn't know who sent it. He yawns.

Another sheet, different handwriting. Strange occupation, shuffling through papers at three in the morning. But he wants this. He stretches an arm over the abyss, wants to be down there. Cheap little sheets, regular schoolchild script. Who is it? She calls me "My own Erwin", "Your Elsa". I don't know, I do not know, who it is, must have been around at some point, our paths must have crossed. But I know nothing.

His arm drops slack to his knee. Is he falling asleep again? His head turns to the side. That's me. I just don't know.

Standing clearly before his eyes, his former wife, Klara, daughter of an industrialist. At the start of his fame they lived together, she's been back in her Hamburg a long while now. Mother with her daughter, gone our separate ways with no fuss at all. She I do remember, we earned my first laurels together. I never loved Klara, she never loved me. Strange notion, we paired up just like that, and there's my living daughter.

He squinted sideways at the packet, had to reach out again. The arm stayed stretched, hand stuck among rustling paper, fingers crumpling pages. I've grown old. I'm useless now. My plays are still staged, but not in Berlin. They no longer resonate. I've noticed for a while now. A few weeks ago, the first act of my play in Dresden, I had to run out to the street, find a little bar, sit with a glass of beer, stunned, so it was true what I'd noticed for months: they no longer resonate, the plays are the same but the people have changed, the times too, and me. Slumped there with a beer. I'm losing my marbles, I'm a war victim, severely wounded.

And so turn about, head in the sand, oh yes.

His hand pulled out a letter. At random. Who's this writing to me?

People, listen now to what you wrote me, for sure I barely read it. Postmark 12 March 1899. Right, Florence, to me, from 1899, a year after the child was born, Klara's parents wanted a child, neither of us did.

A letter to me from 1899. This demands a formal toast, to think it's actually found me. And he climbs to his feet, stuffs the letter in his jacket pocket and stumbles from the cluttered library to the next room, it's dark. He clicks the light switch, damn, bulbs must have gone. Feels his way along the wall of the dining room until he meets the well-turned legs of the sideboard, bends down, tugs at a door, feels for a bottle. And without looking he carries it back to the lighted room, sits in the armchair by the desk, strokes the bushy grey moustache back from his lips and takes two deep swigs, tipping back the head and its sweat-clammy hair. He gasps at the second swig, it's neat rum,

the bottle drops to the floor between his knees. He gasps, rubs his eyes, snorts, phew, that burns. Does me no good, toasting these old letters. The burning in his throat and stomach fades. Maybe I'm woozy. His hand feels in his pocket.

*I salute you, phial of rare potion, I lift you down, with devotion!*¹ Florence, 1899. He picks up a paperknife and runs it slowly down the edge of the envelope. So, now you've arrived. We hear of Pharaohs' tombs in the Pyramids, opened later there were miasmas, people died.

It must be an actress, I don't know the handwriting, easy, rhythmic, I see a small brunette, a heart – when she's older she'll be good for a mother role. And now, good Lord, she pays me a visit. He unfolded the letter on the desk, three sheets, it'll start "Dear Erwin, my dear Erwin" or "Beloved Erwin". He reads: "My heaven, my joy, my one and only, the only person I love on this Earth."

What is this? Who? To me? Where's the envelope? Yes, addressed to me. He turns the page over: "Lucie". That was the female lead in my, what was my play called? *The First Snow*. She's taken the name from that.

"My heaven, my joy, my one and only, the only person I love on this Earth. I don't know when I'll be able to reach you with this letter, for you said you'll be travelling, or are already on the road. Erwin, if there is such a thing as Truth, before myself, before you, before God in whom I believe, then I tell you: I did not want this. I did not flinch from Fate when I met you in the Director's office, for the audition. To my – to our – joy. It was the first time I became aware of an inexpressible feeling: there you are, there you stand, there you speak – you, mine, me, more than me. When I saw you that first time, I no longer felt myself as me. It was over with me, now it was only 'us'. And now it has taken this path. This wretched path I never meant to take. Who am I now, Erwin, after you have said 'yes' to me once, twice? After I have lost myself to you."

His fingers drummed on the desktop. Who's the subject here, no one's ever spoken to me like this, ever. He raised his head and stared at the open packet, this Pandora's Box. He tugged at the thick wrapping paper, and the first thing that fell out when he bent back the stiff edge was a bundle of letters tied with thick lilac tape. He scattered the pile, maybe there are more bundles, no. This letter had come from the bundle, the tape was loose.

Unusual tape. Such a smell, an intense fragrance. I know the colour: Klara's nightgown, when she had the child, way back then. But how did the tape attach itself to these letters? He fastened the tape, flung the bundle gloomily down on the desk. As if I'm paralytic, I have no memory, I remember the tape, but not that she gave it me, no.

Bemusement, profound consternation: so many unopened letters, six, eight, eleven, fifteen, same handwriting, sent to our Berlin address. And I never opened any? Was I travelling, too busy, sick? Impossible. I was in good health, then.

Why were the letters unopened.

¹ *Faust* 690-91.

“You must not misunderstand me, it should cause you no grief that I desired you. Did you not say to me once that you desired me too, and you added – it made me laugh and I really knew you – that you were a puzzle to yourself, and had never known yourself like this – like a young girl in love for the first time.

“But I was already terribly ahead of you, Erwin. I saw and knew at once that it was not about your wife – to her you were merely an ornament – but about your fame, your many many women (forgive me), your plays. I was delighted to play your ‘Lucie’. Every one of your words revealed you, I knew at once who you are, better than you yourself. And you took me on, as was your duty towards yourself, and then, now –

“The bond, Erwin, established between you and me is no whim. It is not one that can be broken by any act of yours or mine. It was imposed on you and me by laws natural and supernatural. And so it remains to this day, to this moment when you are still here. And you?

“All I can do now is make a note for the record. You said my voice is like yours, and is for you. But you permitted me no more than to lift it up to you. You stroked my hand not four weeks ago, you were so full of cares – and left. And then the pain entered into me.

“I saw you dozens of times. I asked myself: what has happened? I avoided following you. The fame, the many, many women – your plays, or what is it? It must be, Erwin, that you are already so lost in it all that you can nevermore come free of it.

“My arms always yearned for you, yet you shied from my touch. But the bond between you and me, Erwin, was and remains firm, let me repeat this. I complain, but it won’t happen again. The pain is a poison, and should not extend to you. My loving friend, who dare not come into your own life. My love for you is endless, endless. I am holding a picture of you on my knee. I know you as well as your own mother, know who you are and that you belong to me.

“The pain in me is cruel. Help me, when you come back again. Be kind to me. I am distraught. Erwin. Death is at my door. Forgive me for not holding myself back.”

He read, read again, again. And then: “Lucie”. A slim blonde beginner, who was swiftly given the part. A passionate creature, I really know nothing more of her, not even her surname.

But why then did I open none of these fifteen letters? That’s not like me.

No, I’m not to blame. I’m no such common beast. The letters were kept from me. I was obstructed, I was ...

What’s this now (he pulls out another letter), a picture postcard from Milan, Teatro alla Scala, her writing. “I do not want to go on alone, not one more step.”

Unread, held back, deception, murder. Murder... No one ever spoke that way to me.

He leans over the packet, pulls out another. In pencil: “Just don’t think about it, or tears come. I am nearby, in a hotel. Loud voices outside my door, singing from the

next room. I have become a dog, chasing after you. I am afraid of the worst, of dying. Maybe I did not try hard enough to tell you what you are to me – that is not your problem. But there is one thing I must say to you:

“Erwin, you live in direst poverty and do not realise. From you come such abundance and music, but how are they to thrive in the long term? Who will add to them? How do you think to grow – without me? Acknowledge what it is that you hang over yourself. Don’t, don’t, I warn you. I love, love you endlessly. In loving you I have my bliss. And I call to you, do not deny us, recall your words whispered to me as we sat side by side, whispered to my throat. I cannot conceive, cannot conceive what has become of me in just three days, ever since you would not let go my hand after the audition. Yes, Erwin, it was I who held you tight then. I am proud of it.”

He slumped over the desk. His head knocked the lamp. The fat packet scratched his chin. He groaned, his gaze drifted down. This is too much. Then – he noticed in the middle of the packet a letter in very large format. His name stabbed him in the eye. No stamps. An envelope of Klara’s, her handwriting.

A forgotten letter? It too is unopened.

A chill falls over him. The tape too was Klara’s.

He puts the letter down.

What’s going on here? What do they want of me? He climbs to his feet. He steps away to protect himself, stands in the middle of the room.

I should leave. This is a Pharaoh’s tomb. I was about to undress. Someone put it there among my papers.

What does Klara have to do with it. I’ve been carrying the letters around with me all the time, among my papers, without knowing.

I’ll have another swig before I get to grips with it, that pile of letters from her. I shall wear fur gloves – or I’ll smash the whole packet with a hammer.

His teeth chattered. He paced up and down, shivering. Rum, yes, a rum. He picked up the bottle. There’ll be a drop left at the bottom. He flung the empty bottle at the chair and began to curse softly, fists at his face. Monster, monster, just wait till I catch you, monster, you do not know me, you do not know what I have in me.

Once more to the phial of potion.

Klara’s elegant, regular script, look at it: “Dear Erwin”. You can keep the “dear”, you iceberg from the northern coast.

“It will a special surprise for you one day to find my letters among your papers, after we exchanged all our correspondence yesterday. But this letter is new, and then one day, one very distant day you, or maybe someone else – for you too will die – your executor, your heir, will read it. For I do not want the words buried in my breast under the rubric ‘Erwin’, to remain there and maybe all at once disappear along with me.

Whether this letter reaches you who will leave our shared house tomorrow, or someone else, it will have its effect.

“And that is what I want. **Yes, Erwin, what a shock: Klara wants it too. One day Klara will want it.** But I would prefer that it reach you while you are still alive. I shall tuck this letter along with certain others in the trunk where you keep your letters. The letters with which mine belong I shall bundle with tape from the nightgown I wore before our daughter came along, she who now has no father.

“We married almost ten years ago. At least, we lived together for ten years. I came to know you better than you know me, better than you realised. You never looked at me, not really. I was never a beauty, and during those ten years under your influence I certainly grew no uglier. I did everything to please you. I – Erwin, don’t be startled that now a word comes between us that I never uttered – I loved you. Even now it is with inexpressible pain that I let you go.

“But I shrank back in the face of your silent assurance, your shameful determination to treat me as your wife, your housewife, your representative to the world. Honourably, to be sure, most honourably, but a stony-hearted honour.

“This left poor me, forbidden to speak and conscious of nothing but shame, with no recourse but to freeze into myself. In this you did me dreadful wrong. I could have forgiven you all your women, most of whom I knew, and could have led you, the artist not to be measured by normal standards, to others yet prettier and more refined. But there I still was. Even if only as Klara, your wife.

“It was four weeks ago, in this room where I now write, that you broached, off the cuff, the idea that we should separate. You saw no need to offer particular reasons. When I said nothing, for you it was all nicely settled.

“During these weeks I have despised you, and wrestle even now with my feelings of contempt for the man at whose side I spent ten years, who shows no respect for his little daughter, his family – and leaves.

“I have taken my revenge, Erwin. I see you smile: Klara taking revenge.

“You find my letter among a dozen others.

“I have seen ‘her’, and twice, in your absence, have spoken briefly with her, in the entrance hall. A single glance showed me who it was standing there, young, upright, resolved, not especially pretty.

“Who? I myself. Someone who loved you, and wanted to obtain her life from you.

“But Lucie – she really was called Lucie, you presaged her name and her fate in your play – her eyes and voice took all hope from me. I had no such unselfconscious strength.

“After the second meeting my resolve hardened. For I could also see how you behaved, and what was playing out in you. You were not torn between me and her – I came as little into consideration as any other member of my family, or yours. Your

struggle was between her – and your whole life so far. Even your art was at stake. She had plunged you into a crisis. She was that strong. It was certain she had attained her goal – my goal.

“So I set to. I admit that in doing so I did not love you. The slave to which you had reduced me wanted revenge. The slave wanted to act on her own behalf. It was your curse upon me that made nothing else possible.

“She came several times to our house. She was adamant, shameless towards me, knowing me to be your wife. I received her, or told her from you that you were working. She telephoned; I took the call. I did housemaid’s duty with the apparatus, and failed to pass on messages. Letters from her arrived. I opened them, read them, tore them up. I confess it. Then I no longer bothered to open them. Here they are. You heard nothing more from her. You wavered, vaguely wondered, and then forgot.

“After Florence she fell silent. She never showed up again in the theatre. I have no idea if she is still alive.

“Even if – as I often ask myself – she died somehow because of how I treated her: Erwin, I take full responsibility. It was life against life. And I proved the stronger.

“This I say to you through this letter. Now you no longer see me as a stupid servant, an insignificant member of the family. I hope that in future the name I now sign with will sound differently in your ears.

“On this unhappy day, weeping for herself and her little daughter. Klara.”

Mouth agape, beset by cold shudders, he read this.

He stood up from the desk, panting, he groaned, fingers clawed. The monster. She stole my life. He groaned out loud, growled: “Murderess, ice-cold Kriemhilde.” He stamped his feet, trampled her with every step: Homicidal monster, monster. He began to tremble, there in the middle of the room, to shake like those war wounded out in the street. His voice grew louder, became a bestial bellow.

The porter downstairs had long since been wakened by the noises overhead, and imagined one of the house-raids so common just then. Now that it had come to loud voices, crashing objects, he pulled on some clothes and ran upstairs, listened. He heard glass break, ran back down and alerted a police patrol from nearby Speichern Strasse, two men on bicycles. He opened up for them.

They were greeted by a horrible scream. The man screamed “Help, help.” He hid behind the chaise longue. There was a smell of rum. The tenant was clearly drunk, there were no strangers in the apartment. The porter took the initiative to fetch the doctor from the second floor. He knew the gentleman, the famous dramatist. Stauffer was wheezing on the chaise longue, pointing to the desk. “There. My wife has murdered me. I’m done for. It’s all over with me.”

The doctor nodded, smiled, and led him to the bed. As he helped him undress he prepared an injection. Fifteen minutes later the famous man was fast asleep.

As he left he whispered to the porter: "The revolution. Sensitive man. Nerves."

The porter: "That's how he draws the crowds."

EPISODE 2

(VV p.274, Woods APB p. 184)

FRUITLESS JOURNEY

A dramatist snores. Intellectual workers represent public interests and eat tarts.

A chap wakes up, travels to Hamburg and is surprised by his cool reception.

Prologue

They hear snoring, regular, sometimes soft, sometimes loud, sometimes vibrant enough to make the walls tremble.

It is the dramatist Stauffer, that refined man, on whom his body plays this trick. But now, in the afternoon, he is still under the influence of the injection administered last night by the doctor on the second floor.

The apartment is as disordered as it was last night. The empty rum bottle stands on the desk beside the gaping packet from which letters spill. "Dear Erwin". "Ever yours, Grete".

A whole line of letters stretches away between the boxes, like a trail of blood.

"My Heaven, my whole life, my joy".

[Stauffer's name is edited out of the following
'Intellectual Workers...' section.

EPISODE 2 resumes at
VV p. 279, Woods APB p. 186:]

Stauffer on the Warpath

That night, while much went on in the world that troubled his sleep not at all, our gloomy dramatist Stauffer awoke and found himself in bed in the company of all the old miseries. But things that can never be predicted or properly pinned down (internal glands? Rays from particular stars?) had the effect of lifting from Stauffer all the sorrows he had wallowed in so intensely for months, especially yesterday. Those letters in the night had delivered a decisive jolt. He was raging, savage, active, pulled up from the basest miseries.

He dressed, swiftly consigned to the trunk all manuscripts and letters he could find without regard to persons, piled heavy books over them and topped the whole thing with an irrevocable lid. For he had made his decision: open the window, go to the telephone, and travel by the next train to Hamburg. The train, according to the travel agent, would leave in one hour. The dramatist, never for a second wondering how and why he had so suddenly adopted this course of action (mere vexation, after-effect of the morphine jab, the stars, internal secretions?), had already picked up hat and coat

and crammed essential items haphazardly into a suitcase. Downstairs he shook the porter's hand most heartily and thanked him for his help in the night, nervous state, nerves, all the turmoil these days. He asked him to convey thanks to the doctor, and pressed a three Mark coin into his hand: "If the apartment hasn't already been rented out (it hasn't) I'll stay one more month. I must make an urgent trip, be back in a week."

And he rides courageously through the city of Berlin which has suddenly become once again interesting, to Lehrter Station, to sort out this nocturnal business of Klara's.

It really was beyond the limit.

The good fellow forgets a great deal In his haste, setting out so furiously and soon rushing through the dark on the train: for example that he had a date for nine this evening with an actress from Dresden by the name of Bella, who was coming to Berlin especially for that purpose, and what's more he hadn't informed his forwarding agent of the change of location. But he's not bothered. At least he's on his way. He seems to himself ten years younger, twenty even, and so completely that it seems he left the marital home in Hamburg only yesterday, the home inherited by Klara from her parents. He will tackle her about all this.

EPISODE 3

(VV p. 282-290, Woods APB p. 188.)

Vengeful Man in Hamburg

And now Stauffer in his wide fleece coat alights from the train in Hamburg, picks up his little suitcase and before setting off to find a hotel– it's late evening – sits across from the station in a crowded music restaurant, seething with an unfamiliar din of human voices of a kind he has long shunned, and the booming of a band. It's hard to find a seat, he lays his coat across a stool and puts down his suitcase, and as he stands at the counter to buy cigars, keeping an eye on the coat, sees his handkerchief poking out suspiciously, and a glove has fallen to the floor. He feels in the pocket, and was not mistaken: his purse has gone.

He stares around in alarm, and sits down.

A waiter says: "There's no thieving here." The manager appears, points accusingly to a sign announcing that the management takes no responsibility for garments unless deposited in the cloakroom. Every eventuality allowed for and foreseen. Stauffer resigns himself even to this. He shrinks. Something – fate or a demon – is exercising its mischief on him.

He heads for the nearby modern hotel, and allows himself – it's coming up to midnight, so long since he was in Hamburg! – allows himself to be pulled along by the stream of humanity around the station into the brightly lit main street. He is moving into a cold clear night. Such a fresh world, life so lively as to be a miracle, red flags on several rooftops stand out alongside others black-white-red, the lights from below glare eerily harsh, they pulse and blink. The big clock in a store is lit from within, it

shows midnight. And as the clock with its internal illumination and the hands point ominously to the turn of the day, just so do the people and the buildings, silhouetted by fire, the way they move, seem to be a kind of idea, a legible script that speaks to the eyes but avoids speech.

Who has done this to us, Stauffer ask himself. A happy terror twitches in him. The phrase “stung by a divine bee” occurs to him. He strides jauntily along, he is bright, young, transformed. And he inhales a strong spice, a most pungent lure draws him on. And he is a magnet, and soon no longer walks alone, on each side there’s a woman, they cling to him and he doesn’t shake them off. He thinks: Bella’s waiting for me back in Berlin, but what of Bella, this is something else, I’m in a boat, holding the tiller.

He finds the small brunette, the quieter one, most appealing, follows her into his room. How many years since a woman, any woman, captivated him so violently, so irresistibly. Marriage, a wedding with a seething life that had already abandoned him. Let it be, even unto my death.

He slept in the hotel until midday. And as he dressed he remembered: I came to Hamburg to pay Klara a visit.

She brought all this on me.

He dressed slowly, checking to see what he had in him. He meant the visit to be a kind of revenge and punishment. But did it still make sense? He would have to ride out to Eimsbüttel. I shall go down to the street and see how things are.

Outside, cars tooted in the bright daylight, tram bells clanged, people went about their business, flags red and black-white-red still flapped in the breeze, but weren’t lit up like last night, secrets no longer dared step forth. Still, it was good to stroll along here. Finally he called a cab and rode on out.

He knew the big yellow villa on a street corner that she inherited from her parents, an extensive property with a pond. Who knows, she may not even live here now. The thought came to him as he rang the bell and no one answered. What am I doing here, actually – but now feet come pattering, a dog barks, the door opens.

First to appear was a black onrushing dog held back by a lead. Then a merry young lady, elegantly dressed with untidy dark blonde hair, poked her little nose out, still laughing from some conversation; she ordered the dog Mirza to heel. Only then did she deign to look up to the man standing there and ask, as she clamped the dog between her knees: “Yes?”

Stauffer lifted his hat and asked for the lady of the house. She shook her head: “Mama’s not here. The best place to look for Mama at this time of day is at the hotel.”

“Hotel? Doesn’t she live here?”

The girl laughed: “Of course she does, but in the mornings she’s at our hotel.”

“Which one is that?”

“Excelsior! Near the station.”

Ah, the same one he was staying at, he’d just come from there.

Stauffer stammered in confusion: “I wish to speak privately with the lady.”

The young woman, quite natural, in no way interested in him, still clutching the dog, suggested pleasantly: “If it’s urgent you can wait here, I’ll telephone. Mama would be back soon anyway.”

The dog whined horribly, she let go, it rushed at Stauffer, who stepped back. She laughed out loud at the scene. He asked, putting his hat back on, if he might approach.

A myriad thoughts rushed through his head. This exuberant creature must be his daughter. She didn’t recognise him, of course he didn’t know her. She might be adopted. No, she was Laura’s age. So, her mother Klara owned a hotel. It took the wind out of his sails.

She let him step past into a small unheated room off the entrance lobby, a kind of boot room of which he had no memory. She soon reappeared, still with the big dog tugging ahead. She had a pert ingenuous manner: “So I phoned, and Mama has left the hotel. I hope she isn’t going shopping. How do you know Mama, actually? From the theatre?”

Droll creature. What fun having a daughter like her.

“But your good lady mother was never in the theatre.”

“You think. Of course. So you don’t know her at all.”

She was already stepping away, pulling the dog behind her. Her face hardened: “Actually I didn’t catch your name. What is it you want?”

He wagged a menacing finger and smiled: “Look here, you really shouldn’t let just anyone in. I might be a Spartacist.”

“Who are you?”

“My dear young lady, I used to know you, yes, you, when you were very small. Let me provide proof, as in an old fairytale. If you go down this passage you come first to a dark room with antlers. Past the antler room, which serves, or used to, as a breakfast room, you go through a door, which back then was hung with a curtain, into a dining room. That leads to the garden, it has a stucco ceiling with little boxes, and in each box is an electric bulb.”

Her eyes widened. She came closer, sat. She said softly: “That fits. So – do you know me?” He shook his head: “I believe the little girl who was pointed out to me back then as she was led by the hand around the garden was you.”

She lifted her head: “It will have been me. But that was ages ago. So you must know my father as well.” Her face had narrowed, the frizzy head no longer matched the grave tense expression.

He: "I saw your father only once. He was always very busy, and distracted."

She, quickly: "My father is the dramatist Stauffer."

He nodded dismissively: "I know."

She, sly: "He doesn't live here. You know him? Well?"

He: "Only what I read about him in the papers."

She nodded: "He's famous." She waited for him to say something, then ran to the door: "I'll show you a picture." In a moment she was back, this time she left the dog in the lobby. She was holding a framed picture. "This is him. Do you recognise him?" She looked lovingly at the photo: "He looks overwhelmed with sadness. I do regret I was so little back then, and never knew him."

"You know his plays?"

She sighed: "All of them. All. They're so difficult. But lovely, really lovely. I have a girlfriend, she's mad about his plays. And I like his poetry."

"Do you work, my dear young lady?"

"I've had acting lessons, I really wanted to be an actress but I lack the patience, and I can't think my way into artificial roles. But it's cold in here, come to the breakfast room."

As he followed her down the passage, his heart was thumping so in amazement, excitement and expectation that he had to hold on to the wall. She opened the door: "Here we are. Do you know the room?"

He pulled himself together. She pointed to the antlers.

Then the doorbell rang three times. "Mama."

A pity, he thought. The dog barked furiously and rushed ahead, she following. The chain clinked, the pin dropped into place.

And now there was a tremendous familiar commotion in the passage. Four voices could be made out, first the deep bass of a man who laughed like a hurricane, beginning with a cannon-shot (clearly the merriment in him was held in under enormous pressure), then the giggling soothing voice of a woman that could make no headway against the man's laughter and had to extricate itself from the confusion; and then the protesting voice of the young lady, but she was helpless against the two adults whose tumult preceded them in from the street. And finally the dog, barking from its own joy or sympathy with the others' joy or in protest because it had no clue, but deafening in any case. The tumult lingered some minutes at the front door (they must be taking coats off outside), then rumbled like a machine of war down the passage and very quickly reached the antler room where Stauffer sat, completely still, rather nervous and ashamed. Now the young lady's voice prevailed. Stauffer heard her cry: "My God, there's a gentleman here waiting to see you, mama."

“Well then, we’d best be off, Laura!” the amiable bass voice threatened.

And there they were at the threshold, the source of the voices, and now all four – man, woman, young lady, dog – stepped into the room where Stauffer stood hat in hand, awkwardly, like a travelling salesman. The bearded elemental force greeted him with a jovial look, a collegial wave of the hand, a wink (ah, he thinks I’m a commercial rep), then the man kissed the woman: “You can probably manage without me now.”

“Of course. Be off, you old monster!” the woman laughed, and clapped him on the back as he strolled out.

Then they were three – or four if you counted the dog.

The woman, a large figure wearing an imposing black dress trimmed with fur, brooch flashing at her breast, strong hands with many rings, several bracelets tinkling on her right arm, now stepped towards him with an obliging smile. She had a healthy energetic face, not old, the eyes blue, around her mouth traces of merriment from her conversation with the man.

At first there was only the daughter’s voice, as she swept past her mother: “I’ll just retrieve the picture, mama.”

“What picture?”

Stauffer stands facing the sturdy woman, makes a bow.

The woman’s hand clutches her throat. Her full face, reddened by the cold, turns a shade paler, her mouth opens as if she can’t breathe, she drops into the chair where her daughter had sat, says not a word. Stauffer too keeps silent. Then, eyes still on the hat in his hands, he too sinks slowly back onto his chair.

The daughter lays an arm over the mother’s shoulder, looks bewildered from one to the other, whispers: “What is it, mother, what’s going on?”

As Stauffer sits head drooping like a poor penitent and the woman stares at him as if at a ghost, the daughter removes her arm from her mother, kicks the dog aside; it howls and creeps to the door. She stands between her mother and Stauffer, frowning.

The woman has regained her faculties, sits upright and says in a hard tone: “Go, Laura. Leave me alone with the gentleman.”

The daughter, hesitant: “Can I not stay, mother?” The woman: “Please, leave us.” So the daughter steps slowly to the door, picks up the dog’s lead, looks over her shoulder with a grim hostile glare at the man, this old acquaintance of her mother’s she has just been chatting with, runs back to the table, retrieves the photograph, and she and the dog are gone.

Laying her right arm across the table like a weapon, the hand pressed flat, the woman asks in a hard voice: “What do you want?”

He doesn’t know this woman. No trace of Klara, except perhaps the general shape of the face. He replies: “I’m in Hamburg for a few days, and wanted to pay you a visit.”

She is silent. Then, with the same free open expression she had when they entered the room, she said: "You are either ill, or mad." He (how to come out of this, I'm in a totally false position, she'll soon be asking what I need): "I do beg your pardon. It was just an idea. I didn't mean to intrude."

"Didn't mean to intrude? You turn up here after nineteen years, unannounced, sit yourself down with the girl, and tell me you don't mean to intrude? What are you up to? To what purpose have you done this? Have you lost your mind?"

He is already on his feet. She too stands. She is fizzing with anger.

He tells the strange lady: "Once again, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to intrude." He goes to the door, makes a formal bow to her back.

The girl is standing by the wall in the passage, head proudly high, arms crossed over her breast. She lets him go by without raising her eyes. He can't open the lock, fiddles helplessly. She comes up, opens it with a flick, cold air pours in. He stares at her, enchanted, unable to move from the spot.

Shattered, he says softly: "Adieu, Laura."

In the quiet street of villas he looks around to see if he is followed.

But no one comes.

EPISODE 4

(VV p.375-387, Woods APB p.242)

Death's Siren Song

After his conversation with Klara, Stauffer checked out of the hotel into which he had unknowingly booked. He transferred to another a long way from the station. He could have travelled home, his presence there was urgent, but Hamburg held him in thrall.

The meeting with Klara had thrown him into a confusion similar to that occasioned by his leafing through the old letters. So it was true what he had suspected that night: Fate has set him a trap, he's landed in a diabolical ambush. Somehow he had been made to find the letters, then he was impelled to make this Hamburg trip, in order to – see this woman, this family, in order to make him see for a moment what he had lost, his Paradise Lost. They mocked him with their laughter.

They were sitting outside his door.

For whole minutes he was choked by a feeling quite alien to him: envy, self-disgust, abasement to an outrageous degree. But he grasped the unworthy sentiment by the throat and hurled it aside. He was once again on the vengeful warpath, like that afternoon when he emerged from sleep and decided to go to Hamburg. Long hours would now be devoted to planning revenge.

Next morning he reviewed the situation. He was overwhelmed by awareness of his utter impotence. He looked on at his fate like a detective who has cornered a cunning criminal and

finally secured a confession. There he stood fettered, hands behind his back, head lowered, awaiting the fatal blow.

Then he marched up and down the room and bewailed his fate. He implored the powers that stand over our existence to be merciful and just, more than just. He conducted a silent dialogue of defence and prayer.

And so it came that he sat at the window in the living room filled with the light of a new day, pad of paper on his knees, and pulled the pen (that old weapon) from his waistcoat pocket and settled into a posture where he knew himself to be master, namely that of a writer.

Torment still gnawed away inside and acted like an all-powerful mistress over him, she disported in the liveliest fashion, whirled (so it seemed) around him like a bat. But her dominion would soon be at an end. He raised his magic wand, his pen, and on the blank paper drew her contours, her ugly wings. He revealed the ugliness of her body, she had no defence, he held her in thrall. Thus Stauffer's thoughts, and he set to.

A wild torrent of writing flowed from his pen. He set to, and drew this picture:

Death's Siren Song

They come back from the War
And stream down every street.
You see in them the joy
At their escape:
 Escape from what?
And the joy of wives and loved ones
To have them back again:
 For how long?
Oh gloomy veil
That hangs before their eyes,
Oh the rapture flowing in their limbs,
And deadening the brain:
Of these bright beings it is
The driver.
But they –
However loud their stepping,
Their stamping and clacking,
They are but misty shapes
Harried by the wind,
And do not know it.
In the corner of a narrow room
I lay and slept
And slept.
And when I awoke,
To the barred window I went
And shook the bars

And wanted to leave
But could not.
But you kept walking by outside,
And sometimes I knew you
As I know you now.
I heard your gentle swirling music,
The light tread of your dancers,
The scrape and scuffle of their flags.
And in your silken garb
You went by outside,
You monarch, royal majesty,
Death.
It is a weed,
This thing called "I".
It grew up in this world.
And from the world to clear
Every stump and stem,
Every root and shoot,
Is my fealty and my fear,
No venture dearer
That I may enter on.
O Death, we shall know right soon
Who you are, who we are not.
We windblown mist-shapes,
We drunken braggarts,
Empty vessels,
We are not life,
And you are not Death.
From a hand by us unknown,
We drift into this place.
With what wild rage it burns,
This "I" that I have "graced".
Now lay hold of me and take me up,
And lead me one small step
To you, back to wholesomeness.
The poison has now burned enough.
To light and shade, the bloom of flowers
Will I open up and make avowal.
I will exchange the spasms of the "I"
For music, dance, flags flying high.
Take me, Death, raise me up to Thee,
One call, O Death, and I am with Thee.

Writing this has calmed him. He gives his pen a grateful look and places it carefully back into his pocket. He regards the paper with the lines attentively, takes it to the fireplace, it catches fire and he watches it go up in flames. Then he sleeps, quite calmed.

In the afternoon, before he is ready to go down for tea, a visit from a lady is announced. He asks the name, doesn't recognise it. He declares he's just about to come down. Let the lady wait in the lobby.

But when he puts on his hat and takes the key from the lock, there comes a brief energetic knocking. It had already seemed that someone was trying the door. He calls out: "Enter." Quickly, even hastily, a young person holding a pair of skates, boots and all, sweeps in and at once places herself with her back to the door-curtain.

It takes him two seconds to recognise Laura, his daughter.

His left hand automatically drops the key into his pocket, his right hand removes his hat. So surprised is he to see the girl in his company, a scene he has now and then pondered with pride, but superficially.

She remains glued to the door. The skates scrape the floorboards.

He: "Laura. Please, I beg your pardon, I'm sorry, I was just coming down to the lobby."

She wore a little green hat with fur trimmings. Her jacket and skirt too were green. The jacket collar and sleeves were hemmed with fur. She stood there defiant and wild, stared directly into his eyes. Those blue-green eyes – they were his, the mouth too maybe, but his was not so tight-pressed. She said not a word.

"Would you like to sit down?" he offered, "I'll just take off my coat." She steps away from the door and sits stiffly on a chair at the table. He asks: "May I take the skates?"

Her first words, toneless: "Thanks, I'll hold on to them."

"You'll catch cold."

"It's OK."

He has no idea why she's sitting there. Was she sent by her mother. He sat down opposite at the little square hotel table covered in newspapers and books, and swept the papers aside. "I'm really glad you've given me the pleasure of this visit."

She dropped the skates and boots, put an elbow on the table, rested her chin on her hand. Her wild look reminded him of Ibsen's Wild Duck, parents quarrelling, they don't think of the child, and here we are. I've always depicted individual fates, but I was on the outside. How vehemently it now assails me, leaves me no peace in my room, sits at my table.

She said: "You came to us yesterday. Why didn't you tell me who you are? You let me show you a photo. You tricked me."

"That – your mother must have said that."

“So anyway, why did you come to see us? I’ve never had a chance to see you. Mother’s told me about you.”

“What has she told you?”

“You abandoned her when I was a baby. And never troubled yourself about us.”

“I knew things weren’t going badly for you two. Otherwise I’d have shown up.”

Her hand dropped to the table: “Mama had no use for you, thank God. But I was there too.”

There was a high wall around his heart. Things had always gone well for him. Only for a vicarious experience did he climb often to the crest of this wall and describe what he saw. Now he trembled when she said: “I was there too.” He couldn’t tell her he’d never once thought of her. Laura: squalling infant in a pram, a bleating thing. All the past is ganging up on me. My life will have a kind of Day of Judgement.

“What was I supposed to do?” he acted disingenuous. “Trouble myself? You saw how your mother reacted when I turned up.”

“Nonsense.” She transformed herself into a miniature Fury “Mama was outraged to see you turn up like that now. After nineteen years. Suddenly you have a notion to come along, just on a whim. But never in those nineteen years.”

“Did your mother miss me?”

“I don’t know. I only found out about you after I started school. And I didn’t understand anything until I was twelve.”

“What did you understand?”

A child’s soul. Women have busied themselves so much with me. I pleased them, or caused them worries. They love you and curse you. But a child. Remarkable to have an effect on a child, to grow into its soul.

The girl took off her fur cap. She put it down, toyed with it. She seems serious, a proper person. A wave of joy swept over Stauffer. Won’t she take off the heavy jacket?

She: “You know about the Indians in North America? Whites, English and American, came along. They took all their land, the Indians became homeless. I’ve seen Indians, at the circus, and at the Berlin Ethnological Park. Those Indians remind me of me. When I was small I wanted for nothing. I never noticed anything. Later, at school. When I was twelve I began to grieve. Mama noticed. I couldn’t explain to her. She put it down to my age. I collected pictures of you from newspapers, and made an album with the reviews. I never missed a single one of your plays in Hamburg. Mama thought I was at the cinema. And I wrote to you.”

“What?”

“You replied. You were very friendly. I used a different name.”

“And you came over here under a different name.”

“I used Karla Schröter, from one of your novellas.”

The name Lucie was mentioned. The mysterious Lucie had done likewise.

He heaved a sigh and asked: “Won’t you take off your jacket? It’s warm in here.”

She made no objection, stood up, took the jacket off and hung it up. He stood too: “Shall I take your hat?” And he hung it on the stand.

Now he was behind the girl and sat beside her on the sofa. They both looked at the window. It had begun to snow, the room had brightened considerably. He thought in amazement: I’m sitting with my daughter in a hotel room in Hamburg – and was unable to press through to a clear feeling.

She said nothing, He too. To his surprise her face when it turned to him was hard: “What happens now?” He made no reply, not understanding the question. “Will you go away again, or ...?”

He: “I’m glad to be here. I’m glad of your visit. You could have come to see me before, instead of writing. I knew nothing of you. If I’d known of your torment, I’d have found some way to meet you.”

Tears sprang to her eyes. She made no attempt to conceal them. “And you say this now. And never lifted a finger to do it. I’m your daughter. You had plenty of time for others. No birthday with any sign from you. Like a button gone missing. Mother forbade me to ask about you. You weren’t worth it.”

“That’s what she said.”

“Yes. And she was right.”

“Listen. You’re a grown woman. Your mother and I were not suited to one another. So we had to separate. I never wronged her. What God sunders, let no man force together. You understand?”

She toneless, the tears drying: “Yes.” Then she spread her arms on the table and wept out loud: “I knew it.”

He was agitated: “Then you’ll also know why I never showed myself. I knew what opinion your mother had of me.”

Her head lifted. She kept sobbing: “And I knew it. But now you show up. Now you’re here.” Huge bewilderment in him, she smiled between the tears: “And now you’re here. And you really are my father.”

Then – was she fainting – she sank to the carpet, and lay with her head at his feet. He grasped her by the shoulders. Her eyes were closed. Her teeth chattered. Her whole body twitched and shuddered. She was too heavy for him, he couldn’t get a grip. So he left her on the carpet, pushed a cushion under her head, and knelt at her side.

Such scenes were no novelty to the dramatist. But what she sought from him – she, his daughter – moved, delighted, enlivened him. She’s a young woman, it starts early.

And as he usually did in such cases, he paced up and down, sure of victory and its happy sequel. He had to kneel beside her, a tricky matter at his age. He lifted her head, and as in all such cases she opened her eyes. But what happened next had never happened with other female breakdowns: the young face that avoided his and pressed itself to his breast was unhappy, she sobbed and clutched at his cravat. He risked overbalancing. He knew this posture from the stage, and knew that in general it's one of the most comfortable: you lift the affected person – at least if you're a younger man – from the side onto the adjacent chaise longue. But now she clawed at his waistcoat, it was becoming dangerous. He thought he'd better approach her from above, from the head end, then she couldn't do anything with her hands, she'd have to stand in order to follow him. Now she was nicely settled on the carpet. He was about to fall over, and couldn't anyway kneel for much longer.

So he said, as tenderly as he could: "Laura, do you feel unwell?" She made no answer. She tugged harder at his waistcoat. He really couldn't stay kneeling, and the alternative – to actually lie down beside her – would be just too ridiculous.

"Stand up, Laura. It's not good to lie like this, the blood goes to your head."

She kept crying, and now his tie and clean shirt came adrift. Every fatherly feeling had now evaporated. He swore that if the affair went on for a minute longer he would exercise his newly-acquired paternal rights by roaring furiously at her.

But as if she noticed something, she let go and like a recalcitrant child turned on her side, both hands over her face. He climbed painfully to his feet and rubbed his knees. If she wants to lie there, it's her business. I shan't kneel again.

He paced up and down. Each case has its own characteristics, this one is longer drawn out than most. Then she sprang to her feet, put the cushion neatly back in its place. He was by the wash basin, went towards her. She ran to him. He was afraid she would embrace him. She flung her arms about him, face glowing, said: "Father, Father."

The expression and the feeling came as a complete surprise, all he could think was: what's this with the 'Father', so now I'm her 'Father', what's it to her? He thought, when she lifted her head from the tie and shirt so liberally dampened with her tears: human emotions are not easy to fathom, as I know all too well, so now I'm Father to this pretty young thing and must learn to enjoy her stormy reverence.

What happened. She let go, and squealed. She danced across the room. Then she came at him again, kissed him on both cheeks and was quite another person. He knew at once the girl who'd opened the door and struggled with the dog. Now she had him.

She sat him on the sofa. She crouched before him and stroked his jacket as if he was a doll and said half a dozen times: "Father, Father, do you know why I say it: because I said it at home a thousand times, in secret, looking at your picture, sitting over my book, you really are my father. And here you are. I can't believe it."

And her head lay again at his breast. He was defenceless against this. A couple of times it was on his lips to ask: Your father, yes, what does it mean to you?

But he was afraid to disturb the mood.

Then she hit on the clever idea of sitting at his side. It didn't last long. He had to march up and down the room arm in arm, and yield to her outbursts. He sensed: I can't be her father for much longer. Nothing for it, I must go back to Berlin.

Let us treat ourselves to some notes on their muddled conversation.

Fact is, that during this peaceful and friendly sitting side by side, and with the unfamiliar tenderness shown him by this daughter fallen from Heaven, Stauffer felt curiously well, reconciled with the world. A passage from *Zarathustra* occurred to him, where Zarathustra or the Soothsayer were in a similar situation. However, the phrase from *Zarathustra* that occurred to Stauffer – *But all joy wants eternity* – caused him to doubt. For though this situation was nice and almost perfect, others were just as nice.

Laura asked quietly, not moving from his side, she didn't want to be indiscreet, but, had he remarried?

Having carefully chewed it over, he replied to this very sensible question: "No, actually. But I have friendships here and there."

She: "I'd like to get to know them all, Father."

"Come now, Laura! All! You think I have a harem?"

She giggled: "Father's a humbug. Doesn't want me to meet them."

He thought: not a bad idea. I'll bring her to Berlin and show her Bella. That'll set the cat among the pigeons. He was glad when she looked at her watch and gave him a hug. It seemed she was leaving – for today. Any experience is worth having – once.

She said: "Adieu, Father. But why did you never come to see us? So many years without you. I had such a longing for you." She wept, head on his chest. He was strangely moved to feel her on his arm. Such an unusual feeling, holding a young trembling daughter to one's breast – something close that needs protecting, has a claim on my protection.

She drew slowly away from him, tidied herself at the mirror. "You know, Father, today a segment of my life has come to an end. Without you I was so deprived."

He left Hamburg the same day, troubled, captivated. He had an irresistible urge to distance himself, shut himself away, evade a too-strong excitement. Then his insides soothed him, and off he went blissfully with his loot: Laura his daughter, his daughter.

He recalled the night of his arrival, the restaurant with the stolen wallet, red flags on the roofs. And then the delightful scene with Laura in his room; he was filled with a great joy that warmed him. I was ready to hit her, I'm her father. Some change must have occurred in me. And the pitiless figure of her mother, Klara, Hecuba fleeing burning Troy. She'll think I'm robbing her of her daughter.

So much going on in the world. And I owe it all to the move, and those packing chests. God knows what else is rising from the grave to confront me.

Stretched out in the empty compartment, in his mind's eye he saw a spider's web. The spider was at work, ran to a corner, pulled on a thread, the web quivered, she wove another circuit, all so regular, tidy, a mysterious image that he observed in loving awe, until he slept.

EPISODE 5

(HdF p.49-66, Woods APB p.336)

ON THE TRAIL OF A FADED ROSE PETAL

Fairytale journey of the dramatist Stauffer to the land of his youth

On he ran, the dramatist Stauffer, in pursuit of his faded rose petal.

He wouldn't have been himself if, returning from Hamburg to his new disordered apartment, he hadn't begun to bicker with himself. Here, out by Schlachtensee lake, were no noisy demonstrations. No newspaper criers. The building occupied a large plot, he could look out on an empty expanse, a wintry lawn surrounded by bare trees.

He stood dreaming at the window. The house move has done me good, exposing Klara, finding Laura. She's already phoned from Hamburg. She really wants to visit. She feels like a daughter, makes demands. How amazing to have brought such a thing into the world. It should fill my thoughts, make me proud and happy. But it doesn't. It doesn't help... But help how? I've moved, here I sit in the new apartment, but it's all become worse. Such emptiness. At night sleeping draughts come to the rescue. But the days. If only I could write again. Cocoon myself in writing. I cannot.

He went into the lounge and stood at the sideboard. Unopened boxes lay around. And suddenly once again his hatred for Klara, enthroned triumphant there in Hamburg, resolute creature with the jovial consort, and me she's consigned to nothingness. His thoughts began to whirl. Avenge myself? I could confront her, show her the letters, hers as well. To what effect? An Italian would knock her to the ground.

But like a white cloud in an endless sky, there floated over him – thoughts of Lucie.

As he stood there eyeing the boxes, calm flowed over him and an image arose in his mind, one that often haunted him these days. A river breaking out from a forest and rolling gently along, reeds along the banks, reeds in the middle too, and he, Stauffer, stood under a tree and threw threads into the water, threads, yarn, no doubt for fishing, angling or whatever. When this image came, he felt brave.

Was Lucie still alive? Did she suffer like him? Was the discovery of the letters a call from her, a cry for help, uttered from who knows where to set in motion chance events?

What does it mean: dead, bygone? For what sort of creature does Time exist, for which not?

It was on 8th December that he travelled into the city, and embarked on his search for the young actress who twenty years before had played the role of Lucie in *When the First Snow Falls*. He was braced for a mountain of obstacles. But already at the

theatre office and from a couple of agents he learned something. She had actually abandoned the stage early on, and then made a great leap up the social scale through marriage. There was talk of several divorces. Her life, according to reports, was entirely that of an adventuress. He was told with complete certainty that this interesting person was still alive, probably in Italy.

But the theatre manager called on the evening of the second day of his search: he can't supply Stauffer with the address of this Lucie, but another rather older actress to whom he has mentioned Stauffer's interest in Lucie's fate has reliably informed him that she's alive and in good circumstances, not in Italy but mostly in America and southern Switzerland. She often stays with Countess X at her villa near Locarno. This Countess, a patron of the arts, to whom the name Stauffer is of course well known, will supply him promptly with full information concerning Lucie's current whereabouts.

The rose petal fluttered before Stauffer's eyes. *If you're loath to set your life at stake, no life at all is yours to make.*² He set off that same night.

The trip to Hamburg loomed before his mind, the pitiless figure of Hecuba who survived the burning of Troy, the chance events on his arrival, the magically illuminated clock, red flags waving. He lay in his sleeping car bunk in a chimerical joy and let it carry him away, once again in a state that vaulted over Time and Space. A mysterious dream worked its way in: a deep, an enormous anguish groaned through him, as if a strong arm had grabbed hold of a cliff and sent it tumbling onto him.

In the morning he stopped in Basel. Late that afternoon he entered a new landscape. Profound silence. White snow shoe-deep. Most hotels closed. At his hotel he enquired at once about the Countess's villa. They pointed out the way, and offered to send a member of staff with him. Several other guests were heading for the Countess's celebrations. To conceal his surprise he asked about the theme this time. This time, the receptionist said, it would raise the roof.

It was the Countess's name-day, there'd been tremendous preparations, a preliminary event was taking place this evening. Stauffer thanked him. He'd stay behind this evening, after his long journey.

When he looked out next morning it was snowing. Whole clouds of snow were falling. Stauffer strolled off towards the Countess's residence.

He expected to find an elegant villa, and stood before a big fenced property where behind snow-covered firs a chateau loomed. It had a tower with a weather vane shaped like a halberd.

The entrance to the park was wide open. In the snow were fresh human footprints. Stauffer wondered who might be visiting now. He could have himself announced and simply state what was on his mind. But that bourgeois approach had no appeal, and he strolled back to the vicinity of his hotel, where he'd noticed a nursery with a greenhouse. He bought a bouquet of gorgeous flowers and had it sent to the Countess

² Schiller: *Wallenstein's Camp*, sc. 11 Chorus.

at her chateau. When the nurseryman asked for a name card to attach to the bouquet, he looked in his wallet, hesitated to bring out the first card he found – his own –but handed over another that happened to be there: Laura's stepfather, Klara's second husband. Laura had brought it with her, to provide him with her own address. It would do. He would attend today's festivities.

That evening when he noticed other hotel guests setting off, he put on his coat and headed up the snowy valley towards the chateau.

Suppose I meet someone I've met before, but fail to recognise them. Then I'll be enacting the fable of my play, presaged and foretold by the inner me. What lay in me as a dream shall befall me as Fate.

Monstrous times, that make the improbable come true. They hurl war and revolution upon us, and open up new paths.

How to understand what's happening to me? Am I too weak to remain alive in the present, or so strong that I can follow my own path wherever it leads, and must drag my will, even if it's a hidden secret will, into my life?

He smiled to himself. Revolution? Wandering here through a snowy Swiss valley, borne on a magic carpet, is an elderly rather useless fellow from Berlin.

Mountain peaks rose magically snow-draped into dark sky. His heart swelled: Wouldn't it be something to have Laura at my side now. And he stood by a bench deep in thoughts of his daughter; snow fell on his hat, and he felt blissful. He felt longing and joy. He sniffed. I've grown sentimental.

No one else was on the path. He looked around for his own footprints, he was like a wild creature. The path led higher, and he looked down from his lofty position onto the valley where lights twinkled. He felt blessed.

What more do you want? You can see all that is to come. The best to be hoped for is no disappointments.

But the urge was too strong. He still had ten minutes. He could slide over the edge and be dashed to pieces. But on he went. When I write the story of this journey I must begin with Sleeping Beauty, how she was pricked by the spindle and lay there until the Prince wakened her. I must begin it there. For she has not remained the same. She stares at the unknown Prince. Her situation's incomprehensible. After a while she thinks it would be better if the Prince had left her sleeping.

The Countess's Ball

He stands outside the chateau. A garland of lights streams out above the entrance. A line of cars has halted. Stauffer waits until a man on foot turns into the park, and follows him. He can already hear music. A concert is in progress. Someone holds out a guest book. He writes any old name and stands at the open door to the low saloon-like space; it's half dark. Up on the podium a quartet is playing Beethoven.

When the recital ends, people spread out through rooms filled with costly artworks. There's time to study the pieces. Meanwhile a proud very gracious lady in a rustling light grey dress of atlas-silk with a long train approaches the crowd: the Countess.

She stands before Stauffer as well. He whispers something that might be a name, bends low to kiss her hand. She says he must have arrived during the concert. The room is readied for the performance. Responding to Stauffer's query she names the author, a young Swiss man, and invites Stauffer to sit beside her. Courtesy keeps the throng behind them, and ahead the chairs are free.

So Stauffer, when the bell tinkles and the Countess looks round at him, has no choice but to offer her his arm.

The piece was a kind of ballet, clearly inspired by the War. Ghosts of the fallen, stepping out to music of Gluck-style formality. Driven too early from the Earth, the ghosts thirst for their life, which they depict with yearning, in exaggerated words. But already one of them remarks that actually all was not so lovely on Earth. The War goes on, people could be starving. And if Peace is to come, what will that peace look like?

Then everything in this infamous underworld presents itself in a quite unexpected guise. First, there's no Hound of Hell, Cerberus. A friendly doorman sits at the entrance, he's supposed to ask each visitor his name and nature. But he's drunk, and asleep. And when they cross the threshold there are catacomb-like spaces, moderately lit, everywhere peopled like a garden colony. It's all thrown together in rough and ready fashion, as circumstances allow. They exchange puzzled looks. As they head farther in, they see in the background people who in the course of time have built whole villages and towns, have renounced the official welfare regime practised here, and plant their own cabbages and wheat. Of course it takes more years of wandering to reach them.

And now you realise that down here it all proceeds as it does above, only more peacefully, because you're made of air and there's less pressure than up above.

The piece was titled *Achilles Debunked*. There was an ironic Prologue on those verses from the *Odyssey* where Achilles bemoans his tormented monotonous sojourn in the underworld. Strange piece; it seemed to preach an elegiac stance of consoling pessimism, and suddenly it was over.

Afterwards there were refreshments, and people danced.

Stauffer gazed around at the guests. Many foreigners; he looked into the faces of several younger and older ladies, danced in the comfortable modern style with this and that one, to see if Lucie might perhaps be among the guests. But without success.

Later he bumps into the Countess again. They dance, she asks his opinion of the play. She keeps firm hold of him. He really doesn't want to delve into the topic. He pleads ignorance. She laughs out loud into his face. "But since when did you start making jokes, Herr Stauffer?"

He is flabbergasted, stammers: "How did you come upon that name? Is he here?" Then, as he can't maintain the ruse and she keeps laughing, he gives in and provides an improbable explanation about a rest cure, escape from the turmoil of Berlin, moving down here and so on.

At last, because they're chatting in such a cosy and almost friendly way, he confides in her, and after a few devious moves explains what has brought him here.

NOCTURNE

*A man elevates the moth to his armorial beast. Doors open and close.
Someone sleeps and eavesdrops on himself. In the morning he laughs.*

Three o'clock in the morning

Meanwhile, night has fallen.

When Stauffer paused in his confession, the Countess made her apologies: she must attend to the guests now trickling away. Then she came back to Stauffer. She had confirmed that the former actress Lucie was a friend of hers, and spent whole months at the chateau. The Countess looked at her wrist watch and asked Stauffer if he realised it was already Sunday, almost three in the morning. If it had been summer, she would have invited him to continue their chat for an hour in the open air and await the sunrise with him. All she could do today was ask him, since he had no car and her chauffeur was already asleep, whether he would spare himself the long walk back to the hotel by passing what remained of the night in the villa.

He hesitated. But the Countess was already gliding ahead to open a door, covered by a heavy curtain, in a wide side-passage on the first floor. She clicked on a light, pulled the curtain closed again, and invited Stauffer to approach: "You'll find all you need. The room is always awaiting its guest. It's all for your pleasure."

She mis-spoke, she'd said "for my pleasure."

They both laughed. If they'd been younger they'd be blushing.

"You could even," she said, opening a wardrobe, "dress up as a woman. Alas, apart from a few neutral pyjamas I have no men's clothes." She nodded as he bowed in acknowledgement, held out a hand for a goodnight kiss, and left.

He looked around the room. He tested the bed, the mattress. It's late. I'll sleep well. Three o'clock exactly, just like that night in Berlin when I rifled through the boxes and the letters appeared that started me on this adventure.

I wonder what sort of clothes she wears, this lady, he asked himself facing the wide wardrobe; a key was in the lock. I'm not being indiscreet, she invited me to look.

The door opened without a squeak. He was met with a strong smell. He detected camphor behind it.

So, there are moths here as well. A consoling thought. They're everywhere. They turn the exotic back into the ordinary. They chew the same way at proletarian rags,

the elegant lady's silver fox fur, and the ermine on the king's cloak, assuming there is still such a thing. Moths bring every exaggeration and craziness back into line. Such earnest healthy creatures. And if I ever have to choose my coat of arms in our new German Republic, the moth shall be my armorial beast.

Dozens of dresses hung side by side in the wardrobe.

He couldn't see clearly, so he lifted the table lamp with its shade of animal pictures. Everything became brighter and colder. He wasn't enjoying this, but he wanted to make sense of these clothes.

He pulled at several coat hangers, looked at hats on the shelf above, gloves at the side, all had such an unfamiliar look, he understood them not at all, this strange way of concocting a hat – until it occurred to him: they look just like a theatre wardrobe.

And this thought at once delivered such a jolt that he retreated to the middle of the room, and from afar, from the armchair into which he sank, he gazed into this abyss, this gaping maw, this wardrobe smelling of camphor and perfume. Here and there a hat or a skirt flashed silver, gold, colourful stones. Theatre costumes, of course.

Pharaoh's tomb. Three o'clock. My ghost-hour.

It's true. I'm on the right track. She's sheltering Lucie, or has sheltered her. I'm in her room. She has moved about in here. She has slept in this bed, and now here I am. Already there's something uncanny about this.

But this is why I came. How remarkably different it all seems, thinking versus a real encounter. I can hardly bear to sit here.

He keeps to the armchair, intimidated. The lady of the house could have done no better to sober me up or scare me to death, than to allow me into her domain.

He jumps up and closes the wardrobe door. He goes along the walls and looks at the pictures, landscapes. And he is so far recovered that it doesn't surprise him to see, to the right of the big oval wall mirror, a photo of himself, but very young, fresh, bold, untroubled, also a little cold.

She has lived here, he knows it for certain. He stands transfixed. He glances at the mirror, unintentionally, and sees – a gentleman with a thin grey moustache, furrowed brow, little mistrustful anxious eyes. He has caught himself unawares. He gives a start, and looks away. And to the left is confirmation: a small picture, a girl's head. It's a painting. It's Lucie, he knows it, proud young face, a heroine, the face of a born princess. Suddenly he realises: he knows her. She's alive. What does she look like now?

And once more, unintentionally, he has to glance in the mirror and start back from his reflection. He brandishes his fist at that grimace. It responds. He turns his back and lowers the lampshade. The room settles into a cosy half-dark, an inviting calm. Playful gazelles shine down from the shade.

He gets into bed and thinks: cover it all up. Don't touch a thing in this room. I don't know what secrets lie hidden here, against me.

And everywhere in the room are creaking noises. He is hyper-alert. After half an hour he has to get up and turn on the light, open the wardrobe door, stare at the

sparkling clothes. Then he sits pensively at the writing desk, his heart pounds, he pulls open the middle drawer, and— nothing surprises him now – sees letters, lots of letters in her handwriting! The big “Erwin” with an exclamation mark jumped out at him. His hand sinks into the drawer. There’s nothing for it, he must read them.

The letters are like a novel. In the form of a diary, and it all revolves around him.

Lucie complains. She tells of her travels, of other men, over several years. She talks of Stauffer’s plays. She attended many premieres. It’s as if secretly, without wanting to step forward, she has always been in the background of his life. She married. She keeps writing to him, but doesn’t post the letters. He occupies a constant place at her side, but not always the same place. In the end there’s no more complaining. The stormy assaults cease. It seems he has traversed every station in her inner being. Now, like a sailor to the wife left in port, he is the always absent one, the voyager, to whom she gives account and tells what is happening back home.

Stauffer pursues the unfolding plot without arriving at any clear feelings. He feels moved. He is calmed, soothed, more than for years now. And so he is able to close the drawer and go back to bed. He likes the gazelles on the lampshade. He keeps the light on. And so he goes to sleep. And sleeps soundly.

By the light of a candle that she at once snuffs out, Lucie creeps in and sees him lying there.

She settles cautiously on the wicker chair beside the bed, and watches him.

She stands, turns out the light, and vanishes.

Blissful departure

In the morning, at breakfast, Stauffer learns from the servant that the Countess went out early and will be away all day. She will be pleased to receive him any time tomorrow. This turn of events suits Stauffer well. He wouldn’t like to be sitting across from her just now.

Tomorrow then. He is to come face to face with her tomorrow, she who is no fantasy but a reality. Once again a rescue line will be thrown to him, swimmer in the seething current of Time. “You want this?” he asks himself. “I do,” he replies.

He goes out into the snow that shines so wonderfully from every height. He returns to his hotel. Sometimes he sees himself as one consecrated to Death. Sometimes as a bridegroom. Sometimes like a page, kneeling before the loveliest of all mistresses, so that she can place the golden chain around his neck.

In the end he struts along like a boy sucking on a sweet.

A revelation

While Stauffer was still asleep and floating on lovely clouds towards the sunrise, the Countess entered the breakfast room and was surprised to see the American woman already eating. She wondered at her friend’s high spirits. But you never knew, with Daisy.

After breakfast the Countess had to ask, as Daisy sat smoking in a rocking chair humming contentedly: "What are you up to now? Your admirer is still asleep in his room. But he could show himself at any moment. Please Daisy, he is someone, after all. Don't embarrass me."

Daisy laughed: "The great man won't come in here. He'll be served in the small dining room. I arranged it over your head."

"But for God's sake, why?"

"Today belongs to me. He is my 'Descent to Earth', after I've spent so long playing 'Hanele's Ascension to Heaven'.³ Today belongs to us both, Betty. And you should gift it to me, and no one shall come between us. Yesterday was a bit much for me. But I had fun last night."

She explained how she couldn't sleep after the party, the few words the Countess had spoken about Stauffer's confession were to blame, especially the fact that he was here and looking for her. "This tale of the lover who comes hunting for his lady after a quarter of a century made a crazy European impression on me. The War has made people here totally nuts."

The Countess: "Putting him up in your room, Daisy, has, forgive me, a touch of the macabre about it. And changing the décor, hanging up your old picture."

"It amused me. In some respects it was a reunion. I was playing a stage ghost. And later, in the night, I went to him." The Countess was shocked. Lucie soothed her:

"Nothing happened, Betty. Listen, I'll tell you. It was on the stroke of four. I stood in the passage outside his room. I waited a while. I knew the door, it wouldn't creak. I heard him get into bed. There was a chance he might have locked it. But he hadn't."

The Countess was appalled, propped her head in her hands.

"So I dared to do it. There I was in the room. If I'd been anyone else I could have done whatever I wanted with him. He was asleep. He'd left the light on. I could have strangled him, or shot him. I know where the revolver is kept. But he was asleep, the good fellow. Sleeping the sleep of the righteous."

The Countess whispered: "What did you do?"

"Nothing. Just enjoyed the comedy of the situation. Betty, you can't imagine how it is to be so to speak at the goal after so much struggle. There in his cot is the man, the idol, for whom I've spent my life yearning, around whom so to speak my whole life has revolved, a planet orbiting at the proper distance. There sleeping is my pole star, snoring a little. I confess that nothing stirred in me. He meant nothing, already in the evening he'd meant nothing to me. Any emotion would have made me look ridiculous in my own eyes. My crush has something mad and pathetic about it, sure, but" (she shrugged, blew smoke rings) "I renounce it. I told myself: you're always doing something stupid, Daisy, something experimental. You may not have put on so much weight, but still, thirty-eight years old. And having made sure of that I withdrew quite satisfied, and even waved a little bye-bye in the dark."

³ *Haneles Himmelfahrt*: 1894 symbolist play by Gerhard Hauptmann.

The Countess stared: "Your idol? I never knew he played such a part in your life."

Daisy glanced up: "Inwardly, a thought-game. The man needs dolls, to amuse him in his lonely hours. I wrote him even later on. I couldn't get away from it. It became a favourite habit. I had it out with him in all possible situations."

The Countess: "You're a secret novelist, Daisy."

"Novelist, Betty? Only insofar as I never posted the letters." The Countess: "But I still don't understand why you kept writing, never stopped, and in the form of letters?"

Daisy, cigarette between the fingers of her right hand, placed her left hand over her eyes. "At first it continued from the earlier letters. Then it was self-deception. And then it was going to cure me. But it didn't. Back then I was dealt a dreadful blow. He treated me barbarously, this aesthete, this 'cultivated' writer. I was a young thing. I could never recover. The play of his I debuted in was called *When the First Snow Falls*. It fell as hoarfrost in a spring night. When my letters back then never reached him, when, for unknown reasons I never found out, he didn't once deign to reply, when he built a Chinese wall around himself, at first of course I refused to accept it. He was after all a man, and had to have human feelings. And we'd never quarrelled, nothing happened between us. So I hammered away at the wall with my letters. I wanted – I had to – tear the wall down. But I couldn't. I changed from a living person to a writer of letters. At first they were written in despair, then more and more listlessly. Then the game changed and at the end was only a pretend struggle."

"I never knew this, Daisy. You've told me so much about yourself, here and in America, but this you kept to yourself."

"It's just a little bit comical. As you can see from how it's ending."

The Countess: "Last night I could only speak with you briefly. He told me a long, long story. I was so exhausted, you know, from rehearsals for the play, and confess that for part of his story I dozed off a little. But then something strange happened, this'll interest you. I've just remembered. He told me how he came to make this fantastic trip. I'm glad I didn't mention this part in passing yesterday. It would be a shame if it fell flat. So listen to the grisly ballad with which our writer introduced his great adventure. Please hold back your laughter till the end. It began with a mundane matter: he was moving house. He was sitting somewhere in Berlin among packing chests, in the night. Then in some eerie manner a chest shoved itself at him, and letters fell out. He grabbed at one. It was unopened. He was puzzled, he opened it. It was from you. And another, and another, more than twenty. And among them, and this is the point, was a letter from the wife he'd divorced twenty years before."

"Among my letters?"

"Among your letters, which – mark it well – were all unopened. Around two dozen. And his ex-wife writes that she confiscated the whole pile in order to – how should I say, I've forgotten how he put it – to nip in the bud the love that was germinating in you both. She did it, she tells him, out of hatred, envy and jealousy, to avenge herself, because she was the one who loved him." The Countess smiled, searched Daisy's face: "Of course it's all his own invention and fantasy."

Now the Countess' smile froze. The woman in the rocking chair had dropped her cigarette on the carpet and made no move to pick it up. The Countess: "Daisy, your cigarette." She had to jump up and retrieve it herself. Daisy had collapsed strangely into herself. Not moving. Staring into empty air. She whispered: "No, no, no." The Countess bent down and took her hands: "But Daisy, it's all imaginings. The man cooks it up to make himself interesting. Like presenting a fake visiting card. Giving a fake name in the visitor's book. Please don't be upset. Oh God, what is happening."

Daisy's head sank to her breast. Her body swayed. She slumped over the chair arm, tumbled to the floor. Servants carried her to her room. The Countess stayed at her side.

This was the hour when Stauffer left the chateau to stride cheerfully down the snow-covered hill like a small boy sucking on his sweet.

The whole long day, which Daisy had set aside for a walk with the Countess to celebrate her 'Descent to Earth', she kept to her bed, silent, her face pale and empty.

Late in the afternoon came fits of screaming. A doctor was summoned.

EPISODE 6

(HdF p.166-175, Woods APB p.408)

SNOW, EARLY AND LATE

*Stauffer in the snowy mountains of Switzerland. Searching.
And what does he find?*

Early in the morning, the dramatist Stauffer set off on his pilgrimage through the snowy landscape, to collect his Christmas present. He was deeply moved. How graciously Fate had steered everything. He'd been going to pot, and then these letters appeared. It seemed to be Klara taking revenge, but then it became clear that Lucie was calling out, that she'd been preserved for this moment.

He was brimming with sincere gratitude. He sent blessings on ahead as he approached the now familiar chateau. So here's where she's holed up, in this castle draped in an ermine cloak of snow. In his arms Stauffer bore the huge bouquet he had ordered yesterday from the nursery, red and yellow roses.

He went in, let the servant take his coat and hat. He was taken to the little salon where he'd sat with the Countess on the concert evening and made his confession.

He bowed as he entered, bouquet in his left hand. A lady was sitting there, he recognised her from the concert, one of the Countess' staff, she'd accompanied him as he admired the artworks. They exchanged mundane phrases. Then the lady leafed through a garishly illustrated magazine. He held the roses on his knees, now and then allowed the bouquet to dangle between his shins. He waited patiently. The room was pleasantly warm.

Now the housekeeper person lowered the magazine and gazed out of the window. He followed her gaze, and they agreed on a topic: the wonderful weather, wonderful

snow. She asked about the delectable roses. She knew the nursery. Did the gentleman love flowers.

He said: "To tell the truth – not excessively." Now and then he would arrange a few, or someone would bring him some, and he'd smell them and enjoy the bright colours, but he would soon forget about them in the day's rush, and when he remembered they'd be faded, or already thrown away.

What a shame, she suggested. "Many flowers retain their beauty a long while, some in fact show their best colours only as they fade."

"Could be. But they remind one too much of transience, and in one's own room. On the other hand it's brutal to clear them away, picture them being thrown in the rubbish. No, I'd rather not."

The lady smiled. "Strange. That your thoughts take you so far. May I see your roses?" He passed them across. She plunged her face among the blooms and laid the bouquet in her lap the better to see, gazing down at the noble yellows and the radiant reds. "The Countess will be delighted."

He nodded, without betraying himself. But was the Countess not at home? Had he been announced? Here he was, sitting and making conversation. The lady handed the bouquet back, neither spoke, he didn't want to spoil the mood with some banality. At last the door opened. The door-curtain was pulled back. Stauffer stood, the Countess entered in a heavy brown fur coat, fur hat, big, her face fresh, eyebrows raised. She hastened to him, squeezed his hands: "Now, I shall leave the entire chateau to you until this evening. I'm unlikely to be back before seven."

His face showed puzzlement.

"Well?" she asked as he came upright from kissing her hand. She gave him a penetrating look, and when he clearly didn't understand she called to the housekeeper person: "Excuse us," and pulled him into the hall.

Erwin, softly: "Countess, you know why I'm here."

"Absolutely," she replied, and looked at him from the mirror where she was giving her forehead a quick dab with her powder-puff.

"So here I am."

"Without a doubt, Herr Stauffer."

His heart gave a twitch. He bowed: "Then – then might I request that you lead me to her?" But she reinforced his uncertainty by making no move to lead him anywhere, but just – stared at him. She turned to face him, put the powder-case back in her handbag, and stepped closer. "You didn't introduce yourself? Surely I introduced you last evening?"

He was perplexed: "Who? Whom?"

"I'm sure I remember introducing you to Mrs Brown?"

“Mrs Brown? I was chatting with her. She’s in the salon.”

“And...?” They stood facing one another, uncomprehending. Suddenly the Countess opened her eyes wide, whispered: “You didn’t know – Mrs Brown is Lucie?” She repeated: “You didn’t know?”

The floor beneath his feet gave way. Paying no attention to his reaction she pushed her arm under his and pulled him to the salon door. “Well, now you must go in. I’m in a dreadful rush. Till this evening.” She opened the door, pulled back the curtain. From behind she called into the room: “Bye, Daisy.”

Mrs Brown was still sitting at the bow window, garish magazine in her lap. When Stauffer stayed standing in the doorway where the Countess had left him, for his legs wouldn’t move, she cried in a friendly tone: “Please, Herr Stauffer, come a little closer.”

He couldn’t. She became attentive. She hastened to him. He couldn’t lift his eyes from the floor. He was in a state of utter consternation. So she pulled a leather chair across and sat him in it. He clutched the bouquet tight in his left hand as if fearing she might snatch it away. His face was drained of blood, his lips quivered, but he was still conscious. He turned to her and said quietly: “Thank you, thank you, please don’t trouble yourself.”

She went to the door and rang. He slowly drained the glass of water they brought him. His expression became livelier, and he sat upright in the armchair. He freed himself of the roses by placing them on the little marble-topped table beside him, and now sat calm and almost himself again.

Lucie, having settled in a corner of the sofa and pulled the heavy rug over her knees, said: “Good day, Herr Stauffer,” and held out her hand. He turned to her, touched her fingertips and inclined his head, all very formally, but made no response. He was frowning. He recalled Klara as she sat facing him in Hamburg, the unknown wife of a common hotelier.

“You don’t answer, Herr Stauffer?” She held an arm over her face. Quickly he went to her. With sociable neutrality she turned to him: “The Countess tells me you were looking for me. You are horrified to find me.”

“Oh no, no, please.”

“A quarter of a century is an age, unless you’re made of stone. I’ve often seen you, so I’m spared a real surprise. It must be instructive for you to look at me, reflecting a quarter of a century. Am I a Gorgon, Herr Stauffer? We had a nice chat. You remember? And for whom did you bring those roses? You meant to give them to the Countess. I’ll put them in a vase, if you don’t mind.”

“Please.” He was no longer as drained as before. He watched the lady with the English accent busy herself with the vase. Appalling to think this was Lucie, the Lucie of the letters – “my joy, my whole life”. Softly, as she was about to go out to find a bigger vase, he said: “You needn’t bother. The flowers were for you.”

She turned to him: "For me? But why?"

"I meant them for you. Please, keep them."

She held the heavy bouquet in her arms. "For me? I rather think they were meant for Lucie. And now you give them to me." Then she sat down with the roses in the corner of the sofa.

For quite a while neither said anything. Below they could hear the Countess' car crunching, her voice. The car door banged shut, the motor wheezed into action, the noise faded into the distance.

Stauffer looked up. What was I thinking, twenty years have passed, I must pull myself together or else appear a complete idiot. But his heart tensed within him.

The bouquet lay like a baby in her arms. She gazed at it, pensive and grave. Now he remembered the sleek hair, greying at the sides, parted in the middle, the strong almost square face with the powerful cheek muscles, the tall smooth forehead with waves of hair spilling over, the short nose with the narrow nostrils, the full wide mouth. To think that this was Lucie, she who would bear him away on her youthful wings. Did she know how it had all turned out? Their eyes met.

The woman: "It was kind of you to bring fresh roses for Lucie. And even kinder to give them to me."

And all of a sudden, as her voice was so gentle, the desire arose in him to tell her how it had all come about, to justify himself to her.

"I gave the Countess," he whispered, "after the concert, a brief account of the events that led me here. It began with a dreadful discovery, made by chance as I prepared to move house. You know I found letters from you that had been withheld from me. A letter from my ex-wife explained it all. Out of jealousy, for vengeance, she hid the letters. She brought it about that I never heard anything more from you."

She spoke away over the roses. "The Countess told me. Is your ex-wife still alive?"

"In Hamburg. I went looking for her, as soon as I discovered the letters."

"And how are things with her? How did you find her?"

He, surprised: "She's in very good circumstances. She's remarried, manages a hotel."

"And your daughter? You had just become a father, back then."

"My daughter" (what curious questions) "lives with her."

"She must be grown up now, twenty or more. Are you pleased with her?"

"I first met her when I went to find her mother."

"Just imagine! And for all those years you never felt a desire to see your child? You must have been in Hamburg often."

"My wife was given custody of the child, I wanted to avoid interfering."

The woman put the roses down beside her. "Once you discovered the letters you dashed off pell-mell to Hamburg to confront your ex-wife?"

"That night when I found the letters I'd have killed her if she'd been near."

The woman smiled: "You wouldn't kill anyone."

"No, I'm not a murderer."

"And the wife politely showed you the door when you explained the reason for your visit."

He: "It – didn't come to that. I sat with my daughter, who didn't recognise me, and waited. The woman was – hard, cold, just as I remember her. There was no point trying to make her feel guilty."

"Your daughter?"

"Why are you so interested?"

"I'm interested in people. I'm sure your daughter didn't simply throw you into the street once she knew who you were."

"She came to me in my hotel two days later. Under a false name."

"Why under a false name?"

"She was afraid I wouldn't see her if she gave her real name."

The woman's eyes grew wide: "Ah. You see, a human being. She knows you. And then she demanded an explanation? But she was happy to have her father at last."

"Just so."

The woman: "Amazing. Really amazing. Now you come to me. You're on a real old rampage through the past, Herr Stauffer."

He felt much better now. The conversation was a relief. He was conversing with a sympathetic woman interested in his fate.

"It wouldn't let me rest. First I had to go to Hamburg, confront the woman with her guilt."

"You found your delightful daughter, who had some accounts to settle with you."

"Then I had to – go searching for Lucie, around whom all this revolved."

"And instead of Lucie you find me. Can one talk to you now?"

Stauffer, ashamed: "Please forgive me."

"But it was all so natural! Now you sit face to face with the one who wrote to you. She remembers you. She has wandered through the past carrying your memory, like one caught in a fire who bears lifelong scars." (She paused.) "That image is wrong. As if a priestess of the fire, a Vestal, steals a flame from the sacred hearth and flees with it into the wilderness, has to flee, and now worships the flame all by herself and warms

herself at it and stays alive, it's her flame, hers alone. Now you come to me. I know why. You want to retrieve the flame for your altar. I've guarded the flame as best I could, as God is my witness. I guarded it in a way you never could. Don't speak, I know it. But what now?"

She leaned forward, elbow on the table, and rested her head in her hand. Her smile was mocking: "I can't wait for you, not with your charming daughter. I'm afraid this visit will turn out just as fruitless as the other one."

He mumbled: "Why, why."

She: "I'm not cruelly spurning you. We're chatting, as cultivated people do. But please regard me the same way you did before. That was good and true. So why not fruitless?"

He had been looking deep into her face. It seemed as if an old image surfaced in him, the way she held her head so proudly and pressed back into the sofa, arms crossed, with a glance, no, a lightning-flash, down at the bouquet of roses.

Sheepishly he begged: "Don't hold it against me, please, my behaviour earlier."

"Oh, it was good. I knew you – and myself, when I saw you standing there. I saw you hadn't forgotten me. If you hadn't been so shocked I'd have long since said: your visit is pointless."

"And now?" He sensed menace in the air. He was afraid. He wished for a better ending than his visit with Klara. He pleaded: "I know what I know of you from the letters I found, and from things in the guest bedroom. I hope you're not angry with me for looking. They were aimed at me. A dreadful wicked deed, a murder, sundered me from you. Please tell me about yourself. Let me hear about your life. What have you – been doing? Give me a guiding thread."

Suddenly she looked pale and shrunken. Her nostrils quivered: "You said dreadful and wicked. I've been thinking about this crime, the possibility of such a deed." She glared at him, eyes glowing. He felt uneasy. But she gave a little dismissive wave of the hand and resumed her conversational tone: "What I've been doing in the meantime. In the meantime. A life has gone by. You talk as if we're just back from holiday."

He: "I never said 'in the meantime'."

She: "I have occupied my time, though I can't say, like Faust: 'First powerful and great, But now at pace more prudent, more sedate.'⁴ I spent a long time in America, before that in Italy. Then I married. My first husband died early. I settled here and came to know the Countess. The Count, later on Betty's husband, was still alive then. He wooed me. But I liked Betty more than him. Then I went to America. I came into an inheritance. I married again over there. Over there you can't live alone, at least at the beginning, you'd die of loneliness. I worked in museums, my second husband was a museum director in a southern state. He's the same age as me. He didn't object to

⁴ *Faust II*, lines 11439-40. (Tr. Walter Arndt)

my coming back to Europe every year or two, to see my old friends. Betty, the Countess, came over to see us as well.”

She took the bouquet and flung it down on the sofa. “What does it have to do with you? What does my life have to do with you? Why do you sit here and interrogate me about my life? I know the journey wasn’t entirely fruitless – you will turn it into a play!”

Stauffer: “I found out only a few days ago what happened twenty years ago. My demeanour cannot have given you the impression that I’m interrogating you.”

“So what are you doing? You went out into the world to get to the bottom of the business. But – I might have been long dead already.”

(She’s attacking me, just like Laura.) He mumbled: “Seems Fate has other ideas. One should examine the foundations of one’s existence.” He was about to gather his thoughts to tell her more of himself when the door downstairs opened, a car drove up. Soon there came a knock, the Countess’ chauffeur reported: He is to pick the Countess up in late afternoon, meanwhile the car is at the guests’ disposal.

Behind the chauffeur a maid appeared to tell them breakfast was ready. The American lady thought it splendid, she gaily gathered up the bouquet, and Stauffer, distraught as he was, had to stand too. She offered him her arm with sociable courtesy. They went down the long corridor to the breakfast room. The chauffeur was ordered for eleven o’clock. Lunch, the American lady declared, would be taken at Bignasco.

EPISODE 7

(HdF p.184-192, Woods APB p.414)

ERWIN AND LUCIE

The encounter in Switzerland takes a decisive turn

The outing to Bignasco

The car drove slowly down towards Locarno and the lake. It was wonderful to see the fig, olive and pomegranate trees under their blanket of snow, indistinguishably merged into a general tree-nature. Buried myrtles in the gardens bent low.

They crossed the pretty marketplace. Their gaze skimmed the ancient arcade passages. Stauffer got out at his hotel, he wanted to fetch his fur coat for the trip.

He didn’t go back down at once. He sank into an armchair. So this was his room again. It was over-bright with its two windows. He’d enjoyed a lovely sleep last night. He’d set out happily on his quest. And – now? Should he go back down? Why? Why make this excursion with the American woman? Because she says she’s the Lucie of old times? Should I go down or not? If I want I can pay my bill, pack, and leave the hotel at once via the garden. That would be best, he told himself as he stood up. I shall get ready to leave. My affairs have taken a diabolical turn.

But as he opened the wardrobe to take out his suitcase, he reconsidered. The word “final” ran through his mind. Then it would finally be at an end. Then you’ll revert to your old life, with no way out.

Slowly he pushed the wardrobe door shut. And now a troubled elderly man stared back at him from the mirror. The man seemed distraught. He gave a sad smile. “What shall we do?” Stauffer asked his reflection. “Shall we head out, or go back down to her? What do you think?”

It was unclear what the reflection thought.

“Two possibilities,” Stauffer repeated. “We can pack up. Which one do you choose?” The reflection gazed mournfully back, and Stauffer understood.

“We’ve used up our chances, you mean. We should pack up and make no more great leaps. She’s not Lucie. Lucie is lost, stolen, robbed away for all eternity. So, I should go back down to her? To that – lady? She’s not unlikeable.”

The mirror said: “Don’t make such a big deal of it. She’s not Lucie. But who is Lucie, anyway? You don’t have even the slightest accurate memory of her. The woman here is real. And don’t grumble because she doesn’t look how you imagined. Turn around. See how your hair’s falling out. Anyone would think you’re an overworked clerk. Hasn’t it occurred to you that that’s why she doesn’t reproach you? And she still remembers the young Stauffer.”

And since the reflection conveyed all this so honestly and convincingly, Stauffer leaned his forehead against the friendly glass, and agreed. He nodded a greeting to his doppelganger, opened the wardrobe and lifted his fur coat from its hanger. Wrapped up warmly, fur hat on his head, he went from the room with a certain resignation and descended the carpeted stairs. I go down in silence, he thought, and smiled sadly to himself, down to my enchanted princess. *If you’re loath to set your life at stake, no life at all is yours to make.*

And with utmost cordiality, our hero extended a hand to her as she opened the car door, and apologised for taking so long. Lucie admired his winter outfit: “You were only a few minutes – and we’ve both grown accustomed to waiting.”

This playful handling of the scene pleased him. Now he felt at ease with the situation he’d run headfirst into. He sat beside her and stretched out comfortably, proudly, in his seat.

They drove up the valley of the Maggia, saw Solduno, the Piedmont landscape. The Maggia foamed beneath an ancient bridge. Everything was white, the peaks above the valley, the little villages, the churches. They drove through one single element of Nature, snow, wherein with no hint of grief all human creation lay. The snow was a gigantic beast letting birds play amicably around it. The way to Bignasco was slow.

The American lady knew the big Glacier Hotel. They ate in the sparsely occupied dining room. They had coffee served in a small quite empty room.

Now they were alone again, their conversation could resume its course.

What is a conversation? With looks, gestures, words one entices the other to reveal invisibly, inaudibly, whatever one is able to reveal. Lucie smoked her cigarette. She said: "Now you are in my hands. I'd given up expecting this. You notice, Herr Stauffer, the difference between Madam Klara and myself: she drives you off, I hold you close."

She fiddled with the ashtray. Her tone changed: "I insist on accountability, on justification. You throw all the guilt on Klara. You know the line from Ibsen's *John Gabriel Borkman*: 'You have killed the love-life within me'."

"Not wittingly, Lucie." He actually said Lucie, he'd tried it, dared. Her face flamed.

She: "But wilfully. You lacked confidence in the path I took."

"What path?"

"Look at me. I walked alone. All around me was life, open spaces, people and lands. People and lands wait for us, they all need us, and we exist only when we take them into ourselves. The world is a wonder, Erwin, but hungry for us. You don't believe how dry this ground is, the earth, the lands, and the people on them, and how right, how good it is when you approach them. By this circuitous route I understood what it means: God formed man of dust, and breathed into him the breath of life. You know Michelangelo's painting in the Sistine Chapel, where Adam crouches dull and lifeless on the ground, a troglodyte, and God approaches from afar, out of a cloud, and lets a spark leap across from his outstretched finger. How having a soul changes a person. Only now do they arise; before they were just pre-births. Out there, Erwin, are some who owe me their second, their real, life."

She turned to face him: "I could have done even more, if I – had been more. I used you. You were my consummation, and you too could have become more. How I wept about it, back then. I was a tree, you literally shattered my trunk. It still grew, kinked, and how. – You did this wilfully, Klara was right. Your good fortune ruined you. You were too much honoured, famed, loved. You enjoyed your work. You wanted nothing more. But the way you drew back into such a tight little nook, this you never noticed. I was horrified whenever I happened to see you. I was embarrassed for you. The world could be smashed to pieces around you, it wouldn't matter how, you'd take no notice."

She stubbed her cigarette in the ashtray. "You were like so many others in Germany. You became abettors and accomplices in crimes. How, why? Out of inertia, only half-knowing, half-endorsing. Just so it never takes you by the scruff."

She tapped his knee. "So, Erwin. What is your problem?"

He took her hand: "So it really is you."

"What is your problem?"

It was a while before he could open his mouth. "I shall tell you. But none of it is any longer entirely true now. There's the emptiness, the vast emptiness. You have to live in it. Nothing resonates in you, and nothing gets close to you. Things that parade

before you have nothing to say. Music has lost its melody. That out there in the world wolves eat lambs, that's a fact – no one gets worked up about it. We're surrounded by facts and note them down, such a stupid occupation. Change the world – in what direction? There's no stimulus there either. It is what it is, but exhausting. You'd have to be a child to find enjoyment in it."

After a pause he continued: "You hear of problems that others busy themselves with, social problems, revolution, the need for a new kind of state. You experience this. But the questions make no impact on you. What does actually make an impact? No one even despairs about it, or only a little bit, and that little bit of despair is the only positive thing the world offers. Life is a thick pile carpet worn down to its base, revealing the bare mesh backing."

"And writing? You no longer work?"

"Rarely. But I can't say I have no ideas. I'm often astonished to find notes among my papers of which I have no memory at all, all discarded, torn up, nothing made of them. Sometimes I'm besieged by ideas, but then you think: what's the point. I might tell myself I'm lazy, or merely fed up with Art. But will I at least try to meet what the public demands of one these days, politics and action? Seems not. Something lays a fog over my thoughts. I keep busy for hours, but can't tell you what with."

"Go on."

"I can no longer watch my early plays. They were written by someone else. That's why your letters fell on me like fire. There was no concealing it. I saw how matters stood with me. You foretold it."

"What was the outcome?" She rose to her feet and moved away. She stood at the window with her back turned, and said before he could answer: "I will try to help you. You don't know what steps to take. You get on a train and go to Hamburg. You think you'll give your ex-wife a piece of your mind. It backfires." The woman laughed. Stauffer gave a start. He had no idea how to react. Every elegiac and romantic feeling fell from him at this sudden coarse laughter.

"Your wife Klara was so convenient for you. You can put all the blame on her. But with me" (she laughed again) "how do things stand with me? Poor Peter thinks all he has to do is chase after his lost youth. But that's not how it works." She sat down at his side. He shifted away. It was an outrage – and unsettling, she laughed, she laughed. She dared to take his hand. She was treating him like a silly boy.

"Bad, Erwin, isn't it, how everything goes off the rails. If you could have your way now you'd stand up and leave, yet again. No doubt this trip would then, once you're back in Berlin, result in your angrily tearing up all the letters you can get your hands on, and swearing never again to even touch a letter. A radical solution. But as matters stand, my dear friend, you can't have it all your own way. I too am here."

"I'm glad of it." (What is the woman up to?)

"I could, for example, decide to take my revenge. And you wouldn't escape lightly." (See, the reverse of the medal.) "I've mulled it over the whole night. When you went into the hotel and left me waiting downstairs, I knew you had a notion to run away. You came back to the car. But next time you won't come back."

He shrank into his chair. He mumbled fearful, cowardly words: "I'm at your disposal. I've not much else going on."

"You bought me for a few pieces of silver. I felt defiled all my life, by you who inflicted it on me. And you're trying basically the same manoeuvre now." She thrust her menacing face closer to his. "Say yes."

"How will you take revenge?"

"See, now you're afraid."

"No Lucie, not at all, not in the least." (He wouldn't look at her.) "I'd like you to take revenge. You'd be doing it for me. I just realised, Lucie, that I was expecting this of you. It's the reason I made this journey." (He wasn't lying. He'd had enough of himself. And now even this ploy was failing! Such anger, shame, self-disgust.)

"The death-potion! Isolde's death-potion. And you, the old epicure, perhaps you think you'll prove to be the death-potion."

"Say what you like. I shall sit here."

"And wait and have nothing to say. Criminal." She actually flung herself at him. She threw him back in the chair and held him by the shoulders like a wooden doll. His face had a pitiful expression, which she noticed only after some moments. She released him, he sprawled there unhappily, she observed him and shook with laughter: "If only Betty could see this." Then she crossed to the window, and wept.

As he pulled himself together after the assault, he felt, as with the Laura incident, that he was a man. With women you never can tell. She's sobbing by the window. A sign. But already she blows her nose and comes tripping, wiping her eyes, back across to him. She has adopted a friendly, slightly mournful smile: "Let's get some fresh air, Erwin. It'll be better outside. Two people should hide away only for kissing."

He was happy to stand up. So she does have some sense. He has come off lightly.

She led the way out, past the car. She pointed to the towering snow-covered landscape, stood enchanted (how quickly her mood changes), and said softly: "There, Erwin, the orchestra to our duet." He had no idea how to respond to such grandiosity. He gave her hand a squeeze. (Got off lightly there.) She seemed not to notice his self-consciousness. She stood large as life. When the moment had lasted a great many moments, he cleared his throat (he was freezing, they'd left furs in the car), she came down to earth and saw he was cold. At once she dived into the car, which was heated.

There they sat, and drove along, he at her side. He was glad it had all gone so smoothly. He was ashamed of his good mood and called himself a rogue and, smugly, an incorrigible sinner. The atmosphere in the car was excellent.

As they approached Gordievo, she put an arm on his shoulder. "You shan't go back to the hotel, Erwin. You're coming with me." The tone in which she said this exceeded all expectation. He was gentle, compliant, sweet. ("My one and only, my whole life.") So she was Lucie. – His ears pricked up. She was saying more, in the same tone.

He was enchanted. What an experience. Everything in him fell apart. If they weren't in a car, he'd have fallen on his knees before her. He felt dizzy. So the goal was reached, after all!

The sun came to his aid. The light faded, dusk fell. She whispered in his ear (she did!): "My one and only, Erwin, my whole life."

The miracle had happened. The dusk enabled him to see beside him a divine young face, proud, stern, enticing.

Until the outskirts of Locarno they were locked in an embrace. Suddenly she lifted her arms high, stamped her feet, screamed, laughed, and her behaviour caused the chauffeur to stop the car.

"It's nothing," Stauffer whispered, ashamed. The chauffeur drove discreetly on.

EPISODE 8

(HdF p. 244-250, Woods APB p. 451)

MASQUERADES AND DANCES

In Switzerland. A different, very solid and appetising spiritual banquet is spread for a delighted gentleman. Friendship reaches the stage of a mood for marriage.

After they returned from the Maggia valley, Stauffer stayed in his hotel. Lucie had put him on the spot: either move into the guest room at the chateau, or stay in the hotel. As she expected, he chose the hotel.

He felt not quite comfortable in his skin. He couldn't trust himself. He'd manoeuvred himself into an almost unbearable, phantastical situation. I have to retreat, he told himself, Erwin, what are you doing, you're no fraud, flee!

But then she picked him up at the hotel. He found she had designs on him. At the chateau they sat in the same little room where their first conversation had taken place. There, without preliminaries, she asked him above all to be honest. Above all they must be honest and sincere with one another. Only then could she be to him what she had to be and wanted to be.

He agreed at once, and his heart sank: for what must she, would she, be to him? He really wanted to know but dared not ask. To signal his sincerity, he mentioned a certain inclination for the Countess, maybe it'll make her a little jealous and even in time make her despise him. She received it nobly, he thanked her gloomily. She said: "It's a matter of reciprocity. Betty asked me to convey her greeting. Erwin, you well

know the new life we are stepping into. I haven't pulled wool over your eyes. You were free, and are free. We shall arrive at more and more truth. Otherwise we'd simply be adventurers and frauds to one another."

Her smile was proud: "We shall not allow misunderstandings to arise, Erwin. I shall not join your long line of lovers. Nature has allotted powers differently between men and women. I need your strength. But I cannot wish for you to lose yours. I don't want to make you poorer. You still don't understand. You're still stuck in your little nook. I see who you've gone around with and what they've made of you. Let me tell you, you came within an inch of having nothing. And you wouldn't have come looking for me. Now give your bouquet to Betty."

He accepted the admonition. A servant came along, he handed the flowers over for the Countess. As he sat alone, a mysterious feeling came over him: this Lucie, this real Lucie with greying hair and the proud face, she is my guide. She's saving me. Don't deny your destiny, Erwin. Then the servant came back and invited him to the big salon.

And as he entered that great space, his feet came to a halt. The salon lay in semi-darkness, the entire rear portion of the long room was invisible. He couldn't get his bearings. For the rear portion had pillars, between which the musicians had sat. And he had stood by a pillar when the Countess first came across to him. Now he could see neither pillars nor stage. His eyes adapted gradually to the dark, and he saw: what he had taken to be the rear wall of the room was a dark blue curtain stretched between the pillars. He stepped on down.

In the middle was a splendid ornately decorated dinner table with three place settings. Garlands wound around the chairs. The entire table was strewn with petals. Now Stauffer could see the wreaths on the door he had just stepped through. The statues along the wall were adorned with wreaths. Stauffer, uneasy, was overtaken by deep excitement. He lowered himself onto a chair beneath the bust of a faun. They're giving me a reception. But how have I deserved it? Me, why me, who am I? How many go to the grave not suspecting even a little who they are, how many fade away without seeing even a trace of their dreams fulfilled. And I, after a wasted life, a fraud ...

The door behind him sprang open. Light filled the room. The candelabra too lit up. From the doorway, as old-fashioned music played behind the curtain, a masquerade descended into the room. Stauffer by his pillar stood up.

At the head stepped two whitehaired white-bearded men. Each wore a golden crown. A long sword at the side. They stopped before Stauffer, crossed their arms over their chest, inclined their white heads a little, and gave their names.

A shiver ran through Stauffer. These were characters from his plays! Women and pages came. Their greetings moved him, he thanked them. Lucie set this up. So she is Lucie. But I ...

Now they took up position before the dark blue curtain. One after another they quoted Stauffer's lines, melancholy, tragic, comical lines. Then set off again around the

room, to the steps where two women had meanwhile appeared, and who now came down into the room. Stauffer thought they too must be characters from his plays. He looked on with a mixture of pleasure and shock. The one in front, slender, showed off her shiny clinging snakelike black silk dress. She gathered up the train. Stauffer, entranced, realised it was Lucie only when she drew near. Sleek shining chestnut hair fell in heavy waves about her neck. Her grave proud face, the wide brow, the straight nose, firm mouth, strong chin. It is her, me myself, an extension of me. She held out both hands. He didn't understand what she was saying, it sounded like a proclamation.

Hardly had this creature released his hands when the other stepped forth, a stunning beauty. She wore blue and white, with little delicately embroidered flowers. She was taller and stouter than the other. No words could describe the divine beauty of this person. Her gaze, it seemed to him, was sweetness itself. Her bosom swelled white from the calyx of her dress. A girdle of silver enclosed her hips. She tripped along in white shoes, and the motion caused the loose fabric, slit at the sides, to lift away and reveal the knee and the full pink legs.

So Stauffer, the doubting Thomas, now stood between Lucie and the Countess, and had to show some reaction. When Lucie embraced him he was unsure where best to kiss her, it had to be the mouth. In the case of the Countess no great deliberation was needed, her mouth came to him like a flower on which the bee alights. He had kissed the Countess, the Countess had offered him her mouth – what a crazy situation, you could lose your mind.

Lucie on his right arm, Countess on the left, he approached the table, and now the Countess, this frisky miracle, spoke: “You must not think, Stauffer, that we would allow to pass unsung, in silence, your return to the world of truth after a lifetime of wrong living. I don't know about Odysseus, when he returned home from the Trojan War after ten years of wandering, whether his wife Penelope organised a big welcome party. But he deserved one.”

Stauffer: “First he had to drive off Penelope's suitors.”

“And you, lucky man, don't even have to do that much. Allow me two sentences. You have been wandering for twenty years. That's no trivial matter. So I beg you to please accept this celebration and its elaborate introduction.”

As they reached the table and Lucie freed his arm, she said: “This will be a pleasant first step for you to enjoy with us spirits. Now we shall feast together.” She turned, and said half to Stauffer and half to the servant: “No, we are not yet quite ready to begin. Stauffer, you would surely wish to bestow on the other spirits your thanks for their consideration, before they fade back into their secret world.” The servant withdrew, and as they stood there the old men with the crowns, the women, the knights and pages all came down once more into the salon.

“What do you mean by this, actually?” Stauffer asked. “What kind of celebration is this? Is it for my seventieth?”

The kings advanced. How often had Stauffer faced such characters in rehearsals. Now, though he had already seen them once, when they stood close, face to face at mirror-distance, he was overcome with a physical terror. It was himself, his real truth, and not his miserable shabby lived past. He clung tight to his chair. Lucie, seeing his face collapse, put her hand on his. He asked: "What should I say to them?"

"Whatever you like, Erwin." But he said nothing, his powers of speech had fled.

The kings extended a hand, he mumbled thanks. The noble ladies curtsied, the pages bowed. And now they could take their seats.

Stauffer tugged at his collar, said how embarrassed he was to be wearing ordinary 1918 clothes in front of these gentlemen, and was even more embarrassed to be sitting between the two ladies. Food was served, toasts were exchanged, a small orchestra played. It was the strangest meal he had ever attended. It was like a baptism. Between courses they stood up and danced, Stauffer first with Lucie. They swayed slowly in each other's arms. He was no longer rebelling. The enchantment was complete. Then the two ladies danced together. When he asked the Countess for a dance, she offered him her arm, and it was only a solemn promenade through the salon.

When the ladies withdrew after coffee and Stauffer went to his room, he found a big bouquet of roses in a vase with a note attached. It contained a shiny gold ring with the name Lucie. He put it on. It sat on his finger. It could be considered an engagement ring, he thought. I've been ambushed. I must flee. Do I want to? Do I want – a new life? A true life? Is it the true life? His heart pounded, he was afraid again. He recalled the night when he found the letters, and now here are the consequences.

Pharaoh's Tomb

The Countess came to fetch him. She wore the same formal dress from the theatre evening, the spirit atmosphere had wafted clear. She accepted his thanks for the celebration, and looked at his hand with the ring. "You want to wear it, Stauffer?"

"With all my heart." (Fate, I'm done for, I won't defend myself.)

"Then perhaps you'd like to see another ring?"

They met Lucie at the doorway to the salon. At the top of the steps Stauffer showed her his ring, and slipped onto her finger another that the Countess handed to him. It was too much for Lucie's nerves. She fainted, as during that first conversation with the Countess. But she didn't cry out. "She'll come round soon enough," The Countess pulled Stauffer down the steps. "Don't be surprised by her agitation. Apart from anything else, she's married."

"My God." Stauffer was rooted to the spot.

"It means a lot less than you think. There are no difficulties on Lucie's part." She told him of Lucie's husband in America, she knew him well. He'll act up a little when Lucie, who's spent half the marriage away roving the world, asks for a divorce. "Lucie

is well off, from her first husband. He was killed in a car crash. If it comes to it she can bear the fury of her current husband. But she's incredibly clever. You'll find out."

He already had.

EPISODE 9

(HdF p. 263-266, Woods APB p.459)

TRAVEL PLANS

Of foreign parts, and the things that happen on one's travels.

Fantasies arise, but one has secret reservations.

Stauffer paced back and forth in the chateau's guest bedroom, laughing and unable to believe his luck. After the festive luncheon Lucie had come to him in the hotel and driven him back to the chateau. Now he mused in disbelief over his suitcase. He saw his fur coat, his briefcase lying on chairs and asked himself: "Now I'm actually to live here? Is this final? What is dream, fantasy, what is real?"

And now Lucie stepped in, and though she was not simply the apparition of yesterday's theatrics, she seemed to him nonetheless very similar, younger even and more in line with his dream picture. I'm oscillating between two worlds. The ladies have conjured away my identity. I shall have to change my name.

Lucie was tender to him. Both were drifting in a curiously nostalgic emotional state. The spirit-play had not yet released her. And so they embraced. Swiftly, surprisingly for him, Lucie became a happy little female. She gave herself to him. It happened so suddenly and was so unexpected and extraordinary that afterwards, when she'd left him, he sat there, felt himself all over, groaned softly and tore his hair.

It's all a lot of nonsense, he rebelled, nonsense, and impossible. I can't take any of it seriously. All I did was cave in. I really must pull myself together. It's imperative I take a different direction. But what direction? He sighed. But it wasn't quite genuine. What else, when you think it over, could he do. Some quotations came to mind: *The Eternal Feminine draws us on high.*⁵ And: *There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy.* Thus did he seek to justify himself to himself, and cast a pall over memories of this day.

Evening came, lamps were lit; he encountered Lucie in the small salon with the Countess. But the Countess at once left the room, would not be detained. Now he learned what Lucie had in store for him. She showed herself more practical and concrete than him. As he marvelled at the assurance with which she spoke (and arranged his life) she shook the serious head that he was observing with joy and astonishment – he was making discoveries, she was conquering him. She said:

"There's nothing to marvel at, Erwin, when you consider how many years I have had to prepare for this moment. I shall fetch you away from Germany. I shall take you

⁵ *Faust II*, the final lines.

out into the world. You will see other continents. We shall not storm through Heaven and hell. You shall learn that there are oceans, and America and South Sea islands and China, and the Congo, Egypt, and the Ganges and Shanghai. It's quite something, a long sea voyage. If you don't hide yourself away in the entertainment rooms and listen to the same old jazz band and dance the same old tango with people you already saw in Zurich, Munich and Berlin and will see again in New York and Chicago – then you can already catch a sense of the elements, of nature, real life. You'll see youngsters playing tennis on deck, and a fog will envelope us, and the ship senses what's happening and every minute the ship gives a hollow blast of the siren. It's a warning, but she's also afraid. And down in the bowels of the vessel the mighty engines toil away, and you're glad to hear their plucky thumping and stamping. I've done lots of travelling. I'd like to go into the polar night one day, see the Northern Lights, Eskimos, huskies. But I don't trust myself, I always want to go but I too easily feel the cold. So that's the first part, Erwin, travelling. And then I'll have to go back to America, deal with all kinds of business. Some won't be pleasant. And over there – I shall marry you. It's unimaginable: we shall get married."

Tears sprang into her eyes. He felt hugely guilty and thought he should comfort her. But she was ahead of him:

"Travel, yes. I shall do all I can to help you discover yourself. Anyone discovering foreign lands also discovers something of oneself. No man is an island. No. And you can't find yourself when you're stuck in a little nook. Among these vast things your mind will expand, feelings will become stronger, truer, more natural."

She whispered: "You know, Erwin, cities actually turn us all into empty vessels. They're all one and the same, with their music, the theatre, their literature. And all you men are so eager for experiment, for politics and world history, and that's what makes your society. And in this confusion left behind by earlier generations, we who come later are supposed to find our feet. Hah, before you realise it's all chaos, you've already worked yourself to exhaustion."

He listened with great attention. She remained grave and assured: "The patient does not know his suffering. But he protests in his own way, and feels dysfunctional."

"I am all ears, dottoressa."

"So, we'll be in America and shall stay a while. And then the second part begins: you will embark on something. You and I both stem from a nation that calls itself a people of poets and thinkers. Over there you'll find it quite different. Already when a handful of English people decided not to maintain their dissenting religion in their own country, but rather to embark on an undertaking, that was something. I don't yet know, Erwin, what you will do, later, much later. You will not let your talent tyrannise you. Maybe another side of you will show. You'll learn who you are, among other people. You can only learn it among others, with others, Erwin. The writer's study is the biggest evil. Please, don't misunderstand me. I'm not urging you towards politics, though I won't hold you back if that's what attracts you. But there's nothing like

actually taking part in person. You can't avoid exposure. You have to throw yourself into it. I've had a few successes, and if they weren't more, Erwin, it's because you weren't with me. Powers will flow to you when you engage with others. Calls and questions all around, and you're right in among the choir. When does life begin to become interesting? Do you know? When resistance begins. I've learned a lot from this. How was I able to bear my fate? You think: I wrote letters to you. I did, to hold myself together. But I had to do more. The Countess even asked me again yesterday, after she knew all about it, how I managed to persevere after the 'disappointment' back then. The 'disappointment' for me meant almost annihilation. It was other people who helped me get over it, not with words but with deeds. And it largely faded into the background. I had to struggle and not die."

She'd meant to fascinate Stauffer, and ended sadly. He had to distract her, but the effort failed. And when he went to bed late that evening after a silent supper with the Countess and Lucie, he admitted to himself: how could this day have ended otherwise than subdued, with so much of the past and a bitter glimpse into the future.

Just before he fell asleep his mood changed, and he sank into the gentle foolish joy he'd felt during the first visit, when he tramped through snow towards an enchanted princess. He rocked himself in his sleep, the old fantasist, with the phrase: a triumphant Babylonian death, in ecstasy.

Of course he meant no such thing.

EPISODE 10

(HdF p.421-441, Woods APB p.565)

DANCE AROUND THE MAGIC LETTER-CHEST

*A daughter fights for a place in her father's life. Various Poets and Thinkers
drown their sorrows in alcohol. Old love grows not stale,
and heads for America.*

Furniture makyth Man

Stauffer, the dramatist, found himself back in Berlin late in the afternoon. At Anhalter station he looked out onto the city. Now it had happened, a life turned upside down, and he strove to view the world through new eyes. He made an effort. Incredulous, he felt the smooth gold band on his finger. Incredulous, and proud. What an adventure. What a grand, real adventure. His own revolution.

He strolled down towards Potsdamer Platz. It was seething with people. He knew from the papers that frontline troops had returned, there had been no incidents, a certain nervousness had lifted from the city. He observed nothing of it directly, everyone appeared strangely grey and insubstantial. It must be an after-effect of the tremendous experiences he'd just undergone. At Potsdamer Platz the number of street-walkers doubled. He fled, and headed for his suburban station.

And now to the apartment. It looked desolate. The old porter's wife from the previous apartment had made a rough and ready job of tidying up. That evening he sat in his room under a wax candle and sought to enter into some relationship with his furniture. He couldn't. Why did he drag all this stuff around with him. Why does he need four rooms. And so much junk, a museum, a rubbish dump.

Only the still-unopened boxes of books drew him – among them the box with the letters, the magic box, Pharaoh's sarcophagus. Pharaoh's sarcophagus? Afterwards it all seems so different. Thus might the deceased, should they prevail over Death, have a different perspective on our existence.

But it was still eerie, squatting among all this junk as if in a cellar, by the light of a single candle. Nothing for it but to go to bed. In the dark and his distracted condition, he forgot to halve his sleeping tablet, swallowed it whole and was still fast asleep when the bell of the newly installed telephone rang and rang. He lay listening to the ringing, fire engine, church, ringing on and on, must be the doorbell, it's quite nearby, he lifted his head, but he couldn't tell who or what was ringing (it was a new apparatus with an unfamiliar tone). He sat up: what's ringing, where the devil is it? At last it was clear that the ringing came from under the bed. Yes, the telephone was under the bed. In his stupor he bent down to seize the noisy creature and haul it out. It didn't cease its din until he lifted the earpiece. He gave it another shove in his annoyance. And now the earpiece was at his ear and he understood nothing. He stared around the room: what kind of a stupid room is this? And who's talking there, actually? He sat down, until lightning flashed through his brain, through the clouds of stupefaction. He understood something, his name repeated several times, someone laughing.

He became more awake, felt his heavy dull head and for the fifth time gave his name. Now he heard: it was Lucie.

She told him she'd arrived and was at a hotel in the city. He apologised, said he couldn't hear clearly, he was still in a stupor, his sleeping pill had worked really well this time. She advised him to go back to sleep, she was in no hurry, she'd call again in the afternoon. He replaced the earpiece and did indeed go back to sleep.

Two hours later, when the sun shone into the room, he woke up, his head was clearer, he got out of bed and began to make desultory attempts to bring order to the place before Lucie arrived. He pushed at furniture, to no avail. Then he left the house meaning to intercept Lucie outside.

He found a flower shop, armed himself with a huge collection of flowers, and arranged them in vases in the apartment. Then he carried all the vases into one room, his horrible study, and of course was interrupted there by her arrival.

She kept her coat on. In the study, before those unhappy vases of which in his haste he had placed one on the floor and knocked it over when he went to answer the door, she embraced him. He tried to extricate his face, which he hadn't yet shaved. But she wouldn't let him. She threw her fur coat onto the desk chair, and he, prey to so

many emotions unpleasant and pleasant, finally allowed her joy to infect him. All his tiredness and dull thoughts sank away – until she released him: “Enough now. It’s tearing my whole soul away.” The same style as her letters.

Then, despite his embarrassment and his attempts to prevent her, she inspected the whole apartment. She went around every room with great attentiveness looking at everything but touching nothing. She was trying to get her bearings, and clearly failing. He had to ask her not to form any judgements about the furniture, it wasn’t the furniture’s fault, furniture was really of no importance.

“Why not, Erwin? You’re not rejecting your old life. One remains what one is. No?”

“One remains what one is. That sounds dangerous.”

She looked around at the chests. There were enough of them. She sat on a low box. He sat facing her. Lucie: “Why, Erwin? I insist that you remain what you are. And you won’t be able to change me, either.”

He, reflectively: “I caught myself out just now, when I flinched at your saying: one remains what one is. There’s something in that. I’ve been hauling this furniture around for decades, and that, it now occurs to me, is not merely an external matter. When I look at this furniture, it’s part of a set that includes the box of papers your letters fell out of. The letters lay in there for decades, the box preserved them, it had swallowed something of mine, I had no idea and never noticed until one day, late one night, the box sprang open and yielded them up.”

She pressed: “Then what, Erwin? What will you hold on to, what will you give up?”

“You see, I always had a theory about milieu and people. You know what Taine⁶ and others taught: it’s the milieu that shapes the person. Show me your environment, tell me where you grew up, and I will tell you who you are. Contrary to this I assert, more for myself than for the outside world: it is the person who shapes the environment. Were it otherwise we could not exist, and would ourselves be nothing more than environment. We shape our milieu, tune it to ourselves, at the very least we make it consonant with us. So, for example, I proudly lay out myself and my furniture and pursue my way of life. I don’t allow myself to be changed, and no one imposes on me. Now – I see it differently. I haul this old junk around to barricade myself behind it. Yes, that’s how I regard this furniture now. Actually it’s strange, it seems to me that through all this I’ve never really looked at the furniture. It’s simply followed me around. But others will have seen it.”

“And what story do you tell yourself, Erwin?”

He searched his memory: “From childhood I was kept isolated. I became used to solitude early on. Apparently I was often ill as a child. I had no siblings. I was coddled. My parents kept me for themselves. They had little else. I recall that they seldom let me play with others, they were afraid of something. Then came reading, and dreams. A

⁶ Hippolyte Taine (1828-93): influential French literary critic and historian.

frenzy of reading. And when you're solitary, reading makes you even more so. There I was already, life size. At the time I was already twelve or fifteen years old. Then the writing started, quite early. At first I was puzzled that other people found something in my scribbles, my versifying – and not only my parents, who already regarded me as their miracle child. I wanted to know what I was writing, did it have some contact with reality. Probably it had none. But through writing I began to come into contact with people, right at the start with certain circles, people from the newspaper world, criticism, later on the theatre. Then I experienced the strangest thing: others started calling me their 'colleague'. Of course nobody acquires colleagues in that way. I say this not out of jealousy."

"Meanwhile you came to know women."

He lifted his hands with a laugh: "Sorry! Yes, that too. Or differently expressed: they came to know me. I was happy enough to tend this or that 'flame'. But it was not meant to be, was not allowed, not tolerated."

He hesitated, looked across to the desk: "So I got married, and that was the start of this study, my writing room. My mother insisted I get married. She thought I was going to seed."

"You came across Klara."

"She took me as I was, a rare bird she could domesticate – till it flew away. So I was alone again, was what I was – and sank ever deeper into a life my mother called dissolute. It became fixed. I placed the furniture around me, pulled the cage close about me. I felt safe in it. Furniture is battlements one builds around oneself. You know the rest. Decades, a whole row of them. My furniture, horror of horrors, is me."

Lucie sat on her box, bent forward, hands in her lap. "It must be a horror for you to feel that way. But you can be very rich and have a garden full of flowers and know nothing of it. You can let the garden become overgrown by a single species – it needn't be a weed. This plant can suck the ground dry, leach it, so that in the end it can produce nothing more, and even the plant itself dies. How to save yourself? Dig elsewhere, plant other things."

He took a deep breath: "Good advice."

She: "Let me tell you something zoological. We too are a mix of animals, noble and base, big and small. I think that must be why we like so much to visit zoos and watch the animals: we already have dogs and cats and birds inside us. But then we're frightened: there are lions and eagles there too, stags and elephants and vipers."

As she spoke, there were noises at the door, someone trying to ring the bell. Now it came clearer: a knock. Stauffer stood up: "The bell doesn't work." The woman smiled: "Yes, I had to knock."

He came back quickly, said nothing. She: "Well?"

"There's – a visitor for me."

She: "So? Let me see who it is."

"Please don't."

"Is it a lady?"

"Yes."

She swept to the door. As she passed she whispered: "The serpent, Erwin. If you don't mind I'll fetch her myself."

The porter standing in the hall explained that a lady was waiting in his lodge; was she at home to her? Because he knew, the mischievous fellow, that the gentleman already had company, so he'd thought it best to ask first.

In the porter's lodge Lucie found a lady who had acquired ink, pen and paper and was busy writing. When the porter bowed to Lucie at his door (this'll be a lark!), pointed to the lady and withdrew discreetly, Lucie approached the desk. The writer looked up. Lucie: "Excuse me, are you the lady who wishes to speak to Herr Stauffer?"

The young person's face flushed deep red: "Yes." She leaned back, and they stared at each other. Lucie had a friendly smile: "Herr Stauffer misunderstood the message. He asks you to come up, and apologises for making you wait."

The young lady grabbed her fur coat from the desk, left her unfinished letter lying. The porter, quickly reappearing on the scene, handed it to her on the way out, she stuffed it in her handbag, then thought of a tip and pressed something into his hand, whereupon he stood cringing at the door, which was already open, and let the two ladies with their serious faces pass.

He hastened with utmost eagerness to the kitchen to tell his wife what had just happened, the new tenant, that famous Herr Stauffer, and what a rigmarole there'll be upstairs now. "The first one, the older lady, knows what the younger one's up to, they're both up there. The two of them, together! They'll scratch out his eyes."

Stauffer paced uneasily among his chests and cursed his luck. This Bella, a total ball and chain. She'll make a scene, a big scene, one of her tremendous scenes, and put me on the spot. And why on earth did Lucie go downstairs. So annoying.

"Put it down anywhere," said Lucie in the corridor, "wherever you like." She opened the door and entered the room where Stauffer was pacing up and down.

Lucie: "The lady says she's your daughter." He went rigid. But already she was at the door, and was undoubtedly Laura. She flew at him with a little cry, flung her arms around his neck and wept. He mumbled: "But Laura."

Some time passed (he knew it would) before she released him, but only to rush out and fetch her bag with the hankie, then back to him, this time only the left arm on his shoulder (the right held the hankie to her nose), pressed to his chest and sobbing.

"Now Laura, tell me, what are you doing in Berlin? Has something happened at home?" The dreadful thought came: perhaps she's run away and wants to stay with me.

But it wasn't that bad. She wept only because she'd already been two whole days in Berlin where she knew no one and just sat in that lodge with the horrid porter and his wife waiting for Stauffer. She'd told the porter right away she was Stauffer's daughter. But the shameless pair just grinned and didn't believe her. And the wife had said out loud from the kitchen so she could hear: it's a scandal what tricks the young girls play, and that such a little goose should come so brazenly to a gentleman's apartment.

So now there was an abundance of consolings, to which Lucie contributed. Stauffer promised to go to the porter couple and restore Laura's honour. She insisted he go at once: "Else I'll never be able to go downstairs." So Stauffer swore he'd go with her when she went down, clear the matter up, and Laura would be his witness. The young lady was content with this, and from that moment on she stole the show.

First she delighted mightily in her father, and explained that she had extended her Christmas vacation because she wanted to go skiing with her parents (I mean Mama and my stepfather) in the Giant Mountains: "And where have you been, Father? No one had your address. Two days ago there was another lady sitting with me in the porter's lodge, very pretty, she knew you well, she said, she'd come from Dresden, an actress. I really liked her. She had a teeny black miniature pinscher in her arms."

"Did you tell her who you are?"

"Of course. But she laughed and laughed, it was so silly, but I had to laugh too, she didn't believe me either. She gave me her card. If I'm ever in Dresden I'm to visit her."

He looked at the card. It was Bella.

Lucie sat on her box, legs drawn up, enjoying herself immensely. Now Laura cast an embarrassed glance at the unknown lady and whispered to her father: "Won't you introduce us? She's been very nice to me."

Stauffer: "I'm sure she has. So, this is Laura, really and truly my daughter. And this is Lucie, my wife." Laura stood dumbfounded. She stared in disbelief from one to the other. Lucie smiled down from her box-throne.

"Your wife? You never said a word to me about being married."

"It happened while I was travelling."

"So that's why you went away. That's why. And left no address. And moved to a new apartment."

"You assume too much. Anyway, you're the first to whom I can introduce my wife."

Lucie leaped down from her box, smacked his cheek and took both the embarrassed girl's hands in hers: "He's fibbing, as usual. Your father is a professional fibber. It's true we've exchanged rings, but we haven't yet registered."

Laura: "Not been to the Registry Office yet?"

"Not yet, Laura. Isn't it awful?" Laura: "But you're going to marry Father?"

Lucie: "Let's be friends. Once I marry your father, you'll be my stepdaughter. So then you'll have a stepfather and a stepmother."

Laura relented, and they hugged. Lucie kissed the girl on both cheeks. Laura, embarrassed, let herself enjoy it, she looked blooming and radiated joy like happiness personified. She flew from one to the other: "And I didn't bring any flowers."

Then they became more serious. Laura asked if she could help sort out the apartment during her two days still in Berlin. Stauffer said: "That's up to you, Lucie."

And Lucie said: "And up to you. And then it depends on the ship."

Laura: "What ship?"

Lucie: "You live in Hamburg, we shall meet again in Hamburg. I live in America, and must go back as soon as I can."

Laura kept silent, then turned to her father: "And you'll go with her?"

He could see what was coming. But something else happened. As he stood close to her and said yes, she kept silent and took several steps back. She knocked over a little chair with blankets heaped on it. She bent down, picked up the blankets, and laid them on a chest. She sat tight-lipped, back half turned to the others, on the chair.

Stauffer, pleading: "What's the matter?" But she turned her back. He saw that she was not actually sad, rather grim and angry.

Lucie stepped close and placed a hand on her shoulder from behind. Laura twitched irritably. Lucie took her hand back: "So what's the matter?" The young lady hissed: "I'm sure you can work it out for yourself." Very formal, all tenderness forgotten. Lucie: "I don't understand." Young lady, haughty: "I'm sorry for that."

And stood, looked for her bag and her stole, and said as she buttoned her jacket, quite rudely: "I should have spared myself this visit."

Stauffer held her hands tight and said with some vigour: "Pull yourself together, Laura. Tell us what you want."

"I want nothing. Certainly not from you. Just like you, scooting off to America."

"Not a nice tone, Laura. You heard, we have an urgent journey ahead of us." (He had to defend himself from her, how strange.)

"You've had journeys ahead of you your whole life. You're never here. Who do you care about, actually? You've never cared about me. And when you do come and at last you're here, you go off with this lady on a trip to America."

"She is my wife, Laura."

The girl replied sniffily: "Not yet she isn't. I won't stand in your way. That's not why I came. Whyever did you come to Hamburg? I've asked Mama a dozen times, she has no idea. I thought it was because of me, because at long last you realised what was the right thing to do."

Lucie approached them both: “Erwin, pay close attention. She’s hauling you over the coals. Wherever you go they haul you over the coals.” She pushed her arm under his and tried to catch Laura’s gaze, but the girl would not react. Lucie said: “I have exactly the same problem with him, Laura. He never cared about me his whole life. You’re quite right to scold him. I too have given him a good piece of my mind.”

Laura couldn’t care less what the lady said, she flung herself angrily at her father: “Mama had no idea why you came. She says it was one of your crazy notions. But you should have left it alone, instead of ... me ...” She couldn’t go on, her mouth twitched, her face contorted, flushed flame-red, and she wept miserably into both hands. She pushed Stauffer away when he put an arm around her.

Stauffer: “Laura, of course you can’t come with us.”

She blubbered: “At least you might have asked me.”

Lucie nodded to Stauffer. She maintained a profoundly grave face. Stauffer: “Then I really must apologise, Laura. Please don’t hold it too much against me. We’d only started discussing America just before you arrived. You see, it’s like this: we, Lucie and I, plan to travel in two or three weeks, even one week if we can find a ship, to America. How long we’ll be away is still not certain, our plans are not yet fixed.”

Laura interrupted, she had suddenly stopped crying and said almost mocking: “Perhaps your marriage isn’t yet fixed.” Stauffer made a soothing gesture to Lucie, who was frowning, and said: “No, that is fixed. That’s exactly why we’re making the trip.”

Lucie laid a hand on Laura’s fur stole: “So you’re my little enemy? Look at these grey hairs, Laura. That’s how long I waited for your father. Much much longer than you’ve been waiting.”

“But you’ve only known each other a week.”

Lucie closed her eyes: “Ask your mother about that, please.”

“You know my mother?”

“A friendlier tone wouldn’t hurt. Yes, your mother knows me.” Laura’s shoulders relaxed, her tears dried. The petulant expression was gone: “Now I really don’t know what’s happening.”

Stauffer: “You don’t have to, child, not this moment. It was my intention to remedy all I’d left undone. If you want to, if you’re allowed to, you’re welcome to join us.”

Laura: “You’ve known Father so long? As long as I’ve been alive? So – maybe it was because of you he separated from Mama?”

Lucie: “Is that the little enemy talking, Laura? You really don’t need to be cross with me. Your father did not separate from your mother because of me. He abandoned me for twenty years in the same way he abandoned you. I was in America without him.”

Laura, ever more astonished: “And you only found each other again just now? After twenty years?” She was lost for words. And suddenly, as she studied them both, Lucie

and her father, she was so taken with the situation – at first she had no idea how or why – that she flung her arms around Lucie: “But that’s so fantastic. It’s heavenly, heavenly.”

Stauffer stepped to the window. He waited quite a while. The ladies wept.

When he heard noses being blown he turned around. The girl ran up beaming and hugged him, congratulated him, apologised. She was excited, cock-a-hoop. It’s so incredible, like something in the movies. She’s terrifically glad to be part of it, personally involved in such a situation. But no one will believe it when she tells them.

And then she became fully sensible again and declared that a celebration was absolutely called for. To which neither Stauffer nor Lucie, carried along by the unruly girl, had any counter-argument.

Laura also declared suddenly: “Have a nice trip to America, and get yourselves properly married. I’ll come later. I can’t just yet. First, I don’t know if Mama will let me, and then my course doesn’t finish until April.”

So, because they planned to have a celebration dinner in Berlin and had to sort themselves out first, she skipped off blissfully happy, excited as a whirlwind, and even forgot about her besmirched honour, which spared Stauffer the necessity of accompanying her downstairs to the porter’s lodge.

Politics calls – in vain

Before Stauffer accompanied Lucie back to her hotel – he planned to spend not one more night in his desolate apartment – he received another curious visitor: the tall dark-maned lyricist from the Congress of Intellectual Workers.

You could tell by looking what hard days the somewhat jaunty lyricist had behind him. For him too it had in the end not been easy to find his way out of the situation.

After the final debates they had dispersed with such enthusiasm. But when next morning the lyricist telephoned the chairman who had spoken so powerfully, he was faced with the strangest conundrum. The man at the other end of the line turned out suddenly to be unapproachable. He said: everything was laid out clearly the previous day and he had nothing to add. – The outcome was fantastic, so encouraging, the lyricist said. – Devastating, devastating, the chairman roared, and if you have no ears to understand that, you should hear it now. Incomprehensible. When the lyricist wailed: for heaven’s sake, what’s happened all of a sudden, the man at the other end became insulting, choked, coughed and roared: damn and blast it, you should all leave me in peace for once, take a running jump the lot of you. And waking him up so early just for this. He harrumphed a bit more, then hung up.

The lyricist, standing there dumbfounded, at first thought the man was choking on something, then came the closely allied thought that the novelist had clearly drunk too much the previous evening. Whatever, that too was an act of outrageous

irresponsibility given the situation in the Reich. The Right Putsch had fizzled out, now there was the threat of a Left Putsch, and where did the intellectuals stand? Where was the Intellectuals' Putsch?

So the perturbed lyricist had got to his feet and headed for the hotel where the famous visitor from Munich was staying. He wasn't in his room, but was apparently still in the hotel. After some hunting around the lyricist found him in the bar with a cocktail, in the company of an old complacent banker and his straw-blonde girlfriend.

The three were in a most boisterous mood. They greeted the lyricist with hearty hellos, pulled him into their circle, and the conversation resumed. It was, the lyricist discovered, not really a conversation but a succession of smutty witticisms and barrack-room jokes. The trio wallowed in indecent stories. The Berliner sat clueless opposite his revered master, the great man from Munich, eyes and ears agog. It really was the famous master. Laughing, giggling, yes, he giggled and purred. The whole face, the mouth and eyes, acquired new traits that reminded the lyricist of the companions of Odysseus, when on their travels they came upon the goddess Circe and with a touch of her staff she turned them into swine.

In shocked disbelief the lyricist studied the normally grave face of the man from Munich. He was flushed, mercurial, full of bounce. (The hormone treatment the Master was undergoing was the tops, a triumph of science.) When a pause gave the lyricist an opportunity to insert his nebulous concerns into the conversation, the man from Munich interrupted him at once. He clapped him on the shoulder and exhorted him to drink up and leave all the rest of it at home. "The Congress of Intellectuals. Hand on heart, it was sometimes quite nice there, you met other people, but in the end a chap had enough of it, and all in all it was an abortion. And with that, my dear friend, we leave our Congress in peace."

And they all, the Master from Munich, baldheaded banker, straw-blonde lady and the tall black-maned lyricist drank a toast to the quietly expired Congress.

The lyricist had to waste half the day there. His head throbbed from whisky.

That evening he sat alone and forlorn in the Café des Westens on Kurfürstendamm hoping to bump into people he knew. A few turned up over time, none with the slightest interest in politics. And the Congress of Intellectuals drew nothing more than a grin. How long did the lyricist sit there, watching the revolving door turn and turn. Now, he thought, someone will enter who will bring salvation. Because Berlin is at stake, Germany. The intellectuals cannot possibly fall short.

No one came. When the propositionings became too bothersome, he went sadly on his way. And there on Kurfürstendamm he suddenly thought of silent Stauffer. Ah, there was a serious man. He'd head off and find him. Next morning it was no easy task to find his new address. But now here he is.

He finds Stauffer in the middle of moving, with a pleasant serious lady who seems very clever and energetic, must be a relative helping to sort out the apartment. In the

presence of this woman, amid the furniture and the chests, the lyricist broached his concern to Stauffer, lamented the utter disorganisation of the Congress of Intellectuals, the lack of interest, flattered Stauffer as one of the few greats of German literature who had found their way to politics, and surely Stauffer would now come and help. A special session should be called for tomorrow in the Reichstag. An SOS call.

Because Stauffer and the energetic lady listened with polite attention, to entice Stauffer the lyricist made a further remark that had occurred to him on his way there. The papers were reporting on President Wilson's arrival in Paris, all ready to begin work on the Peace Conference, to bring about a new peace, Wilson, one of their own, an intellectual, a man of the mind. And over there in Russia a revolution had been brought about by another intellectual, by Lenin. So he asked himself, the lyricist did, where that left Germany, which so loved to call itself the land of poets and thinkers. Surely they won't let foreigners point the finger of scorn.

Stauffer showed interest: "So that's how you see those two, Wilson and Lenin. But they're such opposites."

The lyricist: "First and foremost they're intellectuals like us. Both want reason to triumph, rationality, one via the League of Nations, the other – in another way. Both are making plans."

Stauffer, quietly: "In that respect they're both Americans." The lyricist: "Rationality isn't only American. Anyway, both are our brothers in spirit. Where does it leave us?"

Stauffer, pensive: "Brothers in spirit. Strange to think of it like that. What are we up to, actually, show me the whole picture. What are we planning, who's planning with us? Actually, it's only – don't laugh – the General Staff. That's a fact. If I wanted to wax paradoxical, I'd say that over there they have their Wilson and Lenin, while we have old Hindenburg." The lyricist: "That's no joke. Hindenburg is the polar opposite, the nationalism that leads to war."

Stauffer indicated that he might appear next morning, and enquired about the topic for the coming session. The lyricist lied, said Stauffer would in due course be offered the honorary chair of the Congress; for the rest, they wanted to decide the old question: should revolution guide the Spirit, or should Spirit guide the revolution?

Stauffer's head drooped. Lucie wondered if there was still very much revolution in Berlin. She herself, during her strolls through the city, had found everything calm and orderly. The lyricist nodded mournfully; that was the worst of it, you needed a lantern to seek out revolution in Berlin. But it was there, potentially, in the mood. There'd soon be a big Reich Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils, the intellectuals would be represented, their words thrown into the scales. The counter-revolution was strong. Frankly speaking, he personally included under 'counter-revolution' both the generals and the workers.

Stauffer, mild as ever: all in all everything is in the same place as two weeks ago. But to bring an end to the conversation he fished out his pocket diary and in full view

of his mollified visitor made an entry. Once the lyricist had left, Stauffer showed Lucie the entry for tomorrow: 'Congress of Intellectuals session: caution'.

Lucie said: "I find the whole thing frightening. Whatever is their state of mind?"

Stauffer: "They're drawn on, like me, by a light, by the light of actual true events."

"You will not go to them again."

But the conversation must have stirred him, for he gave a sad smile: "I'm sorry for the boy. Yes, what am I doing, Lucie? I'm slithering away from it. I'm leaving them to it. It's what they call desertion. When it comes down to it, I grew up on the same dungheap. Lenin and Wilson, our spiritual brothers. And sometimes I thought I ought to make contact with the people, with the masses."

Lucie shook her head: "The masses, the people. When you write, when you're at work the way you do, you are the people, are in the right kind of contact with the people. There's no need for you to seek out extra masses. That way you'll find not a people, but only rallies, congresses."

"Is that what they think in America?"

Lucie: "I'm no American. But it seems to me that over there they're not as crazy as here. It really is good that I'm leaving. You came to me at the last moment on this mad continent, I could never live in this European lunacy. Now they glorify some individual, now they deify some nation, and the masses follow. How are the masses better than the myriad individuals that constitute them? Over there, our life is – more realistic, colder, but also less quixotic. Seems to me your Europe no longer has a proper religion, finds it indigestible. So they mess around with every possible religion like an abandoned lover throwing himself at some loose woman. Over there we work hard, competition is fierce, fiercer than here, but people know where their interests lie and pursue them in coordination with others. They have friendships. They live in reality, mostly more than enough. On the other hand they yearn to leave this reality and come to something spiritual. I believe no one in America hit on the notion of a theory of materialism to top it all. It would be like carrying coals to Newcastle."

"So, you would drive all your artists into their ivory towers?"

"Very few over there, alas, live in ivory towers."

Stauffer: "And what about human misery, poverty?"

Lucie: "There's plenty of that over there, too. But as for real suffering, most of it, unfortunately, comes from agitators, and those are people of our class, mostly well-housed, educated, people who for some reason feel impelled to act out feelings of revenge against their own class. Over there the general view is: everyone must work, find his luck, succeed, and not be discouraged. The state leaves you alone. If you're governed by morons or rascals, it's your own fault."

Lucie gazed long at the flowers, and said: "Suffering – belongs with us; it's not life, but it belongs with us like weeds in the crop. But we are the crop. And if there's one

thing I'm sure of, it's this: happiness, beauty and freedom belong with us. That's where our identity grows."

They went into the city. Stauffer was moved by the thought of celebrating his second connection with Lucie, this time together with his daughter. They booked a table at Lucie's hotel, bought her some jewellery as a gift. She gave them little presents.

A voyage to the New World, into a new world, loomed.

As they made their purchases, Lucie pointed to brightly-lit Leipziger Strasse: "Look about you, Erwin, how lovely, how peaceful it all is."

EPISODE 11

(HdF p. 457, Woods APB p. 576)

This is the time when the dramatist Stauffer is pottering around in his apartment. For Lucie has phoned, she wants to pay him a visit, and he doesn't want her to see the place in this state. But after half an hour's efforts at tidying up he sees how hopeless it is, he does what Becker has done: he leaves the apartment and goes for a walk.

EPISODE 12

(HdF p. 493-505, Woods APB p. 600)

PENULTIMATE MOMENT IN EUROPE

Much loses its bitter character if you give it time and learn to know yourself better; many men who can't stand themselves discover this. And when the ship doesn't leave right away for America and you must stay behind a bit longer, you're not too bothered. Maybe you won't make the voyage after all?

The two female adversaries

The Stauffers – Erwin and Lucie, with Laura tagging along – were at a loose end in Hamburg. For as they quickly learned, the blockade was still in effect and no ships would depart for the foreseeable future. But just as someone wearing flammable clothing cannot approach a fire without risking disaster, just so was the situation of Lucie in this city – not just any city, but the city where Klara lived.

Even in the train, Lucie had grown quieter for some reason Stauffer couldn't fathom. And that evening Lucie contrived it so that next morning Laura would have Stauffer all to herself.

She headed out to see Klara.

Whenever a god hangs something over us, we take comfort in bowing to an unfathomable will. But here a human being like any other, no, a common, jealous, vengeful female, has assumed the role of judge and sealed her own fate. Klara will be faced not by a human being, but by a mere object, an insect to be squashed. But since

the squashing doesn't entirely succeed, the nine-tenths squashed thing will rise again for the sake of justice, and pursue its grievance.

When Lucie rang the doorbell, a maid answered. She was shown to the antler room.

Lucie, in her dark green winter coat, on her head a black fur hat, sat grim-faced at the table. This time there was no jolly commotion in the corridor, and no dog, for Laura had taken it with her.

A tall strapping person came in. She wore a simple house-dress, arms bare. She smoothed the dress and asked in a friendly tone to whom did she owe the pleasure. She had obviously been baking in the kitchen, she brushed flour from her arms. She seemed to have not much time.

Lucie: It's on a very particular matter. And when Klara sat down in some surprise – a respectable beggar? – and Lucie saw the woman up close, she said calmly: "I'm the actress from the time when you and Erwin Stauffer were married, you knew her by the name of Lucie."

Klara, dumbfounded, placed a robust arm on the table. She wasn't too surprised. Laura had said she'd come back to Hamburg with the couple, and gushed about the wonderful movie script she'd landed up in, how the couple had found each other again after twenty years.

"So," Klara nodded, fuming at all the nonsense invading her home these days, all the superfluous warmed-up leftovers. "How can I help? My daughter told me about it."

"Clearly I've interrupted you. If you need to finish off in the kitchen, I can wait."

Klara forcefully: "Is it about Laura? I've never once allowed her to make such a trip."

"You seem to assume I'm here on account of your daughter. I am the actress whom you knew at the time of your marriage to Stauffer, by the name of Lucie."

Klara lifted her hand from the table, crossed her arms at her breast, frowned, her eyes flashed, she said loudly: "I don't know you, how should I know all his affairs from the past. It's nothing to do with me. You must have all gone mad. Leave me in peace. You must know that the man who is now your husband or fiancé sat there a fortnight ago and meant for some reason to make a scene with me. He thought better of it."

Lucie had the same experience as Stauffer: she could not reconcile this woman with the matter that had brought her here.

Klara: "That man sent you here, admit it. He daren't come himself. Courage was never his strong point. You're here to negotiate about Laura. There's no need for obfuscations. Laura is his daughter."

"I am not here because of your daughter. You won't get away from her so easily. Not as easily – as you did me."

Klara held a hand to her eyes. In a changed tone she said: "Let me think, let me think." The letters, this is the woman.

Lucie: "Now do you remember me? I spoke to you just once or twice in the lobby of your building, and once at the apartment door. And we spoke on the telephone."

"I remember."

"Erwin was always busy."

"I knew why you were phoning. He was my husband. Others phoned as well."

Lucie: "I wrote letters to him. They never arrived."

"He didn't read them."

"You know that?"

"Yes."

Lucie: "Why are you lying? You know he read them, that's why you hid them away."

Clearly Klara would now stand up and exercise her rights as mistress of the house. But – she did not. This was the woman who had inflicted inexpressible pain on her long ago and whom she herself had harmed.

They talked of events twenty years in the past. In the meantime the Russo-Japanese War had happened, the World War, deportations, the flu had laid waste to Europe, ten million lay dead. The discussion went further.

Now Klara covered her eyes with a hand: "Why are you here?"

"I can't let the matter rest. Twenty years have gone by – and have not gone by. You see what has become of me. And much is not visible to the eye."

Klara: "Seeing you sitting there brings back memories. I was obsessed with the idea that I loved him. I didn't know what love was. And that's why – I hurt him. He guarded himself from me. For in the end everyone knows what true love is. But I couldn't let him go. It would have been an unbearable humiliation. I wouldn't let myself be humiliated. I couldn't allow it. Not that, I trembled at the thought."

"Afterwards, years later, he left me. And when I was really alone, with the baby and far away from him, and my husband appeared, my one true husband with whom alas I have had no children, then – you cannot imagine how I changed, how I revived and came to myself. Many tears I shed over those unhappy years. What had I done with my life. What had got into me. But thank God, it passed mercifully from me."

Klara smoothed her dress, stood and made her apologies. She went out. Lucie sat alone for five minutes.

Klara returned in a dark house-dress, a grave, friendly, even likable lady. She stood before Lucie and without further ado offered her hand. She led Lucie across the corridor to a lovely big room. Klara: "This is my bedroom. Laura was born in that bed. Do you like her? She told me about you."

Lucie: "She's a joy."

Klara sat on a stool beside the bed, gestured to Lucie to take the stool by the mirror: "It's good that you've come. My husband is a kind man, but I mustn't talk to him about this. I couldn't. The child, you see, I took away from Erwin. He didn't want children. My madness from those days has passed, but the child is still here. He was right not to want a child from me, I didn't understand, but even so I had one. He should have had your child. But you have none from him, and as a punishment I have none from my husband, whom I love. You've no idea what I sometimes feel when I look at Laura and think it over."

Yes, Lucie sat and listened. Here was another conversation proceeding otherwise than she'd expected. Now perhaps she should bring some consolation. Lucie: "Your husband is good to you?"

"Yes, he is. He's my life." (Klara folded her hands.) "I still recall the hatred with which I bundled your letters and shoved mine in among them. I came close to killing myself. I'd fallen to pieces. My life seemed over. But it wasn't my life at all. So when my husband appeared, I told you already how my heart leapt and a great weight lifted from me. He wouldn't let me say a word. Once when I tried to tell him about my first marriage, he swore at me. And when I still tried to tell him, he actually boxed my ears. I can't recall anybody ever hitting me before. But he brought me into line. I realised it was for my own good, and there was no other way. It was an exorcism. I assure you, when I look back on my years with Erwin, I was possessed by devils."

Lucie: "When you found yourself again, couldn't you at least have given me some sign?" Klara blanched.

Lucie: "You never gave me a thought. Twenty years had to pass, a box had to burst open during a house move, before I could find out what had been done to me."

Klara, softly: "I didn't want to think about anything from the past."

Lucie: "Meanwhile I had to live alone, unable to find myself."

Klara raised her hands: "Is that my fault. I didn't know. I never thought about it, I didn't want to think about it."

Lucie: "First it was the fault of a devil, then someone simply forgot. Do you really believe, Madam Klara, that it is not down to you?"

Klara: "Yes, it was my doing."

Lucie went to the door, slammed it open. In the corridor footsteps came in pursuit, Klara overtook her and steered her into the antler room. "Please, stay, five minutes more, come, let me shut the door. For heaven's sake, Lucie, you've stirred it all up in me again. Please, Lucie, take a seat, stay here in my home, don't do this to me."

Lucie stood grim and cold at the door. Klara knelt before her, hugged her, Klara's lips quivered: "Lucie, what can I do. I see it all. What can I do to make amends? What?"

There came the sound of a dog thumping against the front door, it scratched at the door, the door opened, the great beast raced down the corridor, someone came behind,

the front door closed, and now came the ghastly cry: "Mother, mother." Klara was already on her feet. Both women ran into the corridor. With a wild cry Laura flung her arms around her mother and stammered: "Mother, father, father."

"What is it? For god's sake, what's happened?"

She kept crying, they pulled her into the room, the mother sat down and took her onto her lap like a little child. Laura slumped sideways onto the table and whimpered: "He's dead, father's dead." Then she slid to the floor. Lucie stood over her, shook her: "What are you saying, Laura, what's happened, tell us."

Laura stammered: "In the bathroom, the gas heater."

The accident

And so it was.

Laura had waited for Stauffer at the agreed time down at the docks, where steamers departed for a round-the-harbour cruise. When father failed to show up, she phoned him at the hotel. When he failed to answer, she waited a bit longer and made another phone call. Then she returned to the hotel. They told her Herr Stauffer had definitely not left the hotel. She rushed upstairs and knocked and knocked at his door. She raised the alarm, and hotel staff opened the door. They could smell gas.

Stauffer's room was filled with gas. He lay lifeless in the bathtub, a book of Mörike's poetry on the bottom of the tub beside him. Laura, who had pushed her way in despite warnings, fainted and was carried out. Doctors and fire brigade were called.

Lucie telephoned from the corridor of Klara's home. The hotel replied: "They're trying oxygen equipment."

Turned to ice, she took a horse cab and headed there.

A devil had torn her Erwin away, just when he had come again into her life, just now: Satan's reign endures. For a moment the thought drifted through her head: Maybe I laid too much weight on Erwin. He dared not embark on a new life.

Numbly she rode the elevator up to him.

But no Satan reigned over our good old Stauffer. Little Laura had saved him. (Of course, others would have come along within five minutes, given, as stated, that the corridor smelled of gas, but Laura's fame as a life-saver endured. And we can foresee how the surviving father will have opportunity to form ample philosophical reflections as the daughter takes her revenge for twenty years of neglect.)

When Lucie peeped through the half-open door, Stauffer was lying in bed large as life, sucking dutifully on an oxygen supply through a big mask, and a man, clearly a doctor, was standing at his side checking the apparatus. Lucie slipped in without a word. At the window she broke into sobs.

At last, in response to Stauffer's frantic gestures, the doctor removed the mask, and Stauffer was able to call loudly across the room: "Lucie, what on earth is going on? Nothing's happened. These damned gas fittings, these self-service machines."

The doctor put his watch away. Stauffer had inhaled enough. She approached the bed. He let her take his hand. He was cheerful, said: "It's like a laughing-gas anaesthetic."

The doctor made ready to leave, advising more oxygen in an hour or two. He would visit again for a check, Stauffer should stay in bed.

As the doctor left there were whispers in the corridor, a woman's voice as well as the doctor's, then a scream. There was no escape from the drama. The door was flung open, a whirlwind stormed in, and since it wasn't a dog it must be Laura. Stauffer could have guessed.

He offered no defence to this assault. His life-saver had a claim. She lay as his daughter on the hero's breast. He too was proud at having cheated death in the bath. He smiled cheerfully across at Lucie, who had retreated to the foot of the bed. "So, Lucie, one must have been dead to experience this. She was waiting for me down at the harbour, I stood her up, and she makes not the slightest reproof."

Laura relinquished the paternal breast only when he declared he had to take more oxygen this very minute, because she was squeezing the breath out of him.

Meanwhile into the room, pale of face, downcast, streaming with tears, came Frau Klara. From his bed, which faced the window, Stauffer couldn't see her. He heard someone coming, turned his head, recognised her and looked bewildered from one to the other. Instinctively he grabbed the oxygen mask again. Not knowing what to say, he pulled the mask determinedly over his face and blotted out the world. He swore never to take off the mask, a genuine Staufferian gesture, a true ostrich as it lives and loves and doesn't fly.

Stauffer inhaled. But the apparatus was not turned on. He made silent gestures. Laura looked around horrified to her mother, whose tears at once dried at the need for practical service. During the War she had been in the civilian aid agency.

Out of the frying pan into the fire. The daughter let go of him, the mother sprang into action. She tried out what she had learned in the War, and was disinclined to be diverted one iota from what she had learned. Indeed, she had good reason to set to. She too was a martyr. The whole way here she had wept along with Laura; she, because she thought Stauffer was dead and no longer able to jog her sense of guilt. Now here he was, alive, the oxygen apparatus too, giving her the opportunity to demonstrate to Stauffer her change of heart.

Dumbly, stretched out on the bed, Stauffer lay snapping at the oxygen he was offered and didn't need at all. Klara, his ex-wife, stood there all serious, and forceful as ever. She said: "Breathe in, deeply, breathe out, deeply." For sure he'd known since infancy how to breathe, but now he was being shown how to do it right. She held up

her wrist watch, he dared not disturb the procedure since it was so completely official. Klara and the apparatus, not he, were the centre of attention.

Stauffer held out for ten minutes before they took the mask off and he was able to say that he wasn't supposed to take any more for one hour. He crawled under the bedclothes, annoyed with himself and outraged by the violation.

Then the bachelor gazed bemused at the three females assembled around his bed, all filled with concern and sympathy for him. But what astonished him most – for he was granted no explanation – was a gesture of Klara's towards Lucie. As Lucie approached, Klara came alongside and on impulse placed a hand on Lucie's shoulder, in the same way Poincaré had done with his old enemy Clemenceau on the Esplanade at Metz on 25th November. Klara's expression was urgent, pleading, and now there they were in each other's arms.

Whereupon Klara was at once completely herself again, and no longer at all bewitched. She strode determinedly to the telephone and in a loud voice told her husband where she was and what had happened, and if he liked he could come along too, he wouldn't be disturbing them. Then she told Stauffer he should stay in bed a further hour. Then he could sit in a chair beside the bed, such a slight gas attack meant nothing, fresh air was the main thing.

Laura asked about the harbour tour. Klara replied: "You can take the tour the day after tomorrow. Tomorrow you will be our guest, Erwin. And the hotel must find you another room, you can't stay here with that gas heater."

Stauffer felt impelled to make a remark. He said to the ladies: "Firstly, I'm embarrassed to be here in front of three ladies with nothing on beneath a dressing gown. And secondly, has anyone seen my Mörike?"

The bathroom was searched, nothing found, the fire brigade must have taken it away, no doubt as material evidence. Klara sat on the edge of the bed to declare: "What a marvellous notion of yours, this little bit of gas poisoning. It's done you no harm, and without it you, Lucie and I would have taken much longer to be reconciled." And to enthusiastic applause from Lucie and Laura she grasped Stauffer by the head and kissed him, as a mother kisses her child. He sank back exhausted and cried: "I'm still weak, it's all too much, I must die again."

Laura suddenly felt very hungry and thirsty, she must have something at once. Lucie too needed refreshment. She took Laura down to the hotel restaurant. They left Stauffer to busily bustling Klara, now totally promoted to the status of nurse. As soon as the two civilians were out of the room, she began putting everything in order and forced him to stand up. She brought him his things and dressed him appropriately without the slightest embarrassment. He offered no resistance.

Sitting there fully dressed, his face turned grey, he felt unwell. She regarded him without sympathy: "Pull yourself together. Unwell is nothing. You might even faint." If he began to feel faint he shouldn't make a fuss. She would administer valerian drops.

As the two civilians relaxed downstairs, Stauffer the patient with his nurse felt himself in the very best of hands. As she tidied the room she asked him what plans he and Lucie had. She'd heard they were off to America. This he confirmed. Her opinion (which he thought quite justified) was why on earth go so far away, who knows their way around America, Europe's not so bad, only riff-raff go to America.

This conversation lasted half an hour. Shall we take a peep behind the brow of our reborn and brand new Erwin Stauffer, dramatist and poet, and report, quietly and *sub rosa*, what we find there? For example, the conclusion: what an absolute brick she is, this Klara. So sensible, maybe a little homely, but honest and straightforward, a practical, energetic person. She talks about her domestic arrangements, about Otto her husband, Laura her daughter, and the trials the dog puts her through every half year, being a bitch.

It must be awfully cosy living with someone like this, thought our newborn Stauffer, a bachelor up till now. She's so – unpoetical. And he recalled a couple of lines: *I fain once more would love in quiet, And happy be,—without a riot.*⁷

At the word riot, there floated guiltily before his mental gaze – Lucie.

Oh this America that threatened. At the moment there were severe difficulties to overcome: the blockade, no ships. For the moment there'd be no voyage.

And as he sat there not at all faint or unwell, they returned, the two civilians Lucie and Laura, their laughter could be heard from far down the corridor. They flung open the door and were happy. Especially Laura. She called across the room: "Father, we telephoned. There's no way you can travel just now, except maybe via Holland. And you need such a mass of papers, being German." She danced about: "You'll have to stay here four more weeks."

Lucie sat at Stauffer's side to console him. "Try to be patient, my dear. It really will take several weeks." He squeezed her hand: "I know. I must be patient, Lucie. But we have learned patience."

EPISODE 13

(K&R p. 411-447, Woods K&R p. 309)

[This episode is separated from the previous one by 470 pages of text across two volumes; hence the need to recap "the story so far".]

A gentleman and a lady set their sights high

The dramatist Stauffer, too, had heard the alarm-call of Revolution, and after all the troublesome politics and dangerous mysticism, we wish to spend a little time with this civilian who, like us, was a writer.

We are dealing with a personality of great merits. The dramatist Erwin Stauffer had found in Berlin that his ink-pot was empty. A middle-aged man who enjoyed good

⁷ Heine, *Lazarus*. (Tr. E. A. Bowring).

health, he suddenly found no joy in anything. It had begun in the last years of the War. He no longer wanted to see his own plays, and had no desire to write new ones. He no longer trusted himself, and no ideas came to him. He declared a kind of internal bankruptcy. This alarm-call had a negative effect on him, a devaluation of all values.⁸

So what did the man do when revolution broke out and year 1918 inscribed the momentous date 9th November? He did as many others did, went out into the street, devoured newspapers. When he heard of the “Congress of Intellectual Workers” at the Reichstag, he even took a look. He sniffed around politics and revolutionaries, and lo and behold – they did nothing to soothe his unease. They caused no ink to flow from the bottle. His ship had a leak, and he must inevitably go down.

In this vexing situation – as a dramatist, to be thrown from the stage down among the suffering audience – something happened for which he was unprepared.

But who among us would have been prepared to receive letters addressed to us twenty years before? Who was to blame – the Post Office? No. Badly written or incomplete address? No. The letters had actually arrived, but hadn’t made their way to his hands. How is this possible? we ask, as the dramatist asked himself, when the letters fell out of a chest of old manuscripts during a house removal out of Berlin (which he hated because of the revolution), at three o’clock in the morning as he dozed off unhappily among the boxes. In his dopey state he turned the letters this way and that. They were all unopened, twenty-five of them, in unfamiliar handwriting. And when he opened the letters, slowly and with growing astonishment, a female person was writing to him in terms of ardent love, signing herself “Lucie”. He doesn’t know her. He knows no Lucie. Lucie was only the name of a leading character in an old play of his from twenty years ago, titled *When the First Snow Falls*.

You can imagine the effect of such passionate declarations and invocations of love on a silly booby squatting morosely among all the clutter of his house removal.

Suddenly Stauffer knew something. Scales fell from his eyes. His life had been withheld from him. Nothing more, nothing less. He should have shared his life with this lady, his real life. With her he would never have sunk into this wretched state. And so floored was he by sorrow and despair at his loss that he was driven to the rum bottle, wielding it to such effect that he uttered loud cries of complaint mingled with threats against the perpetrator of this crime, against the one who had murdered his life, the person who had withheld twenty-five letters from him. He meant his former wife Klara, divorced long ago. The drunken row alarmed the porter, a doctor was soon on the scene, saw the rum bottle, sniffed the strong spirits, and administered a tranquillising injection to the raging man.

A few days later we see our dramatist on the train to Hamburg, to the long-divorced and since remarried Frau Klara. He means to put her on the spot, call her to account, wreak his vengeance and so on. The first thing that happens is his wallet is

⁸ Allusion to Nietzsche’s projected *Revaluation of all Values*, of which only *The Antichrist* was completed.

stolen in a café near the station in Hamburg. Then some bold ladies attach themselves to him as he goes on his way, they console him, and with one of them he spends a happy night. And now he's ready to head off to see Klara, the woman of yesteryear.

Frau Klara has not merely remarried, she's happily married. The wilting housewife at Stauffer's side has become the confident owner of a hotel, and Laura, daughter of her and Stauffer, has grown to a young lady. Into this unsuspecting Hamburg hotelier family unlucky Stauffer blows in, searching for lost happiness. And he has no chance to speak up. He can't. They don't let him. He is all but manhandled to the front door. In this family he belongs among the ghosts, and they set no great store by revenants.

Only to the young lady Laura, his little daughter, is he something more, and as he slinks dumbly away she secretly follows him. Now she has her father again. Quite unexpectedly she reverses the spear and confronts her father: where has he been all this time, these twenty years? She's furious how she had to live her life without him. And without asking permission, she clings to him tooth and claw, won't let him go. That's what came of his attempt at vengeance. She's delightful, but hard to shake off.

In Berlin, as he catches his breath and reflects on the outcome of the foray, he acknowledges it has gone awry and his thoughts turn to the stolen and confiscated Lucie, of whom he has not the slightest knowledge. Who is she? Where is she? Does she actually exist? Did she ever exist? Was it perhaps a character from one of his old plays writing to him? All things are possible. But Stauffer finds no rest, no slumber.

He picks up her scent, still in this world. He tracks her down, flushes her out. Let us draw a veil over how he finds her, in Switzerland, in the chateau of her friend the Countess, and pass over their first encounter.

He finds her, and – life is strange – she too has aged twenty years. For Stauffer a complete miracle. It could have entered his mind, but it never did. To be frank, he had imagined this great event in his life quite differently. Anyway, she provides proof that she really is the lost and intercepted person. Stauffer resists, and thinks that Frau Klara was right to intercept her. But he can come no farther. He has to acknowledge the situation, and resign himself to her company. Conversations ensue, and it emerges that through all those years she has never forgotten the dramatist, despite numerous and varied love affairs and a still-valid marriage in America – that she has almost always had him in her thoughts, now and then has even written to him, but this time, in view of the earlier mishaps, she never posted the letters (for which he does not chide her). To Lucie he has always remained Erwin Stauffer, her man of destiny, just as she, as she so determinedly assures him, is the woman of his fate.

He's dazed, it's all so overwhelming. In earlier days, which she knows him from, he was a notorious Don Juan, so this or that girl could easily have slipped his memory.

Lucie would not have been what she made herself out to be, if she let him escape with his skin intact. She interrogates him, what's he up to, how's he getting along, a total grilling. Without meaning to he finds himself in confession. (Actually he would

have preferred to confess to the Countess, her friend, to whom he was considerably more attracted.) Lucie knows how to handle him. She has him over a barrel. She lets him know what's what, and how – even more than his little daughter Laura. When she sees how he has gone to the dogs, she claps her hands with a vigorous Bravo! It was all he needed. He stands there and – falls into her arms like a drowned rat.

How will his new, his true life with Lucie unfold?

First question: where? She decides: America. That's where they'll head. That's where it will all happen. So, off to Hamburg.

As long as the War lasted, no ships could leave Hamburg. And still not yet. They had to wait in Hamburg. So they happen to make contact with the Klara family, Laura included. And in an atmosphere now calmed and less heated on all sides, Stauffer ascertains that while Lucie, the newly-betrothed, is certainly a fine acquisition, at the same time earthy homely Klara also has her estimable qualities, which tend to tranquillity. (This casts doubt on the seriousness of his intention to embark on a new life. But maybe he means by "a new life" something quite different from what we would mean.) Anyway, for the time being they must remain in Europe, he returns with Lucie to Berlin, the point of origin of all this business, and keeps an eye on sailings.

Now 1919 has arrived and Stauffer and Lucie reside in a Berlin hotel. Both are of good cheer, vivacious and in the same mood of expectancy with which the times have blessed so many. They reside on Potsdamer Platz, Lucie and Erwin, returned after an absence of twenty years from the realm of shadows. They have been, so to speak, nothing more than Dream and Desire, and want now to achieve Existence. Dream and desire have transferred their abode to the bodies of the dramatist Stauffer and an American lady, and feel at home. But what will these fleshy structures, which were already inhabited, say to their new overlords?

Lucie and Erwin can afford the high-class hotel, because he's well off and the American lady is rich. In this Hotel Fürstenhof they are hardly touched by the breath of revolution. They look out of the window, but the Platz doesn't hold their interest for long. They seek out locations of earlier happiness, unrevealed and nipped in the bud, above all in the theatre where Lucie, then a young talent, acted in Erwin's play.

Now they sit in silence in the auditorium as up on the stage August Strindberg, the favourite author of the age, is being performed. Now and then they exchange glances, Erwin shrugs his shoulders, she lowers her eyelids, she has the same feeling, neither of them is carried along, and this does not make them unhappy.

Unable to go to America, forced to remain in old Europe and Berlin, Lucie must at least visit the Botanical Gardens. Nothing was further from Erwin's thoughts. How can anyone go to the Botanical Gardens in mid-winter! She decides: "Come!" He realises that the Botanical Gardens belong to the life assigned to him.

She leads him into the greenhouses. Actually, it's amazing. He'd never heard of such a thing. Normally he's fully satisfied with Nature in the open air, and even prefers

her softer and more familiar specialities, modest mountains and their meadows. Faced with grandiose arrangements, as in Switzerland, he feels horror. They wind their way along the paths of the huge greenhouse and breathe the heavy, warm, damp air that surges in billows from below. Lucie laughs: "In the Tropics it's quite different. Not as confined as here, of course. You can escape the heat in a lake, or a river."

He: "But then there are the crocodiles."

She: "Of course. You just have to not come too close."

He: "I am of the view that if Negroes and Indians are condemned to live in a Hell with crocodiles and snakes, we should leave them to it. Their presence there suffices for the rest of humanity. We should be content to read travelogues."

"Oh," Lucie scolded, "you're such a stick in the mud. So where will you find inspiration, Erwin? Where will your ideas and your inspiration come from? All these, the palm trees, the heat, even the crocodiles, constitute great living Nature, with the Earth, planets, the Milky Way. Surely you won't hide from them?"

He sighed: "I surely won't. But I was never in such a greenhouse in all my days."

Now she applied gentle pressure, took him by the arm and began to natter. She had the determinedly-friendly look from which he could only cringe.

Later they transfer to a cosier hotel by the Zoo. Lucie is their tour organiser. (As you see, it's no ghost-ride à la Hannes and Rosa⁹, but one undertaken on solid, not to say thickly-carpeted, ground.)

Lucie is slim, slightly greying, and very elastic. She still looks quite young for her thirty-eight years. At her side he makes an effort to conceal a certain fullness of figure, and to emulate her in respect of youthful freshness. She takes enormous delight in Erwin, her booty, who ran so tamely into her net after twenty years. She feels happy, is strong and tender, and they are actually on their honeymoon (despite the husband in Philadelphia). Stauffer spares no expense, he joins bravely in, does not flinch from the tribulations of this big new life.

He quickly realises: nothing comes for free. She wants to visit certain parts of the city, where supposedly the Berlin Revolution and the life of a World City are playing out. They go here and there and afterwards visit various eateries. Much remains unexposed to their gaze, but she keeps interested and he strives honestly to open his eyes as wide as her and be amazed. But one day he is unable to conceal that he has a desire to take a look at his new suburban apartment, just this once. The desire urges itself on him from all directions. This afternoon Lucie feels unwell, which he interprets as a sign from heaven, she releases him with grace and cordiality when he expresses a wish to bring her flowers, and reading materials.

When he boards his suburban train at Zoo station and takes his seat, he feels like a dog released from its lead. He was with Lucie in Switzerland, in Italian landscapes, and

⁹ See Woods *K&R*, p. 62ff.

now he rides through wintry Brandenburg, and it's a wonderful region, it's never before seemed so lovely to him. The very sight of it is balm to the soul. It's so relaxing. And as he gazes and loves it and appreciates it, he is already at his station and must alight. And there's the old newspaper seller, they've only seen each other a few times but are already firm friends; they exchange hearty greetings. "Bin on his travels, Sir has, back again, looks fresh and recuperated does the Doctor, and why not?"

"Well then, how's business?"

"Lousy, thanks for asking!"

And over there, on the other side of the square, stands his building, and the porter personally pulls the door open and is so pleased to see him he doffs his cap. Stauffer thanks him and is pleased, they chat, he clomps upstairs, apartment key in hand.

He opens up. Here we are. The apartment is tidy, everything in its place. Stauffer is dumbfounded. He goes through the rooms. All wonderfully neat and homely, as if a leprechaun has been at work. But who did it? They're leading me into temptation. The furniture is Stauffer's old furniture. There's nothing like old furniture, it fits as snug as old clothes. Even the writing desk is in its rightful place, with a neat cloth, that's a woman's hand, to the right half a dozen new pencils freshly sharpened, a whole pile of white paper, and there's the empty writing chair waiting with its new leather cushion. Net curtains and heavy made to measure curtains, carpets on the floor.

Deeply affected, after his inspection tour through the magically cosy apartment Stauffer subsides onto a chair in the dining room, still in hat and coat. The thick blue tablecloth is new, too. He feels behind him for the telephone receiver on the sideboard, asks the porter to come up. When he appears he's carrying a huge rather uninspired bouquet. He was to hand these flowers to Herr Stauffer on his return. "Who from?"

"A young lady. She said, Herr Stauffer will know. The one who sat in our lodge writing a letter."

Laura, my little daughter. The poignant little beast came to Berlin behind my back. Stauffer: "I suppose it was she who tidied the apartment?" The porter, admiringly: "Worked like a savage. Two days, morning till night. We helped a bit, of course, me and the missus. Sign's already up outside."

"What sign?"

"Furnished Apartment To Let. No one's come by yet. Reckon we're looking at spring." Bowled over with astonishment, Stauffer took off his hat. What's this now?

He said: "My daughter must have misunderstood. I've no memory of this." In fact he did recall something. Laura knows about the trip to America, wants to help him out with his one-year rental contract. But still, an outrageous liberty by the little shrimp.

"Take the sign down, Herr Schmidt!!"

"My thoughts exactly, Herr Stauffer. The lady said you won't be taking the furniture to Hamburg with you."

It's lucky Stauffer's sitting down, it's easy to put his head in his hands. The girl thinks he'll be joining them in Hamburg. He said, "Hm," asked the porter to bring a hot cup of tea, if it's not too much trouble.

"With the greatest pleasure." The porter went out. Now Stauffer takes off his coat and marches, still rather agitated, through the tidy rooms. Even the steam heating works. From this paradise they seek to expel him, partly Laura's doing, partly Lucie's. Yes, Lucie was in on it. No doubt she's still lying in her hotel room, nursing her migraine. With women there's always something happening. Strange, actually, how Lucie gallivants so freely around the world, and she really has a husband in Philadelphia, remarkable specimen of a husband, American ways.

Obscure sensations pressed in on Herr Stauffer. In due course, he thought, Lucie too can move in here, into this cosy nest. No, she won't fit. Apart from which I'm supposed to begin a new life in America. Thank goodness it's not happening so fast.

Herr Stauffer, bridegroom of the great Lucie, pilot of his soul, finds his bachelor apartment wonderfully relaxing, and because it's grown dark he lets all the lights blaze as if there's a merry party. He pulls the curtains closed, sits down and writes a cordial letter to his little daughter, thanking her for everything, her attentiveness, her efforts, the big bouquet; and even for the portentous signboard: *Furnished Apartment To Let*. He really wanted to mention that he'd ordered it removed, but decided against; he feared the little beast's claws.

Then he left the apartment to its pensive gloom, and went down in person to the porter, paid him, and observed the ceremonious removal of the signboard. Stauffer gave the porter, he didn't know why, the address of his hotel.

In splendid fettle he bought a handful of magazines from his old friend the newspaper seller at the station, and then, with everything done, dusted and relished, elated at all he'd achieved, he steamed homeward.

Stauffer pulls on his trousers

But at the hotel near the Zoo Lucie was resting, and had her migraine.

She felt depressed, all because of Stauffer. It was exhausting, with Stauffer. It was hard to give him what she wanted to give. She wasn't at all ready for Berlin. The English naval blockade put a big red line through her calculations. If they'd sailed away, oh, then there'd have been uplifting situations, the steamer itself, the mighty ocean, America over there. She'd have led her friend to a truly grand fresh world, with none of the old world's rust. They'd be dashing off to Mexico and Panama. Instead they were hanging around in Berlin, sampling a little of its night life and the Revolution, and what else were they supposed to do?

Yes, even as Erwin rejoiced in his bachelor apartment, Lucie was wailing in her hotel by the Zoo, she would give it all up, she had nothing to offer poor Erwin, the man who had at last come into her life and was waiting for the gifts from her hand.

In her armchair, legs drawn up, she began to smoke cigarettes, and as she did so she complained in the following terms:

“Oh, Erwin, if only you could see into me! If only you knew what a wretched creature is this Lucie that you worship! I’ve sinned against you. Please don’t think I wanted to, that I meant to deceive you. Circumstances are to blame. Circumstances are dreadful, I have no power over them, I need other circumstances to be able to give you what you so desperately need. I want to be true to my word. But I can’t, here in Berlin. Berlin has nothing to offer you, nor Dresden, nor Munich. In Germany there’s nothing doing.”

At Lucie’s feet on the carpet lay two big folios of pictures, early Italian and Egyptian art. She had bought these for herself and studied them in secret, so as to enrich Stauffer at least in this respect. But it was horribly tedious. The folios lay yawning at her. What was she to do with the beastly things?

“What’s wrong with me?” Lucie wailed, lighting another cigarette. “An outrageous piece of luck, an honest to goodness accident, has brought to me the man for whom I was born and who was deprived of me and kept looking for me. Now he goes about hungering and hoping, hoping, and I ...” Tears sprang to her eyes: “I’m ashamed. I’ll give myself a shaking: Come, Lucie, show yourself, prove yourself. But I can’t!”

The long afternoon dragged by. She watched in terror as the hours advanced and Erwin would soon be back and demand his rights.

Then she embraced him when he arrived, the sinner, standing there with a hastily purchased bunch of flowers sorry to have left her on her own so long. He saw her in a cloud of smoke, grave and weighed down in thought, feared she might let loose on him with the obelisks of Luxor or something. But suddenly she began wailing about Berlin and the Revolution, added complaints about the English blockade, but there was always Italy, maybe they could go through Switzerland and take ship at Genoa.

Stauffer objected indignantly: that wouldn’t do, however could she think of such a thing, Italy was still enemy territory. As a German citizen he wouldn’t dare head there and risk being thrown in prison. (A fantastic piece of inspiration.)

“Oh,” she smiled tenderly (and sneakily it seemed to him), it wouldn’t be that bad, in Italy you can always find a way, with money all things are possible.

He was a match for her. Powers stirred within him: “But the Capital Flight Law.” They’d never be able to leave the country. They’d be subject to horrendous taxes, and months and months would be wasted.

“You think?” she asked, helpless. He: “Of course. I know our bureaucracy. And all these new decrees. So many want to leave, and cannot.” He was gratified to hear her despondent groans. Clearly the chalice had been passed propitiously to him.

“Don’t blame yourself, Lucie,” he consoled her. “We’ll find plenty to occupy us here. Maybe we’ll visit Dresden, see the Sistine Madonna.” (He thought of Bella, the actress,

his lady friend in Dresden. What a surprise if he turned up suddenly with Lucie. But serve the little prima donna right. She could have sent flowers to the new apartment, and not left everything to Laura.) Lucie whispered: "I don't like the Sistine Madonna. I have yearned for you, I want you."

Every time she spoke like this it unsettled him. Today it sounded milder, and she looked so weak and in need of loving. Lucie felt once more how deeply he trusted her, and a sense of guilt gnawed at her.

A sleepless night ensued. And in the morning, when the chambermaid brought coffee and the room was light again, it became serious. She sat up in bed and seemed to be jabbed by an icy finger. Suddenly she knew: it's not Berlin. I've grown old. I'm empty, it's all over with me. Trembling she took Erwin's photo from the bedside table, gazed at it and wept bitter tears. She flung herself back on the bed, weeping. After a while she sent the maid to Erwin, asked him to come over.

She waited. The man was taking his time. He took care over his dressing, stood before the mirror and studied his expression. He didn't want to appear excessively cheerful, though he was cheerful. Then, with deliberately lowered head, he stepped heavily along the corridor to her. He was surprised to find her still in bed, coffee untouched. Looks dangerous. Storm coming? Had she noticed something about him? Only when he sat on the bed and she flung both arms around him did he relax. It was all to do with her love for him. Well, it had to be talked about. She spoke movingly, with wonderful directness. He felt ashamed.

Lucie wailed: "She murdered me, that Klara in Hamburg, I'm dead, Erwin. You see me, but I'm dead. I wanted to shower you with a cornucopia of delights, and I did have the cornucopia, believe me. I know what you expect of me, what I owe you."

"And now?" Stauffer asked slyly. He already knew she couldn't. He was glad she had nothing. He had to restrain himself from letting out a great cry of joy.

She: "I know what you lack. An extensive life, new horizons, big ideas."

"We shall go travelling," Stauffer consoled her. "The Hawaiian Islands shall not escape us!"

"But I, Erwin" (she gave a loud sob), "I have grown old."

"You're thirty-eight, Lucie. That's not old. You're still young. And I don't want some silly goose."

But she wouldn't be consoled: "It's all over with me, Erwin. What plans I had for you." (His hair stood on end, what dangers had he evaded!) "It fell to me to develop your ego. And now ..." He interrupted the stream of words and tears: "But now you have me, Lucie."

"But now I'm not here, and so, Erwin, you too are not here, and will never be here, and we must drift about like shadows. You have been deceived, Erwin, I am not who I pretended to be."

“We must comfort one another, my love. We shall bear our fate together.” (But still, he thought in the background, still, this is a crazy business. But really she has actually conned me, when it comes down to it. For why did I make the trip to Switzerland, and why did I exhume her from those old letters?)

“Oh Erwin, when you stood there in Switzerland and didn’t recognise me and weren’t going to give me the roses, you saw the real me. I’m a criminal. I’ve treated you disgracefully.”

He mumbled something, he didn’t know what. The scene was already dragging, Lucie had to bring up more new material. (If I wanted, he thought brutally, I could send her packing now with a magnificent gesture: Begone from me, woman, deceiver, you have cast me into misery.)

“Oh Erwin, I’m so sorry, what is to become of us, how can we go on like this?”

He said softly, as softly as he could: “You find yourself in the same state as I was six weeks ago, before your letters fell into my hands. Now you see how hard it is. But one pulls through.” He knew it was a terribly stupid remark. But he thought that with someone in her condition you can make all sorts of concessions. He pointed to the cold coffee, encouraged her to call for a fresh cup.

But she gazed tenderly at him, and held his hand: “Stay with me, Erwin, don’t abandon me, what is to become of us. What has that dreadful Klara made of us.”

(Totally superfluous, this attack on valiant Klara in Hamburg. Doesn’t improve our situation at all.) He made a despairing face, harrumphed, and to bring it to an end pulled his hand brusquely away and said with manly energy: “You’re weak, Lucie, now I must take over the reins. I shall order fresh coffee for both of us. And before it arrives, I command you to not to open your mouth. You are not to say another word.”

She lay back on the pillows and sighed: “Oh Erwin.” But she obeyed. She said not a word until the coffee was there and they’d drunk it. He sipped his in smug rectitude, a much improved situation, the skies had cleared. Then, oh horror, as soon as she’d emptied her cup she started up again: “Oh Erwin,” she implored, “if only you could forgive me!”

“I do,” he said mildly. He swore to himself he wouldn’t become irritated. In the end he would receive her complaints as acts of homage. But she didn’t stop, she repeated: “If only you had followed your first inclinations back then in Switzerland, when you came upon me in the Countess’s salon holding the roses for Lucie. You didn’t want to give the roses to me.”

“I didn’t recognise you, Lucie, we hadn’t seen each other for twenty years.”

“You literally shrank from me. Your whole being protested against me. And you were right.”

“Lucie!”

“You were right. For it’s not me, Erwin, now I can say openly: I have deceived you.”

“Stop tormenting yourself, Lucie. We shall bear the burden together.” (I know how.)

“No, you’re not facing up to the truth, you’re trying to hide from it. Maybe it’s too much for you, but you should. Hear the truth, Erwin, the whole truth. I am not Lucie, not the one you were looking for. I have deceived you.”

“But I know,” Erwin soothed her; he was bored now. “I know, dear heart.”

“Don’t speak gently to me. I deceived you. You still don’t see. I’m not Lucie, don’t call me Lucie.” Now he really was amazed. She’d gone a bit too far: “So who are you?”

She gave a sob, and patted his hand: “Catherine Eleanor Bollingham.”

He: “What?”

She: “Catherine Eleanor Bollingham.” She gazed up at him through tear-filled eyes. “It’s the truth.”

He stepped behind his chair: “I don’t understand. You are not the Lucie who wrote to me twenty years ago?” She howled and wept and brandished her hands in front of her face: “No, it wasn’t me, I’m a confidence trickster.”

He shuddered. All feeling for this woman had evaporated. “Repeat it. Say it again. You’ve played games with me. You adopted a false name?”

She: “Yes. Now go to the police and have me arrested.”

He dropped wearily onto his chair. He’d been ready for anything, just not this. Bollingham, it’s monstrous. This shameless person has played me for a fool, and now I’ll have to begin the hunt for Lucie all over again. (But I won’t, he told himself firmly.)

“Go, have me arrested,” she sobbed into the pillows.

He paced distraught up and down by her bed. He spoke with great formality: “Then I would ask you, Madame Bolingbroke, for an explanation. How did you arrive at this extraordinary notion, to play such a trick on me?”

“I don’t know. The police. Police.”

He pulled himself together and left the room. He banged the door shut behind him (which for tame old Erwin constituted an act of violence).

He paced savagely about his room and thought of his suburban apartment. Suddenly it had lost all its charms. The fear and terror that fell on him the night he found Lucie’s letters now fell on him again. The letters, those letters, but she did write them, they’re in her handwriting. He fumbled in the drawer, there were the twenty-five old letters in young Lucie’s proud free hand. And here a recent letter from her, from this criminal woman. Same handwriting, same handwriting. Stauffer buried his head in his hands. He pulled a few old letters from the bundle, stuffed them in his pocket, added the last one from Switzerland, and now back to her room. She was still lying there grizzling. Cold as a detective he shoved the breakfast things aside and tapped her on the shoulder (pink silk): “Please, Madame Bolingbroke, attend to me for

a moment. Would you please open your eyes and look here. I have two letters. This one you wrote to me from Switzerland. This is an old one, from Lucie. Do you acknowledge the handwriting as yours? They are the same handwriting, it seems?"

"Same handwriting," she groaned. "Don't show me the letters, destroy them."

He roared. It's true, the placid fellow roared: "I demand a clear answer, no waffling, yes or no, did you write these old letters?"

She sat up: "Don't excite yourself, Erwin. Call the police. I admit my guilt, I have committed a crime. But I didn't realise it."

He roared: "Yes or no? Did you write them or not?"

"Destroy the letters. Oh God, what mischief have I done."

"Destroy the letters" (he ground his teeth); "that might suit your book, madam. You won't get away so easily. I shall keep them and hand them to the authorities. But in the name of all that's holy, how did you come to have the same handwriting as Lucie? Are you a forger too?"

She threw herself glumly back on the bed. "Yes, yell at me. I deserve it. Beat me. I'm anything you like, forger of handwriting included. All those twenty years, after you were no longer there, I just simulated Lucie's life. I was only a ghost, a shadow who convinced herself to go on living."

He was taken aback: "Then – you really are Lucie?"

"No. Lucie's ghost." A rock lifted from his heart. he sat on the bed and dug her dishevelled head out of the pillows. He kissed her teary eyes and her bitter lips.

She hugged him and whispered: "Why are you kissing this old thing?"

A rock fell from his heart. He felt such gratitude, she is his Lucie, he has no need to resume the hunt for her, she's already here and it's not nearly as tragic as it just now seemed. And it was nice that she clearly couldn't continue as she would have liked to, and suddenly he felt again great pleasure at the thought of his cosy suburban apartment. He flattered her: For a ghost she was wonderfully fresh and alive. He gave eloquent, yes eloquent, tongue to the joy that flowed from various sources. For now she climbed from the bed in her pyjamas and did what he couldn't have resisted even as a corpse: she sat on his lap and he had to swear once again as she sat there to all that he had sworn while she was lying down.

Stauffer had rheumatism or gout in his left knee, the knee always hurt, and he favoured it. Now she was sitting on it. As she sat and he repeated the oaths to order, he tried furtively to shift her weight to the other knee. He gently took away his left leg. But she slid gently after it. Finally his knees came wide apart, but she sat firmly as ever. With radiant eyes she demanded affirmation of his forgiveness and trust.

Now the ruffian delivered his blow. He was furious that she imposed the full weight of her bottom mercilessly on his sensitive knee; suddenly he pulled the left leg

away and she was held only by his arms. He let her slide into the abyss. Then he laughed out loud. She screamed. He pulled her up from the abyss, and stood straight. He laughed, it was only a joke, said sorry.

At least he'd found a swift resolution to this incident.

Of guinea pigs, dog-cats and whisky

The afternoon brought yet another development.

Lucie felt herself touched again by the cold finger, and she complained to Erwin, who thought he was already in the clear: "I've embroiled you in my unhappy fate."

He nodded, grave and resigned. You just have to let women complain, they stop eventually all by themselves.

She, relentless: "If only I had never come, Erwin, forgive me."

He forgave. The chagrin of a woman he worships has, for the man, something of flattery about it. That morning, as she crawled back into bed, Lucie had sworn she would be resolute in finding something new to fill his life. At which he had returned to his room, filled with foreboding. Now he's relieved to see that nothing has hatched.

Once she had complained her fill, she released the beloved. The unhappy man should go find some amusement.

She lay alone in her room. Many things ran through her head, including the memory of a melancholy event she had heard of at school. A hundred years earlier there lived one Charlotte Stieglitz, who married a writer, a poet, who never amounted to anything. She saw this and realised at once what the problem was: her husband lacked a Grand Experience. Without a Grand Experience a writer can create nothing great. Since, naturally, a mid-sized philistine town offers no such opportunities, she would have to make one. Love alone couldn't suffice. Her love for him he took for granted, like his daily lunch. Now and then she staged a quarrel. But that only made him less productive. Actually, he used every possible chance to become less productive

Now it was clear to Charlotte, seeing him every day at his desk sharpening his beak and drudging away composing nothing but mediocrity and humbug, that she must intervene with a Deed. This Deed could be nothing less than a heroic suicide on her part. If, say, in his absence she were to stab herself and lie blood-spattered and silent on the floor, in the dining room or better still in his study, an expired corpse, she, the beloved wife – then the spirits within him must be unleashed and his genius, now shackled within, would be liberated. And Charlotte set about her carefully contrived plan. One day she lay dead on the floor, and a letter on his desk revealed all.

That was the Deed of the female Stieglitz. The male Stieglitz, as soon as he saw her lying there, summoned a doctor, alerted the police and showed all of them the magnificent letter. He screamed, beat his breast, wept. And that was all. He had no new song. After the event, the great event, he was still the little bird he'd always been.

When the memory of this sad endeavour naturally failed to console Lucie, she remounted her hobbyhorse.

People from America have a hobbyhorse – they call it their “hobby”. Some play with electric train sets, others restore worn-out slippers, others try to climb backwards up the stairs in the dark, yet others keep a cockatoo that can prophesize. Lucie, a.k.a. Daisy, had equipped herself for the long voyage with two hobbyhorses.

One was a totally screwy pooch, an utter confusion on four legs. People encountering this creature in Europe either grinned or shrank back, and pointed it out to their neighbour. Crowds of children pursued it. In America no one would have noticed. It was no bigger than a hand, and could easily be carried in a handbag. It seemed to have no limbs, was the same shape in all directions, a uniformly round, low-slung thing that apparently ran equally well backwards and forwards, and possibly sideways as well. But no clear conclusion could be drawn because the creature looked the same at both ends with neither snout nor tail. Many thought it a guinea-pig, which Daisy took as a compliment. But it was actually a guinea-pig *poodle*. And the poodle couldn't bark, just squeaked now and then. (Which sceptics took as proof that it was really a guinea-pig. To Daisy's delight.)

Now this fairytale dog had gone missing in Berlin, somewhere. But actually in a pharmacy where Daisy was picking up a sedative; she left her handbag behind with Puck in it. The pharmacist took pity on the guinea-pig, put it in his laboratory with the others. Puck was relieved, and he told all the others what a dog's life he'd been leading.

This occurred during the first days in Berlin. When Daisy couldn't find her Puck, pet shop owners advised her to try something similar. Of course there were no other Pucks. Not, at least, among the canines. They offered her a cat that looked like a dog. That was worth discussing. But what should Daisy call this cat-dog? Can a cat-dog be called Puck? No harm trying, they said. If it doesn't work they'll take it back less a deduction for wear and tear. Whereupon Daisy bought two creatures of this kind, paid in dollars, and off she went.

Here's what happened next. As soon as Daisy let these kittens that believed they were dogs, and even looked like dogs, loose in her room, they disappeared. They didn't answer to “Puck”. Daisy, already weighed down by worries over Erwin, had to climb on chairs, search under cupboards, until she found the little creatures asleep side by side under her own blanket. Daisy gave a glad cry, “Puck”. The startled kittens lifted their heads, clearly felt insulted, and disappeared.

Now Daisy, desperate, let the chambermaid in on her secret. The maid uttered six times in succession the magic words “Kitty kitty” and “Puss”, and the little creatures poked their heads out from under an armchair and let themselves be fed milk. So Daisy sat there happy with her new hobbies, who now knew their names, in her lap. The maid then announced that she wasn't allowed to keep animals in the room, it was against house rules. What to do? The maid offered the American lady her own room on the fifth floor. No one would bother the kitties there, and Daisy could come up any

time during the day to see them. And so it happened, and the kitties were smuggled in, and now Daisy, unbeknownst to Erwin, occupied two rooms in the hotel, at least during the daytime, one official and one secret. (Just as Erwin had kept his suburban apartment secret from her.)

Daisy had occasionally, in the days before her outburst of despair, resumed her second hobby, also upstairs in the maid Ella's room. As the tragedy became ever plainer and sorrow raged within Lucie, she gave herself over totally to this other hobby. As you might have guessed, it had to do with alcohol, in the shape of whisky and cocktails. Since neither the two kitties nor the rest of the world offered her sufficient joy, she immersed herself by means of those beverages in a sense of wellbeing that no one could disturb. Cigarette between her lips, several cocktails in her tummy, and a full glass of whisky at her side, Lucie enthroned herself for hours deep in her dreams in the maid's low-ceilinged bedroom, on a rickety cane chair, a dog-kitty on each shoulder like Wotan's ravens, luxuriating and deciding the world's fate.

And once it happened – curious absorption in dreams – that beside her glass there lay a pencil and sheets of letter paper, and she began to write, to Erwin, to the man she had met twenty years before and who had disappeared and who she searched for and one day would find again. Yes, in her dreams she had already despatched Erwin on his travels again, she saw him traipsing around foreign parts, in the dark and all uncertain. In her letter she said nothing of the room she was currently occupying. She used generalised expressions depicting a fairytale yearning. Still, she was able to impart that she was on the run, perils threatened, but he shouldn't be alarmed. She mentioned the cat-dogs, wonderful creatures that were her companions and protectors.

Whisky and cocktails pack quite a punch. They bide their time as their impact unfolds. That impact differs according to the quantity imbibed, and the condition of the imbiber. Lucie, grieving over her failure, found herself in a condition that cried out for alcohol as a sponge for water. She didn't hold back, but pumped herself full of the manna. Great was the quantity, for she was no novice. She sat in a constant happy haze filled with benevolence towards all earthly things. Since only the maid and the kittens were around at this first stage of ecstasy, she was the only one to profit by it. The maid accepted tips and had to tell about her life. She couldn't quite bring herself to it, didn't want to tell, she must, and so she told a mishmash of truths and untruths under Lucie's vigorous urging to hold nothing back and reveal all. She was a maid like those in a novel, buxom, nimble and in love, also a liar. She'd had a non-stop series of love affairs, and constant money worries. Then Lucie turned to the cat-dogs, which were subjected to frequent painful embracings that they tried to evade by scratching. But Lucie was stronger, and the room was small. She always caught them again.

Then Daisy's sense of wellbeing grew in waves. The more the external world lost its lustre, Lucie turned to characters in her inner life, held whispered conversations with friends from long ago, even her husband in Philadelphia, apologising for all the wrongs she'd done him. In her mind she staged scenes of past situations, and enjoyed them. She retouched them, brought out fresh nuances, mostly of a comical nature that

caused her to laugh out loud. Thus did Lucie correct her past. And from the depths there rose the indestructible Erwin Stauffer, her brief blessed young love. And when he appeared she entered the fully developed expansive stage of Benevolence. She established a direct rapport with him, set him ablaze with inspiration, for she was Lucie, his predestined Lucie. She scribbled down all her dreams and her advice to him, put the pages neatly in envelopes, and wrote his name on them. When Lucie-Daisy, accompanied by the maid, left the room, the letters lay among the bottles and empty glasses. The maid carefully gathered them up.

Ah, letters, letter-writing. Lucie had had no luck with it. But she couldn't stop.

Rumours of unusual drunken binges and conversations in Ella's room had reached the ears of the hotel porter, who was currently friendly with the maid. The maid mentioned nothing about tips, she meant to keep those for herself. He was suspicious, put her on the spot, and to calm him down and distract him she handed him the letters. It was a monstrously stupid step. The letters, which she hadn't read, retailed the confusion of truths and bragging that she had regaled Lucie with. The lovestruck porter's hair stood on end. That evening he took his girlfriend aside, read out the very confessions she herself had made, threatened her, and bopped her one. She wept and implored and insisted it was all made up, the lady liked to hear such stuff, they'd been drinking, she was American, she had a little birdie, and Daisy paid her to look after it.

The very moral porter received this admission with great anger. She had after all to hand him the tips she'd earned with such difficulty. Not content with this, he swore revenge on the American dame: she would have to leave the hotel.

Around this time Lucie climbed the stairs again to her cats and other friends. She found the door open, the kittens were pacing wearily around and looked accusingly at her. She sat down and made everything cosy. She poured and drank. She smoked. The cat-dogs had lost all their good cheer. Daisy gradually noticed. What was wrong? They must be ill. With her incipient sense of wellbeing, Lucie poured whisky into the milk saucer. They wouldn't touch it. They discussed among themselves. They drew back and hissed. The creatures must really be ill. Lucie drank some more, to clear her mind. Clarity grew. After observing the little beasts for a while (they had not been fed yet) she knew: someone has poisoned my darlings.

She grabbed hold of them, stuffed them under her arms, and set herself in motion in her black silken slacks, her red jacket, little red slippers (normally she had a long black coat over her shoulders, but she left it lying). She went downstairs to find help and raise the alarm. On the fourth floor she encountered a haughty elderly lady, and asked her about vets. The lady recoiled as she approached, ran to her room and phoned down to the porter: how is it that drunken females are permitted to roam the hotel and are we to be amused by it. A scandal, a person wearing man's trousers. The porter alerted a waiter on the fourth floor, he met up with thoroughly sozzled Lucie as she was hunting her escaped kittens down the corridor with loud hallos. Every door was open, people stood amazed, and scolded. But Daisy cheerily asked the waiter for

the address of a vet. The young man, who recognised the rich American woman, asked her to wait one minute, he'd go and check. He ran to Erwin to report that the lady in Number 47 was unwell, wandering the corridors on the fourth floor.

Erwin had seen Lucie only fleetingly today and yesterday. She'd left him to his own unhappy devices, she wanted to be alone, and he was keen to see what solitude would make of her. Now he was alarmed. Wandering the hotel? *Penthisilea* in her demented state murdered her lover Achilles¹⁰. In a grim mood Erwin donned his jacket; upset and a little anxious he asked the young waiter to accompany him upstairs. (Who could predict the next twist in this fantastic tale?) The fourth floor was in uproar. Guests, waiters and chambermaids were dashing about yelling. Erwin couldn't believe his eyes when, at the centre of this tumult, he found a plaintive woman in black slacks and red jacket and red slippers, on one shoulder an angora kitten, and this distraught thing was none other than his Lucie. What a terrible sight! She must be sleepwalking. Sleepwalking. She had driven her fate to this point (and he too was not without blame). Now she came stumbling along on the chambermaid's arm, clearly not in possession of her senses. (It occurred to him: she's more like Ophelia, stepping into the water as she strews flowers and sings and floats on the water and drowns.)

Lucie approached. Erwin held tight to the waiter. She stood facing him. She recognised him. Now her grief would burst out horribly. Erwin shrank back. He was glad there were so many people around.

Then her face (such a red bloated face, how unnatural) broke into a grin. She erupted in wild joyful laughter. Unembarrassed before the onlookers, she flung both arms around his neck and cried: "Erwin, Erwin, there you are! At last, phew, where've you been hiding?" He jerked back, tried to extricate himself in front of these common Germans. Moreover she stank horribly of alcohol.

She moaned: "I'm looking for a vet, Erwin, nothing infectious, the other kitten must have run into a room. These people won't let me look."

With difficulty she pulled herself upright. The maid took her left arm, Erwin her right. The waiter grinned behind their backs. Thus did Erwin descend the stairs with the pilot of his soul, pursued by indignant shouts.

In her room she flung herself at once onto the bed and shrieked for the other cat-dog. The maid dashed out. Before she returned with the other kitten, Daisy had fallen fast asleep. Erwin slipped away.

As Lucie slept off her alcoholic haze amid her darlings, now recovered and fed, Erwin paced up and down in his room. The man understood nothing, absolutely nothing, about the cats, about alcohol, or about the room on the staff floor. But with an obscure sense that it was connected somehow to Lucie's disappointment, hence he was involved, he slipped back to her room to take a look.

¹⁰ Döblin refers more fully to Kleist's play *Penthisilea* in his 1919 essay '[On Cannibalism](#)'.

She was fast asleep, one kitten beside her. The other had made itself invisible again, having overturned a table lamp and knocked a tall, water-filled vase off the mantelpiece to smash in the fireplace. Erwin's gaze flicked about the room looking for it, he hoped it might have committed suicide.

After half an hour's absence he again stepped into the room, mainly to check if his hopes for the vanished animal had been fulfilled. Lucie was already up and about, dressed and silent at the window, looking down on the street. Both kittens were playing happily on the unmade bed.

When she heard Erwin she turned, her face clear and serious. "Sit," she said calmly, pointing to a stool. He sat without thinking. The kittens on the bed made rustling noises. He looked across. They were engaged in demolishing Lucie's pyjamas.

"What should happen now?" Lucie asked in a deeply tragic tone. It sounded like the end of the world, but otherwise made sense. "I'm ashamed of myself, behaving like that. I've no idea how it came about. I like this kind of pet. I didn't want to tell you." (Nothing about whisky.)

"Whyever not, Lucie? I like them too."

It was already unnatural for him to make this assertion, for the sake for peace and to gain at last a clear view of the situation. He hated those cats, he had looked around in his room for something to use as a cudgel, but found nothing – as he looked for a cudgel he thought too of Lucie, who could use one.

Slyly she again spoke of the cats: "In the past I never bothered with such things. I had a wonderful little dog that I carried around in my handbag."

"Are there such things?" he asked, seemingly interested, "You never showed me."

"I wanted nothing to come between us, Erwin. I wanted to be alone with you, with you only, for ever."

"And so you killed the dog?" he asked, half appalled, half glad.

"No. I left it somewhere. People thought it was a guinea-pig, because it couldn't bark. All it did was squeak."

"Maybe it was a guinea-pig," said Stauffer, not without design. He meant to annoy. She burst into tears: "Don't say that, Erwin. The poor little thing, where has it got to? Those two new little pets I kept upstairs in the attic, so that ..."

He interrupted rudely: "I know, Lucie, so that nothing should come between us. And that must be also why you made yourself drunk upstairs?"

Quite innocent and unapologetic, she said: "It was whisky."

"And?" he demanded indignantly.

"And cocktails," she said. "Over there we drink cocktails."

"So do we," he said scornfully.

"I was trying to restore my balance."

Now he had to laugh out loud. "So that's why you get drunk in broad daylight and can't go down the stairs without help?"

She: "You don't notice when you're sitting down. I should have taken the lift. But I was looking for a vet. They were sick, Erwin."

He glared at the two monsters on the bed: "Lucie, if only we were as healthy as those two. They're ripping up the pillow now."

"Let them," she said, captivated. "They're always ripping up the laundry." She shifted nearer and laid her head on his shoulder: "What should happen now, Erwin? What have I got us into? Is it all destroyed, our whole life, our future, our past as well?"

Clearly she could see she had transgressed. He was most gratified: "You've been a naughty girl, Lucie. You will keep drinking."

"I know," she said sadly.

He shook her shoulder: "Now now. That's no help. You must pull yourself together."

"Don't you ever drink?" she asked accusingly.

He: "Seldom. Not to that extent, anyway. And certainly not whisky."

"I know it now, Erwin. With whisky you must pace yourself. First you must take a third of whisky in a glass of water."

"No thank you," was his cheeky reply.

"And cocktails?" the American lady wished to know.

"Stop mentioning cocktails," he scolded.

She wailed: "I need them to console myself. I even wrote you more letters."

He couldn't believe his ears. She'd written to him. He was enraged. He'd had enough of all this letter-writing. Letters had started all this mischief. "Wrote? Why? I'm here. What did you write?"

"About the pets, the maid, and so on."

"What does that have to do with me, Lucie? Couldn't you just tell me about them?"

She wept on the neck that had come back to her, held firmly to it: "But I'm always writing to you, Erwin, I have to write, all the time, because I yearn for you so much. I had nothing else all those long years."

He groaned, she was squeezing his throat: "But now you have me in person. Please don't squash me. You can stop that damned scribbling now."

She: "I'll stop writing, Erwin, I swear. But you must help me, stand by me."

He realised from her words and behaviour that something between them had changed. No longer did she make herself out to be the magnificent pilot of his soul, his

despotic mistress assailing him with her plans for his life. She was simply a lady who tumbled, and he'd found her out. He was determined to make the most of it. He swallowed down his annoyance and ordered her first to send back the two kittens. Begone from the room, he doesn't care where, maybe through the window.

In silence the sinner grabbed the creatures and locked them in the bathroom. He crowed, it was so wonderful. He praised her for listening. He even silently praised the whisky for creating this convenient situation. Now she sat at the dressing table beside him and implored: "Don't be too hard on me, Erwin. Don't cast me out. I devoted my whole life to you. It's what I've become. If I'd had you, I'd be different."

He, icy cold and apparently deeply insulted: "Let's have no talk of casting out. But rather of a change in your lifestyle."

She: "I know. I shall pull myself together. I see quite clearly now ..."

"What do you see clearly?"

She sobbed: "I'm old, much too old for you, and empty. I have nothing to offer you."

At this confession of guilt he let himself rip: Now, please, enough grandstanding. You really are completely *de trop*." (He enjoyed calling a spade a spade and allowing himself a little coarseness). "I shall have to grow used to accepting that certain ideal things are denied me for the rest of my life. It will be hard, but no doubt it must be. But what I demand with absolute resolution is that you stop drinking."

She nodded sadly.

"It's the least I can demand of you."

When he made no further demands, she shifted closer. She glanced at him, he seemed annoyed, but not stern. She dared to reach for his hand, and when he didn't repulse her she laid her head on his knees like a child, but on his right knee, the sound one, and he was pleased she'd noticed that his left knee was sensitive, and the memory of the recent scene where he had dumped her on the floor softened his mood. He stroked her hair soothingly, spoke down to her and exhorted her and encouraged her. He was gratified when she soon sat up and humbly thanked him. She seemed contrite. He promised indulgence.

And when they then kissed, the contact of their lips meant questions and answers, promises and warnings and threats. His enjoyment of these tendernesses was fully conscious.

Now everyday life resumed. But a new everyday. The difference revealed itself at once. He wanted to know about the whisky bottle and the cocktails. Lucie said she'd found them waiting up there in the maid's room. Erwin asked the porter to send a waiter to fetch various items that must still be up there. When the porter appeared in person, Lucie vanished into the bathroom, Erwin instructed that the bottles and other things should be brought down, and at the same time gave notice that he and Lucie would be checking out. The porter returned with four empty bottles and two others

half full. In his pockets were several cigarette packets, an ashtray and two corkscrews, and in his breast pocket, wrapped in newspaper, several glasses of different sizes. None of this lot, he said in an icy tone, setting it all down on Lucie's dressing table, is the hotel's property. He would permit himself to draw attention to the house rules, whereby no pets of any kind are allowed. Erwin turned his back on him.

When the man had gone, the door to the bathroom opened. Lucie emerged radiant, like a Greek goddess, crowned not with a *corona muralis* but with a live kitten. The other, the one that hadn't planned to commit suicide, sat on her shoulder making desperate efforts to climb Lucie's hair and join its colleague. Lucie shrieked and tittered. He had to relieve her of the creatures. She laughed when it was done and Erwin retreated with his scratches.

Lucie's comported herself now in an open and approachable manner. She was amenable and ingratiating. He thought: is there no end to what a woman hides in her. Lucie was really no different in her behaviour from other women of his acquaintance. He could enjoy a love affair with her too. Curious adventure. But will Lucie want a mere affair, after having stood so high on a pedestal? Almost seems like it.

She was amazingly cheerful (damn it, why couldn't she have shown me this side from the first?). After being freed from the kittens, her glance fell on the parade of bottle and glasses by the mirror. She raised one empty bottle after the other, and protested: "No, Erwin, others have been at these, too."

"The maid," he suggested.

"Unlikely. I had peppermint liqueur for her. I swear to you, Erwin, this was not all my own work."

He was not quite convinced: "This is no glorious chapter in our story, Lucie."

It went over her head. It was astonishing how much could go over her head. She rang for milk for the kittens, and for the maid.

That afternoon Erwin appeared at her door – with what? Two new bottles, which he swore he would check on. One was egg cognac, the other a less potent cocktail that he quite liked. A corkscrew and glasses were already on hand, from the bankrupt business in the maid's room. They sat together, smoked and chatted and drank until evening. Erwin discovered several new charms in Lucie. This lady was far superior to the previous one from Switzerland, and not once in the course of the afternoon, unlike the day before, did he think of escaping to his nice cosy suburban apartment. He'd never felt so good. Really, he wouldn't mind being married to such a woman.

Now we see Lucie alone in her room. What is she up to?

She's playing with her restored kittens and is still fresh and cheerful after the long eventful day. And the day isn't even done yet. How could it be allowed a swift abrupt end, signifying as it did a turning point in life, for it had shown that she could tinkle to her heart's content, and be as old or young as she liked.

Daisy, in a chic evening gown, that evening fetched Erwin from his room where he had already settled down comfortably, but for goodness sake he's not ready for bed yet, surely. He gets dressed at once, and off they go into the town.

Around this time the revolutionary struggle is in progress in the middle of Berlin and in the east. But there was nothing to be seen of it in Tauentzien Strasse. Erwin and Lucie visit bars. They delight in the jazz music. There are conversations with chance neighbours. Dances even. They stay out until two in the morning. And then there are invitations to the homes of other unknown acquaintances, the man is a theatrical director, the two young ladies are actresses. They stay there until morning, when coffee and sandwiches bring strength for the new day.

When Erwin finally throws himself down on his bed at seven o'clock, he's unsure: is he in Berlin? Is he in Switzerland at the Countess's after a ball, has he found Lucie, or who?

Ah, this night has confirmed to him that he has found something marvellous, he has fallen for it body and soul, hide and hair. Lucie.

Lucie too is sleeping. She sleeps until midday.

In *Tristan and Isolde* the two tragic lovers sing: "What was my dream of Tristan's woe? What was my dream of Isolde's distress?"¹¹ They sing this after they've drunk the love potion, and are poisoned by it.

Erwin and Lucie aren't poisoned. They're enchanted.

EPISODE 14

(K&R p. 474-482, Woods K&R p. 329)

Disenchanted

Erwin and Lucie slept until late afternoon, disturbed by nothing – not by the telephone, because they had lifted the receiver, or by knocking at the door, because they didn't hear it.

But at last the knocking on Lucie's door was so loud that she woke with a start and demanded from her bed to know what was up. But at once she knew: someone's complaining about the kittens she'd locked in the bathroom, where they were mewling and crying piteously. But through the door came another message: someone's phoning Herr Stauffer urgently at his suburban apartment, and Herr Stauffer's not picking up.

Lucie jumped out of bed, and first released the kittens, ordered milk and carefully fed them with it. Then she threw on a coat and shuffled to Erwin in slippers, and when she knocked (was she more energetic than the waiter, or was there some magical influence?) he at once opened the door and let her in. She phoned down on his behalf, and learned from the porter that a message had come from outside the hotel that the young lady in question was at Stauffer's apartment waiting for him.

¹¹ Misquoted from Wagner's opera Act 1: should be 'Tristan's honour' and 'Isolde's disgrace'.

Stauffer laughed: "Now I'm in the doghouse! My little daughter, Laura, feels insulted. Just think, I wrote to her just now when we were out, some nice words, thanked her and so on, not a word about her plan to sublet the apartment. And now she's there and she'll bite my head off because I had the sign taken down, and I have to confess that we shan't after all be going to Hamburg."

Lucie: "We'll go there together, Erwin. The child is so attached to us I wouldn't want you to hurt her feelings. Anyway, Erwin, do you really think she wants us to be in Hamburg? Seems to me she had her mind set on America."

Off they went at once, and at the exit from the station Lucie bought a bouquet for the young lady.

And when they stood there at the apartment door and rang, for a long time nothing stirred within.

Then, to the shock of them both, a strange voice answered. Erwin gave his name. The door opened. He wanted to sink into the earth. In pyjamas, sleepy, blond locks dangling and a rosy doll's face, there was sweet Bella from Dresden. The creature let loose a scream. Then fled into the interior of the sanctum, and nothing more was seen or heard of her.

Erwin and Lucie stepped cautiously in, she in front with a proud smile on her face, he behind a little less proud but with a sickly smile.

In the living room he had the astonishing presence of mind and keenness of wit to remark: "It's not Laura, as we'd expected, Lucie. Please, put the flowers in a vase. I'll fetch water. Maybe Laura is on her way."

They sat down at the dining table, on which a half full bottle of beer, a glass and a plate with remains of cake lay sorrowing. Lucie suggested: "She was eating, and we probably disturbed her. Should we go and look for her?"

Erwin: "She's finished eating. She was still in pyjamas."

"Who is she?" Lucie wondered.

Erwin: "Please, don't call her."

"You think she's gone back to bed? So what's her name? Who is she?"

"Bella."

Lucie: "Not bad."

Erwin sighed unhappily: "She's Fraulein Ringleder from the theatre in Dresden."

"Has she acted in one of your plays, Erwin?"

"Last spring. It wasn't much of a success, no success at all actually. Lucie, believe me, I never invited her here. I cannot understand how she got in."

"On the phone the porter said he'd let her in. Seems he already knew the lady, and trusted her enough."

Stauffer murmured: "It's her. She wouldn't pilfer anything. – I'm devastated, Lucie, I'm not to blame at all, this is so embarrassing."

She whispered: "Not so loud. For sure she's listening at the keyhole." Louder: "Anyway, it's pretty as a picture, your apartment. I never knew you could make old furniture look so good."

"Laura did it."

She, softly: "Hand on heart, maybe Bella too? She wanted to build a little nest here for you?" Erwin: "I swear, Lucie."

Lucie sat at his side, put an arm around his shoulders, and whispered: "And in the meantime you came over here now and then, and took a rest from me with this little doll. No fibs, Erwin, why are you trying to pull one over me? Why so bold, my hidalgo? I can empathise with you. As I sat there with my Egyptian and Florentine books and tormented myself, I thought a hundred times: how can the man hold himself back like that? I literally respected you for it, but was afraid as well. I wondered if he wasn't perhaps not a proper man, something was missing, Erwin, you could offer me nothing lovelier than this little surprise."

He lowered his head: "I assure you, Lucie, I swear, I did not invite her here. She hasn't shown herself even once up till now."

"Then so much the better that I bump into her now." Lucie was delighted: "It makes me so happy. I hate supermen."

And behind them the bedroom door opened very gently. Lucie noticed. She saw Bella, now superficially decent, but already with hat and coat, carrying an open suitcase. Sitting at Erwin's side, face turned to Bella, Lucie laughed as she gave her benumbed sinner a kiss, and repeated: "I hate supermen, we're all human, after all."

She gave Bella a gracious smile: "Please don't let us disturb you, my dear young lady. I'm otherwise occupied just now, or I'd give you a hand."

Now Stauffer became aware that something was afoot behind his back, confirmed when Bella threw down her suitcase. Lucie jumped to her feet. Erwin stood. Bella was already standing. They formed a triad around the spread-eagled suitcase. The scene could begin.

Bella's plan was to start with a big gesture. She had meant to swish past the woeful pair, suitcase in hand, directly to the door. A hitch developed right at the start. She picked up the suitcase before she'd locked it, and at once it disgorged toothpaste, toothbrushes, lots of little jars and boxes, and finally a book. Erwin bent down and began to repack the jars and boxes. She said sharply: "Oh really, please leave it."

But kneeling on the floor he was glad to be down there doing something with his hands. And then she was his pretty Bella, who'd provided him with many a pleasant hour, and it was all a misunderstanding – why all the excitement. Thank God these powder puffs fell out, they're cleverer than their mistress.

"You can keep the book," Bella snarled. He was about to shove it in the case. He opened it: Dante's Divine Comedy, richly illustrated, bound in leather, from his library.

"But do please read it, Bella, if it interests you."

She: "I just wanted some idea of what it's like for criminals, after they're dead."

Stauffer, sad: "It's bad for them, Bella, isn't it? I've known it for a long time. Bella, may I introduce my wife? This, Lucie, is Fräulein Ringleder from the theatre in Dresden. She's a distinguished actress, an excellent one, not least in my plays."

Now Bella was no lady of great refinement. Until now it was not spiritual delicacy that Erwin had sought in her. Being expected to believe that the person who'd shown up with Stauffer and kept smothering him with kisses was his wife was too much for her sensibilities. It was an unusual and unexpected insolence on Erwin's part. Bella, moreover, was a hardnosed creature who had already tumbled in and out of love in surprising ways. She resolved to bring the matter to a conclusion, as she had planned.

She shoved the book at him across the table past the plate with the cake crumbs, with an appropriate expression (about criminals, for a criminal, this one's for you, sir!), knocking over the beer bottle. She closed the suitcase, picked it up, walked very erect with a "pah!" for Lucie and not a word wasted on him, out of the room. She slammed the living room door, slammed the front door, and was gone.

On the stairs she said to herself: That went off all right. (She meant: went up.)

At that very moment she remembered the nightgown and slippers she'd left in the bedroom. She turned resolutely back and knocked with vigour. (I won't leave my nightie and slippers for you, on top of everything.)

Erwin recognised the knock, and let her in. She brushed wordlessly past and into the bedroom, where Lucie was already standing with the nightie in her hand.

"That's mine," said Bella, snatching it from her.

Lucie: "Sorry. I found it lying there."

Bella looked for her slippers. They weren't to be found. Lucie asked humbly: "What are you looking for, Fräulein Bella?"

"Ringleder, if you don't mind."

"I beg your pardon. What are you looking for, Fräulein Ringleder?"

"My slippers."

"What colour?"

"Black, with a B sewn on."

"Capital B?"

"Of course. In silver."

Lucie: "Oh, we'll find them."

The two ladies hunted in silence, finally looking under the bed. Suddenly Bella stood up, flung open the door, and called into the living room in a sharp tone: "Erwin, have you hidden my slippers?"

To Lucie she explained with a grim expression: "He's always hiding my slippers."

"Why?"

"Because of my feet. I always have to go barefoot. He loves it. If I'm cold it's all the same to him. He's a monster, your – husband."

Lucie crossed her arms by the wardrobe mirror and sighed: "A fine mess I've got myself into here."

Bella: "He'll give you the shock of your life before he's done." Again she called out harshly: "Erwin, where are my slippers?"

He appeared from the living room: "They'll be where they always are, in the bed, at the foot." Bella grabbed the blankets, pulled them down, and beamed: Right, here they are. Abashed she mumbled: "So he's right for once."

Lucie took advantage of the moment to approach the blonde doll: "We are saddened, Erwin and I, that you want to rush away from us, Fräulein Ringleder. I really don't want to chase you away. Please don't think I'm so impolite. Would you give us the pleasure of fifteen minutes of your company, at least? Erwin has already told me so much about your talent and your understanding, especially of his roles."

Bella stood considering at the end of the stripped bed holding her recovered slippers. She lifted her little head and remarked snidely: "But he's never told me a thing about you, madam, so sorry."

"That's not surprising, Fräulein Ringleder. With you there's lots to say. I'm nothing to write home about. I really am his wife" She took her hat off. "See my grey hair."

Bella stared. Then she burst out: "Then he's an outright conniving rascal. He never said a word about it. Erwin, you will come in here." When he failed to appear she ran to the door: "Erwin, come here this minute. You're a cheat, a rascal. Never said a word about being married. You lied, said you were divorced and had a grown up daughter."

He stood in the doorway: "I do." She shouted: "You're not divorced. Your wife's standing here. You two aren't divorced." Lucie gazed at him: "No, Erwin, we are not divorced." Bella: "You hear that, you criminal, you arch-criminal. He's deceived you and me both. He's a bigamist. He's made himself a bachelor pad here."

Erwin: "Bella, believe me, I am divorced."

Lucie nodded gravely: "He is divorced, Fräulein Ringleder. But not from me." Erwin: "We've only just got married."

Bella stared bewildered from one to the other. Finally she said: "Well then," and burst into tears: "When, just now? Now? Four days ago the rascal wrote me a long letter from his new apartment, saying how happy he'd be to see me again."

Lucie repeated: "Four days ago." Bella: "Four days. Here it is."

Lucie, accusing: "Erwin, one should not write letters. You keep forgetting. I shall go out now, and you must repent of your sins and treat this lady as she deserves."

When Lucie had left, Bella stood showing her teeth and mocking: "I'll grant you that. Now you're in the soup, between two stools. She's gone, and you can find yourself another one from the market for three Mark."

He wasn't sure what she was saying as she closed the suitcase. The woman lacked delicacy, he knew that. After an indecisive minute he found Lucie in the kitchen, calm and peaceful. She was surprised to see him so soon: "Go back to her right away, Erwin, speak to her."

"Lucie, what for?"

"Come, we'll go together." But when they entered the bedroom, it was deserted. Rapid footsteps could be heard from the corridor, the front door was quietly opened and closed, sweet Bella was gone.

And now they sat by themselves in the living room, among the remains of Bella's last meal. Lucie: "I hope you can calm her down, and I also hope, Erwin, that you will long retain an adequate sense of shame. Because you really did write to her four days ago, behind my back." The sinner nodded dumbly.

Lucie: "I'm delighted this happened, Erwin. Truly. This scene was needed to complete my happiness. The whisky brought it into the open. You preferred this pert young thing to your learned bluestocking Lucie, who tormented you and tried to make of you something you didn't want, and what she didn't want and could not. Another two weeks and we'd have fallen back into our old misery, me with the letter-writing and whisky in the background, you with that sweet goose here and the lies kept from me. In the end we'd have gone our separate ways. The whisky brought us together."

He gave her a big hug and added: "I shall tolerate it better in future."

That very day she fetched the two kittens and moved into Stauffer's apartment.

EPISODE 15

(K&R p. 709-716, Woods K&R p. 503)

Erwin and Lucie

One more peep at these two. Nothing here had gone wrong.

They'd both tried to delude themselves, and (luckily) hadn't succeeded. Lucie had to admit she tumbled, and Erwin couldn't keep sweet Bella hidden in the basement forever. Lucie, now that her ideal ghost had been chased out of town, revealed herself in the times that followed as a strong, cheerful and realistic creature. She no longer wanted to travel the world, or the Universe, with Erwin or any other gentleman, to see if perhaps such journeys would bring her to her true existence. She felt good, totally at home, and glad to have achieved a happy landing.

Erwin on the other hand, having achieved wisdom without any awkward excursions, enjoyed his sensible new existence. Now he rejected, almost forcefully, the notion of making of himself more than he had in him, like a bullfrog that sits there under an inward pressure and risks exploding. He had dreamt, after the wake-up call and under Lucie's influence, of rising like a phoenix from the ashes of the old Erwin. That wasn't necessary, in fact everything went much better without it. (Or maybe that was the Way of the Phoenix? Neither Erwin nor Lucie considered this, but we won't dismiss it out of hand.) He showed himself, having come through the ordeal and survived the catastrophe, to be a cheerful man, no deep thinker, who now and then could even show a disarming innocence. He dressed elegantly – both he and Lucie had the necessary spare change – and he continued to love pretty things.

But among the pretty things he cultivated so carefully were Lucie's love and his love for Lucie (in which he saw an allegory of higher loves, without however taking any steps in that direction). He wrote no more plays, asked himself: what's the point? People will get by even without my plays. They waged war without my plays, they made peace without my plays. If I were a baker I could say: some people need my bread. But why would anyone need my plays, evenings between eight and ten? Let others play games in these times. I prefer to keep my eyes open.

Yes, he (and Lucie) began to look around more intensively at existence, they read, too, which he had not done much in the past, they reflected and discussed. He wanted to clear his mind. He did this not with the vehemence of a Friedrich Becker (a character from whom he and Lucie were disengaged), but with a cautious delicacy appropriate to his education and his background. Erwin was one of those who tiptoe around the bronze doors of Truth, and may sometimes knock on them, but start back when the doors seem about to open. Then they creep away and pretend it wasn't they who knocked. Erwin preferred to stick to those who'd already come out.

But they did make the trip to America, in the summer of 1919, via Italy. They had to take along Laura, Erwin's eruptive daughter from his first marriage. They couldn't shake her off. Erwin managed to tear the enchanting creature from the custody of Klara, his ex, for a couple of months, after swearing a formal oath to keep a close eye on her and bring her back safe and sound.

But America proved stronger than the oath. Laura was captivated by the freedom over there. While Lucie was busy sorting out her divorce (for she still had a husband in Philadelphia), Laura toured the new continent and ended up somehow in the far west. There she demonstrated a talent for the movies. And when Erwin and Lucie, now married, came to fetch her back, she already had her first contract for a minor role. They tried to weaken her resolve by reminding her of the oath that she too had sworn. But she declared she'd just have to be a perjurer, and she'd make it up with Mother sure enough.

So there she stayed, and her father had to admit she was right. For what had Europe to offer her? Two years later Laura turned up in Hamburg bringing her first

baby to show Mother, along with her second husband. For over there, as she said, it all goes faster than here. Klara was stunned. She remembered the awful misery of her first marriage around 1900, with all its heavy consequences, the letters included, and how Erwin was able to unite with his Lucie only after twenty years, she being part to blame.

In those days curious rumours circulated about Stauffer, who spent long periods abroad and once was away from Germany for a whole year. We shall not suppress these rumours entirely, for rumours often contain a kernel of truth, and may even contain more truth than the reality they conceal beneath a brittle shell.

According to one of these murky reports, Erwin, having been enlightened by the discovery of old letters about certain episodes in his past, set out to meet his fate in the form of a certain person named in the letters, a female of course. He could find no trace of her in Europe. He followed her, like a dream-figure, across the ocean to America. And there he who sought so despairingly and never found became attached, not to the person named in the letters, but to a young lady who knew his work and had read about him in the papers. She supported him in his search, and when it proved fruitless he recalled the classical saying: why rove so far when the Good lies so near? And the Good really was close at hand, it was the young lady, and they married and lived a happy life.

But why did Erwin return so seldom to Europe and Berlin, and alone, and never spoke of his American wife and the remarkable happy ending to his dream-chase? Oh, he has good reason, rumour whispered, and a terrible one. His marriage with the young lady soon ended. It had to be annulled, because it turned out that the unlucky man had married his own daughter. His own daughter, just imagine, and so he was revealed as a variation on Oedipus. For he married his mother, and Erwin his daughter – Oedipus had tried to evade his fate, but Erwin, his European life barely ticking over, went in search of his, he required a “destiny” and thought a woman would provide it. The misfortune didn’t cause Stauffer to put out his eyes in ancient Greek fashion, but, according to rumour, he became depressive and avoided his home town.

And how did it all come to light when neither of them, Erwin and his young wife, knew anything of the other? What visionary Tiresias brought light to the darkness, what witnesses came forward? Visionary and witnesses appeared all together in one person – the dream figure he had never found. For she was alive, she really did live in America, as an elderly sober person with nothing dreamlike about her, not these days at least. She read in the newspapers about the curious adventures of the famous European author, her former lover, and then stumbled on the name of his young wife. For she knew that name as the name of the husband that Stauffer’s wife had taken at the time of her second marriage, and she knew about Stauffer’s daughter, Laura. Her suspicions aroused, the sour idle person set off and landed in Erwin’s happy home, to get to the bottom of the secret. Her mere presence was a shock to Erwin, he shrank back, this was the one he’d been searching for, and then she revealed all, and the couple’s happiness died a swift death.

We can discern the elements that underpin this fable: Laura's tempestuous devotion to the father of whom she had been so long deprived, the voyage together to America, and the fact that he did return to Europe alone, the first time at least, while Lucie was busy over there. The current epoch was rife with Oedipus fantasies; it felt guilty, weighed down, and knew not why.

Another rumour came closer to the truth. According to this one, Erwin had at last found again the Lucie so tragically concealed from him, using methods that, as was spitefully suggested, he would never be able to put down on paper. He brought her to Berlin, and lived with her in a hotel and a suburb. She had become completely American. It turned out they couldn't stand one another, they were both older, and had changed. The initial remnants of youthful zest that beguiled them soon vanished. Each had sought a scorching affair with the other, and of course did not find it. All that emerged was that she drank, and he was a square. Lamentably circumstantial accounts were given of the incident in the hotel where the pair encountered one another in a corridor – he had his de luxe suite; she, following the romantic debacle, had taken up lodgings with her kittens and whisky bottles in a hotel maid's attic room. And when this legendary Stauffer came across the reclusive tippler in the corridor, surrounded by amused guests, the whole thing for him was finished. And soon enough for her too.

Stauffer, annoyed, is then said to have acted somewhat madly. He had totally lost his equilibrium, he who was known as a decent fellow. To outward appearances he still lived with the American woman, no one knows why, but he carried on in full view an affair with a young actress from Dresden, cheekily bringing her to stay with them in his suburban apartment. Young Bella was not the only one with whom he whiled away the time, in protest against the fact that nothing had come of his "great love".

On one occasion, when he returned from a trip with one of those beauties who extracted money from him, and began looking for his old flame, the American bird had flown, taking with it the kittens and whisky. And Lucie, who earlier could never have enough of letter writing, this time left behind not so much as a line.

She'd torn away from the one to whom she had pledged her life totally, her inner life at least. He'd shown himself a wimp, and she'd cast him from her heart lock stock and barrel. She took herself off to her friend in Switzerland, the countess at whose chateau Stauffer, to her misfortune, had found her. To her shocked friend, who still recalled the amazing circumstances of restored youthful bliss, she confessed: "He was nothing, and I was nothing." Countess: "And the twenty years of waiting?"

"All nonsense, romancing, on his part and mine."

It was dreadful to hear. She quoted Goethe: "The Eternal Feminine draws us on high.' Meaning, me drawing him, dear heavens!" She gave a great laugh.

She stayed a few more weeks in Switzerland, until telegrams summoned her back to America, telegrams from her fat husband in Philadelphia that seemed to cheer her

up. She packed her things and took the next boat from Genoa, departing the continent that made illusions of true ideas, and turned misery into reality. The vessel was a small one, taking her only as far as her ocean steamer at Lisbon.

But off Gibraltar the boat hit a floating mine from the War. Lucie was not among the rescued. From that moment on, people said, Stauffer went off the rails. He was struck dumb and condemned to sterility.

Those who know the lives of these two know that the lives might well have taken such a turn. In reality Lucie did not lift Erwin up out of his almost criminal stupidities only so that he could continue his old ways. Now there would be no more cosy collusion. They'd figured out that sins don't cease to be sins just because they're shared. Erwin was already caught in the trap, and she hauled him out.

With the alarm call in his heart he lived resolutely in the universally maligned "ivory tower". But was it the solitude of the aesthete? Once Lucie placed on his desk with a serious smile a little volume by the mystic Suso, and pointed to the saying: "Live as if you are the only creature on Earth."

"What do you say to that, Erwin?"

He leafed through the book and found: "The strength one attains in drawing back from things is greater than the strength one acquires by possessing them."

And: "If you would be of help to every creature, turn away from every creature."

These sounded different from the daily slogans screaming "community" and "community". And if these sayings were far in advance of anything a Stauffer could conceive, their tendency pleased him, and he absorbed them. He resisted all temptations. He never appeared in public. He condemned himself, as some said (but few said anything at all of him), to death.

He himself explained, when put on the spot, that he was not ready to adhere to any political, spiritual or religious faith. He was undecided about so much, and was content to be seen as indecisive.

He was asked what he was up to, did he have a circle of disciples or youths as others did. Or what. He could only answer honestly: No, he had no disciples. But as far as he knew, neither did the others. And they too could do nothing. No, nobody living could. It was all appearances.

Something dark rose over Europe.

Solitude became oppressive.

Nothing was real, nothing grew, nothing thrived.

Existence became ever more uncanny year by year.

People shuddered, and liked to hide away.

THE END