Little Troll

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This book is dedicated to the ideal mother, Cathrine Mickelsen, with deep veneration and great affection.

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At Vinge's

The little Danish town of Randers is as full of crooked lanes and twisted streets as old cream is of wrinkles. I was born in this town of half-timbered houses and enormous back yards during the wildest blizzard of a stormy winter. The snow was so deep that four strong men had to shovel a path to our house for Mistress Fog, the midwife, although we lived in the heart of the town, in one of the last houses on Poverty Street.

My parents had only recently moved into the second floor of an old, two-story building. Above them was the attic where the tanner who owned the house dried his skins.

Shortly after my birth my mother lay in bed mourning over her new, inconceivably homely baby. She herself was a great beauty, and my father was handsome. Why should such a couple beget first a boy and then a girl so ugly that original sin was beautiful by comparison? Looking at me, my mother wept. She tried to console herself with the thought that we were healthy and normal. She whispered to me, as she was to say so often afterward, "If you and your brother are only good children, it may be a blessing that you are so plain."

As she stared toward the dark raftered ceiling, she saw a minute thing that was light in color and very much alive come floating down. She screamed wildly. A second one descended. Now she saw that they came from the cracks between the rafters. Both landed with a plop on the sheet and began to wiggle vigorously. They were maggots. Mother knew they came from the skins hanging on lines all over the attic, but that didn't make the situation any easier to bear.

The bed was moved. But the maggots moved right along with it. There was room enough between the cracks for them to peep through and get their bearings before venturing the jump into the unknown world.

Mother could not get used to sharing her bed with maggots, so that fall we moved up to Vinge's, as we called our home. Its proper name was Little Square.

Every morning lots of little children came trotting from the orphanage near by, their hands red with cold and their noses running. Over the shoulder of each orphan hung a small red bag meant for a handkerchief, but it was always empty. The Middle School lay not far off. It was not quite as genteel as the Latin School, but twice as genteel as the Burgher School. And it was a hundred times more genteel than the Free School, attended by the poor children who wore wooden shoes and had lard on their bread instead of butter.

The watchmaker's shop on the corner across from our house had one end cut off, making space for a door below and a window above. The window ledge held small rose trees in pots. Inside one usually saw a dear little old woman in a white bonnet with ruchings and ribbons. Her mouth was like a red, wrinkled berry.

When my brother was big enough to catch a ball, the little old woman would open her window and throw apple fritters from her window to ours. My brother almost always caught them. But when one did fall to the street, I was allowed to run down and salvage it.

Our courtyard at Vinge's was unique. It was in two parts, one higher than the other, connected by a narrow paved path. In winter the path became a dangerous slide, and my parents had it strewn with sand and ashes twice a day. We children usually managed to make it slippery again in no time.

I loved to lie on my stomach on top of the high stone wall surrounding the upper courtyard. In the summer the rack for airing the blankets and feather beds was always put there. All the people in the houses around the court took turns sunning their bedding. When our turn came I can remember Mother and our maid dragging feather beds and quilts, we children carrying pillows and bolsters, and all of us piling our burdens onto the rack. As soon as it was filled, but before the beating began, I would climb to the top and lie on my back with closed eyes, marveling at the warm red light shining through my eyelids. Many sounds came like old friends to my ears – the clatter of the wagons being driven through Vinge's gate down below, the hammering from the shop of the coffinmaker, the whisper of the trees in the gardens behind the court, the ringing crash of the iron bars being dumped at the smithy, or the hard smack of the pick from the lime pit.

Lime was dangerous. If you fell into the pit you would die, and all the flesh would be eaten off your bones – by whom, I did not know. I thought it would not be so bad to die, for many people died, but afterward, to go around without any flesh on your bones – wouldn't that look very unpleasant?

Lying on top of the bedding, I could smell all sorts of things. Sometimes I was tempted to stop collecting pieces of colored glass and concentrate instead on collecting smells. Smells were queer. They took up no space, nor did they cut my pockets; they stayed in my nose. You could neither hear nor taste them, and yet they often fought with each other. When the coffinmaker's window stood open, letting out the smell of fried onions, and I had just found a lily of the valley with tiny smell-bells on the stem, I would try to keep the two odors separate, one in each nostril. But immediately they started to fight. And the onions always got the best of it.

If I turned around on the rack, I inhaled the fragrance that meant "the fine gentleman" had come home, and had sprayed perfume in our rooms as he always did when Mother was frying flounder, or pancakes, or when our dog Sanko got into trouble. It was easy enough to find the pillow belonging to the fine gentleman who was my father. Mother's pillow lay on the other side and smelled of brilliantine.

Sometimes I jumped off the rack and ran into the house, up the stairs, past the shop, past the first attic where the big pot of glue was boiling, and past its dreadful smell. I went to the second attic room, where the coffins stood neatly beside each other, like the pastry on the baker's tray. All the coffins were white as chalk and filled with curly shavings. I would much rather have slept in one of them than in my bed. Up here the sun shone all day long and the shavings came to life and curled up like flower petals. I could see that they had been part of a tree, and so they were a little related to flowers.

We bought many things in Mr. Vinge's shop. We lived in his court, so we had to. But we bought only things which did not have to taste good: flour, soft soap, two øre's worth of sand for the kitchen floor, a wisp of straw for scouring, and, in an emergency, sugar. But the important things we bought at Herman Rohde's fine store. I went there only when I was out with my father. And when he said, "Well, what about some candy?"

I knew very well that Mother would have liked me to say, “No, thank you. I’d rather have the money for my savings bank.” But that was very hard to do.

Sometimes Herman Rohde would hold out the glass jar with the best candy, and let me stick my hand in and choose for myself. But then I would have to find the very smallest piece, so as to be modest. That, too, was difficult.

In Vinge’s store it smelled nasty. Once some kerosene had spilled into the rice, and Mother threw a whole rice pudding into the garbage pail. I was afraid the Lord would be angry at all that waste. When we were to take castor oil, Father would say, “Hold your nose and swallow.” Why couldn’t we have held our noses and swallowed the rice pudding?

Another time some matches had got into the sago soup. I knew who had happened to drop them there, but I had not been able to fish them out again, so I said nothing about it. But Mother noticed a peculiar smell to the soup and stirred it around with her spoon until she found one of the matches. She was very frightened. She said we might all have died of poisoning. I promised my conscience, which sits inside of me and keeps track of everything, “I will confess to the Lord.” But I am afraid I forgot it, or at least postponed it to the Day of Reckoning.

I could feel Saturday down in my stomach early in the morning before it was even light. When I listened with all my ears, I could hear the farmers’ wagons rumbling along through the dust of the highway, the farmers cracking their whips just because they felt good. The smell of coffee rose from Mr. Vinge’s kitchen. It was not made in a common coffeepot, for what good would that do for so many people? No, the coffee was boiled in a kettle so big that one might easily have cooked two hogsheads in it.

In all the stores the clerks whisked back and forth, putting out their wares, for Saturday was their chance to fool the farmers and make them buy the trash nobody else wanted. The farmers’ wives were to be treated to “soft bread,” as the baker called his special cake, the kind we had only for company. They would also be given bread and butter and cheese and sausage and salmon and tongue. The farmers and their families could eat what they wanted all day long. It paid Mr. Vinge to stand treat. For in the evening when the farmers packed up to go home, their wagons would be crammed with new woolens and linens and tobacco and groceries.

Before we were out of bed on Saturday, the court would be packed with wagons. And when they began to leave in the afternoon, the farmers had drunk many a red-and-white dram because they were free. They were so hilarious they could hardly find their way to their wagons, and the wives could not help them, bundled up as they were in shawls and kerchiefs. In the late evening, after it had grown dark, the farmers who were still there would be so drunk they did not want to leave. They would be pitched out of the saloons into the gutter, or be dragged off to the police station and thrown into cells with nothing but straw on the floor. When they were sober, they could go home, but not before they had paid a fine of ten kroner.

Finally they would all be gone, and everything became peaceful. Inside the houses there began to come a kind of birthday feeling, because next day was Sunday.

Sunday was a day all by itself, but it sometimes seemed to have no end. The streets looked as though they much preferred the common days when they did not have to be so prim and proper, but could have paper and straw in the gutters and dirt everywhere.

All the grown people went to church in the morning, and Mother liked me to go with her. But she was always late, because she had a sick husband and a lot of children and did much of her own housework and all the sewing for the family. By the time we arrived the church was full. Mother worked her way carefully in and out among the people until we were way up front, and then she would sit on one of the altar steps. I was embarrassed, for it looked as if she were Mary herself, or at least related to God. I knew I didn't belong there, so I pretended not to see when she beckoned me.

Aunt Sophy said that if you had faith enough, you could move mountains. But who ever had enough faith? Anyway, there was something else I would much rather do. I would much rather fly. I had often flown at night in my dreams, but always when I was just about to tear off a piece of cloud to take home to my brother, I would wake up with a jerk, and find myself in my bed.

I wanted to fly in the daytime, when other people could see me. But one had to believe so firmly that it hurt.

I began to believe. One afternoon I was lying in the courtyard, as still as a mouse. All the world was taking its nap. I decided to count to a hundred and believe all the time. Then I would fly out into space from the top of the kitchen stairs. I would soar across the meadows that were filled with forget-me-nots, or across the fiord. Perhaps I would sit a while on top of the golden ball of the church spire, catching my breath and listening to the creaking of the weather vane.

Or I could lie down on a cloud, a very soft one, and if I were cold, I could cover myself with another cloud. I could fly over the rooftops of Randers, and peep down through the chimneys to see what people were cooking for dinner; then I could fly to the woods and count the eggs in the birds' nests.

I tiptoed across the yard, and up to the top of the stairs. I could feel that I had begun to believe terribly firmly. I clenched my fists and curled up my toes; my knuckles were white and I pressed my nails into my flesh. I bit my tongue to make it believe, too. Now I was believing from top to toe.

I closed my eyes and gathered all my belief into my mouth. I counted to three, very slowly, for, after all, I was a bit frightened. But it just had to be right. I had to fly.

And then I flew.

But I did not fly upward. I flew downward, and that was not at all what I had intended.

I wanted to stop. I could hear myself screaming, and then the slate was wiped clean. After a while I was in my bed and Dr. Langballe was putting something cold on my forehead and shaking his head. Mother was standing there wringing her hands, and Father looked like a man in a funeral procession. Then I fell asleep.

Aunt Sophy was the only one I told that I had almost flown. But I did not tell her that God was not quite almighty. For really, my faith had been strong enough.

2

Palace Square

Palace Square, where Grandmother and Aunt Sophy lived, was so big that the yards of nine houses began there and spread out like the legs of a spider. These houses were very plain, but Palace Square itself was large and genteel.

Grandmother's house was down in one corner of the yard. It was narrow and small, and the paving stones around it were shaped like potatoes and were bad for you if you had tender feet. So a row of flagstones led to the house. I did not use them, however, for my feet were all right, and why should I wear out the flagstones? I was sure they were expensive, and Grandmother could not afford to get new ones.

I nodded to the pump. It had stood there for many years, seeing that no one in the neighborhood went thirsty. The pump was more than a hundred years old, but I had known it long enough for us to be good friends.

I stopped in front of Grandmother's house to get my breath. The house was shabby and needed a coat of paint. A workshop took up half of the first floor, and its windows looked as if they were made of soap bubbles pressed flat to fit into the many little square frames. The workshop was empty, as if it had died when my grandfather, Hans Bech, had had a stroke in the street and was carried home dead. Keeping the workshop empty was the only luxury my grandmother allowed herself. She could not endure seeing another painter working in Hans Bech's place.

I knocked at the door. I knew that no one could hear, but it was polite to knock. I counted to ten before lifting the latch, just within my reach. Then I entered the hall and passed the "best" room, which was rented. Under the stairs a door led to a tiny room with a window about as large as a rye-bread sandwich. Grandmother's maid had slept there – when there had been a maid. Now the room held only baskets, laundry bags and tubs; for Grandmother had not even half a maid, only a whole laundress twice a year.

I knocked again at the kitchen door, a little louder, since Grandmother might be in the pantry. When I had knocked three times, counting to ten in between, I opened the door myself and peeped into the kitchen to see if everything was as usual.

There were the two large pails, red outside and green inside. On the edge of one hung the copper dipper, lined with tin. The pails stood on a red bench, with short legs like a dachshund's, or like Hans Bech's, or mine. The floor was strewn with sand. Its red bricks were hollowed out here and there, because we all gave them such hard wear; and, when it rained, the chickens were let in and rummaged there, too. The kitchen table was quite bare. At home our kitchen table looked like a glory hole, because we had four children and a sick father. The opposite door was my friend; it was so poor it had only an iron latch.

Beside the door stood Aunt Lina's bureau. There was no room for it in her bedroom where she had her hope chest. The chest was full of things Aunt Lina worked at all the time, except three days a week when she pinked shrouds at the undertaker's.

I waited a second until I heard, "Come in, little one!" And there by the window, with the sun shining on her face, was Aunt Sophy, and my brother Hans was sitting at the table, writing on his slate.

I climbed onto the raised platform near the window where they were, and sat down at the table. Hans picked up his book and began to read. I was too young to learn to read. Aunt Sophy had taught me to knit, so I would sit quietly and not disturb them with questions all the time. But I did not have to look at my knitting constantly, so I looked at the book and then I could not help learning the letters. And as soon as I knew the letters, it was easy to make them hang together. If I saw h-o-r-s-e, it seemed just as though a horse trotted out of the book, and if I saw t-r-e-e, any stupid could see a tree full of leaves and branches and birds' nests. But I said nothing and Aunt Sophy didn't notice.

One day, however, Hans could not get a certain word and I blurted it out: "Cassock." I could see, plainly enough, Pastor Bergstrøm shuffling up to the pulpit in his long robe, with the white ruff around his neck, as if his head had been cut off and were laying on a platter.

Then, of course, Aunt Sophy knew that I could read, but she did not mention it. My brother would have felt discouraged. Another day she remarked on how good Hans was at writing and how excellent at arithmetic, whereas I could not even bring back the right change. It was too bad, she said, that I was so scatterbrained, but the Lord took care to distribute his gifts. That was why I could read so well, and why my brother was better at figures. Then, while he stuttered, I was crosseyed.

I liked all the books ever written, but best of all I liked Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. And as nice as any book were the tales Grandmother sometimes told us of the time when she was young. When Aunt Lina was out pinking funeral shrouds, or taking a walk in the twilight and the house was peaceful, Grandmother would sit in her high-backed chair by the stove. The peat glowed quietly as if it were also listening. Aunt Sophy would sit on the platform with her knitting, and I would sit on a stool near Grandmother and wait until she began.

Grandmother was born in Ribe, many miles south of Randers. Her parents' house had twelve rooms and parquet floors. But in 1814 Denmark went bankrupt, and the family had to sell the furniture, and everybody was so poor that they had hardly a crust of bread in the house. So Grandmother had to go out into the world and earn her living.

She came to Aarhus. There a lady who had often visited her parents offered to let her live as her own child. But Grandmother was proud and wanted to earn her way. So she learned fine cooking and housekeeping. After that she became a housekeeper in a cloister for old ladies. But she felt terribly alone, and longed for her native Ribe, with its storks' nests and its cathedral. Then Hans Bech came along. He came to paint murals in the chapel, and when Grandmother saw his curls and his short legs, she fell in love with him at once and quite forgot that she had come from twelve parquet floors. So they were married and moved to the house at Palace Square where he and his sister Sophy had been born.

It was not easy for Grandmother to live like a humble artist's wife. Sometimes she forgot, had her tea like genteel people, and hung real curtains at her windows instead of toweling. And the neighbors said she was stuck-up and acted like a queen.

But I knew that no queen ever chopped her own kindling or swept her own yard, or shoveled the snow from the door, or scrubbed the red brick floor, or carried water from the pump, or cleaned the hen house, or stacked the peat or washed the painted ceilings.

Aunt Sophy would have liked to help her, but Grandmother would not allow it. Twice a year, on washday, three women came and washed for three days with ashes from

the wood stove. When they were through, the laundry was packed on a wagon and taken to the meadows to be bleached. There the women took turns standing by and sprinkling every piece of laundry as soon as it was dry. Aunt Lina never took part in any of the heavy work. Her hands were white and had to be spared so that she could pink funeral clothes and embroider her initials on her trousseau.

Whenever I tried to imagine how God looked, perhaps like my father, or the sheriff, or Napoleon, a mist would form before my eyes, and in the mist was the picture of Aunt Sophy – old maid Aunt Sophy, my great-aunt. She was as humble a human as anyone could be. I looked up to her with admiration, love and a feeling of great happiness. To think of Aunt Sophy was like smiling.

I have never seen anyone dressed more poorly than she. In summer, day after day, she wore one of two blue-and-white-striped cotton dresses; in winter, a cinnamon-brown linsey-woolsey dress, severely plain, buttoned down the front, with a three-cornered fichu around her shoulders and tied at the waist. She wore a cotton apron to protect her dress, and coarse, homemade stockings, not at all like the fine wool ones she knitted for the family or to sell to strangers. Her feet were covered with slippers made of rags, with soles of thick string, sewn on by the cobbler. Her thin white hair was always hidden by a white cap of linen without ruffles or lace. She did not go to church any more, but read diligently at her Bible and hymnbook. Her only walk was the one she took twice a day in the garden with one of us children. When we walked with Aunt Sophy, we were proud that all who passed knew who she was and greeted her with respect.

Although I didn't know it then, Aunt Sophy had had her romance, but it had been short and sad. She had fallen in love with a young man who loved and married a friend of hers. Some months later, the bride fell ill and went into a coma, so that everyone thought she was dead. Aunt Sophy tried to pin a bunch of violets on her friend's breast, but her hands shook so that she ran the pin into the body. The shock roused the woman from her coma, and she lived happily with her husband for many years. The man Aunt Sophy loved kissed her gratefully for having restored his wife to him. That was the only kiss any man had given her.

That was all I ever knew about Aunt Sophy's only and unrequited love. But I knew other things about her.

Often when she was not present, Grandmother told us how gifted a painter Aunt Sophy was, how she and Grandfather had painted more than twenty great altarpieces which could still be seen in Danish churches. I asked, "Why is Aunt Sophy not as famous as Leonardo or Hans Christian Andersen?"

"There, child!" Grandmother answered. "Aunt Sophy would never sign her paintings. Yet she was by far the greater painter of the two. Like Leonardo, she could also make mirror writing, and that is terribly difficult. But Aunt Sophy is modesty itself."

Grandmother liked to talk about Aunt Sophy as much as I liked to listen. So I helped her. "What was it that happened when Uncle Windfeld went to school?" I asked, although I had heard that countless times before.

"You see, your Uncle Windfeld was a little slow to learn and got bad marks in Latin, and was scolded. Then Aunt Sophy began to study Latin by herself. A couple of months later she was able to help him, so he got the best marks in the class."

Then I myself saw Aunt Sophy accomplish something even more remarkable. This time it was my older brother, Hans, who was in trouble. He could not learn his Greek. For hours and hours he sat with fingers stuffed into his ears, studying. But the Greek words would not enter his memory.

One day, poor old Aunt Sophy, more than fourscore years of age, wearing her felt slippers and French shawl, took me all through the town to a bookdealer. There she bought a Greek grammar and dictionary. For weeks we found her always writing the funny letters that nobody could read. But before school began she had helped my brother so much that he could go on to the next class.

Aunt Sophy's only income was a legacy of two hundred kroner a year, which she received in quarterly payments. As soon as she had signed the postal receipt and returned it to the mailman, she insisted on giving the money to Grandmother. "What do I want with money?" she would say. "Haven't I food, clothing, a roof over my head, sunshine, kindness? No, Ulrikke, let me have the joy of being able to help you a little in return for all you have done for me and mine."

But Aunt Sophy had another modest source of income – her knitting. Most of the time, she knitted woolen stockings; but for my sisters and me she made cotton stockings of fine thread, with flower patterns that she invented as she went along. Those were our dancing-school stockings. When people exclaimed, "Aren't they wonderful!" I would say, with my nose in the air, "Of course! Aunt Sophy made them!"

She knitted for the whole family and, if she had time, for strangers. They brought their own yarn and Aunt Sophy charged them twenty-five øre a pair, never any more. "Why should I charge you a lot for my time?" she always said. Her small profits she spent on Christmas presents for us children, and on yarn for the one pair of stockings she knitted for herself every year.

I remember Aunt Sophy explaining to us that money had no value in itself. "One might as well use cherry pits or hazelnuts," she said. "In some places people actually do employ pebbles for money. They keep the pebbles in heaps outside their houses, and the greater the heap the richer they are." It was important, Aunt Sophy told us, not to be a slave to money. Sometimes I was frightened for fear I might become a slave to money. Then I would hurry to give all my pennies away, so as to be free again.

Aunt Sophy's eyes were no longer good enough for her to teach me to sew; that was Grandmother's affair. Before I was seven I knew how to darn invisibly. Grandmother would cut a square hole in a piece of coarse linen, and I would dam it so that one could hardly find the place where the hole had been.

One day, on our way to the fishwives' market, to buy some eels for soup, Aunt Sophy and I came upon a crowd of people around a fallen horse. The driver was beating the horse cruelly. I began to cry. Then I felt queer, and screamed and stamped and pulled the driver's beard, as I had once pulled my father's when he started to strike my brother. But the driver would not stop hitting the horse. I bit his hand, and yelled all the worst words I had ever heard. I thought I would die if the man did not stop hurting the horse. Then Aunt Sophy went to the man and spoke to him quietly. He became quite nice, and someone sent for the veterinary.

Aunt Sophy took me where we could not see the horse, and said, "You are beside yourself with sorrow, child. If you did not care, it would be better that you had never been born. You are sorrowful because you think you can do nothing to help the poor

horse. But now listen well, for what I am going to tell you is the truth, the truth of the inmost heart. Every merciful thought, every compassionate feeling that you have goes from you to the horse and fulfills its mission. Only the Lord in Heaven can tell you how and why – I can only tell you that it is so. Your pity gives solace to the horse."

My heart began to beat more calmly. Aunt Sophy rested her hand upon my head. "But you must take hold of yourself. All of us have only strength enough for a certain burden, whether of stones or of pity. If the burden becomes too heavy, we fall, as the horse did. That is what happened to you just now." She bent and kissed my forehead. "God bless you, child," she said, "and never forget what I have told you."

Many times during my long life I have heard again Aunt Sophy's voice speaking about "the truth of the inmost heart."

3

The Day of Reckoning

My imagination worked so rapidly that it seemed impossible for me to stick to the truth under any circumstances. Grandmother never lied. Sometimes the others did, even Mother and Father. Then we children pretended not to notice, for it was "common" to tattle. It was also "common" to listen at doors, or to hit someone smaller than oneself – and to be "common" was the worst thing possible.

But whatever happened to me, the facts always took on other forms as soon as I began to tell someone else about them. I was called a liar, and I knew I was one, but I did not care much. When my conscience tugged at me and said, "Now you are lying again!" I snapped back, "Well, nobody knows it!" and my last lie was stuffed into the bag on top of all the rest. There they stayed quietly until the Day of Reckoning.

I not only lied, I stole like a raven.

I stole for two reasons. One of them was hardly worth mentioning on the Day of Reckoning: it was to give things to people who were dreadfully poor. Usually, however, I stole to satisfy my craving for sweets. My whole being thirsted, hungered, tore itself to pieces for something sweet. We children were brought up according to my father's ideas of dietetics. He decreed that sugar and other sweets were harmful. Fortunately, as in most Danish homes, we frequently began our dinner with some fruit soup, generously filled with preserved fruit and fruit juices. But we had no coffee or tea or cake on weekdays, and raw fruit only in the summer, so we always longed for more sweet things. On Saturdays we received our allowances of two øre – worth about half a cent – which we could spend as we liked. A store at the other end of town sold fifty-two sugarplums for two øre. They were small and looked like little worms. Inside each one there was a single anise seed. The rest was just sugar. Bought on Saturday and put under one's pillow, these sugarplums marked the beginning of "Sweet Sunday," which continued with tea and coffee with sugar, pastry with frosting, and homemade cake and dessert. Sunday was what a day should be, and I often decided to keep my sugarplums to sweeten the latter part of the week. But every Sunday evening as soon as the light was put out, I devoured all my treasures. And the next day the craving was with me again.

It was wonderful when an empty sugar barrel was rolled out into Vinge's yard. It would stand there a couple of days, to the great joy of all the children in the yard, and many from the street. One could hear "Sugar Barrel!" called from mouth to mouth, across Little Square, along Orphanage Street and the length of North Street. The barrels were so big that two or three of us could rummage around inside at one time, and scratch off the sugar with our dirty fingernails. It had a strong taste of rum, for it came from the West Indies and was in some way related to rum. Sometimes too many children would try to crowd in, and there would be a wild fight for inside places. I was no good at that, but generally I managed to get inside morning and evening, when most of the other children had gone home. I was strictly forbidden to go near the sugar barrels; Father said they were filthy. But I didn't care, as long as there was a chance at something sweet. The fact that the sugar came from the West Indies, where there were Negroes, with ink instead of blood, made the undertaking still more fascinating.

As a rule I satisfied my craving in Mother's pantry. I had only to make sure that Dora, the maid, who never lied or stole, was busy washing or dusting the rooms, and that Mother was in the attic or in the garden. Then I would dash into the pantry and dip into the bags of raisins, or prunes, the brown sugar, the tins of cookies, the bottles of fruit juice, the jars of preserves.

If I could not get into the pantry, it was always possible that Mother had left an øre on the kitchen table. Then, too, she had a habit of keeping pennies under the things in her sewing basket. I never took more than two øre, which to me meant great riches. And I got around the stealing part easily, since I was not "stealing badly." That was entirely different. To "steal badly" was stealing from oneself, from one's own savings bank.

Under the sofa stood a large mahogany box in which Father kept his important papers and our little savings banks. Then, in case of fire, we had only to save that box. Since we were insured, it didn't matter if the house burned down. But our baptismal certificates must not burn, nor our family tree, nor father's insurance policy which was to take care of us when he died of his tuberculosis.

The key was always in the lock. But I would hesitate with a thumping heart before crawling under the sofa and dragging out the box. My savings bank was made of tin, with a slot covered inside with a piece of cloth, so no one could shake out the coins. I had to poke out the pennies with scissors, and I invariably got ten- and twenty-five-øre pieces, too large to be of any use to me. Finally, to my great relief, there would come a two-øre piece. Still my heart would thump, and I would think, "Suppose I were to have a stroke and die here – everyone would know I had been stealing!"

It was so much worse to steal from oneself because on the Day of Reckoning, when we straightened out all the wrongs one had done to others, just as we paid the grocer and the shoemaker, we settled our lying and stealing accounts. That was easy and straightforward. But how could one settle a theft from oneself?

Christmas Eve was so fine that one nearly forgot that the Day of Reckoning would soon be there. We enjoyed our own presents, and giving presents to others, and the smell of burning balsam. We spent a whole week eating wonderful food, and looking forward to New Year's Eve, with its rice pudding and roast hare and almond pudding, and apple fritters, and coffee, and Grandmother and Aunt Sophy playing Lotto and Aunt Lina eating gingerbread nuts all the evening at our house.

But first one had somehow to get through the Day of Reckoning. Now it was almost here; one could almost hear it draw its breath. I felt it first thing in the morning. It marred my joy in the lovely smell of freshly baked Christmas cake, the immaculate white tablecloth, the currant jelly and the cherry jam. The Day of Reckoning was outside, knocking at the door.

I suddenly became marvelously good and obedient. If Mother asked me to get a half a peck of potatoes at the store, I was out of the door before she could finish the sentence. I got the right change, and gave none of it away to any beggars on the way back; I restrained myself from playing chuck farthing with it, or dropping it into the sewer. I dusted all the chair legs, unasked, and put Mother's sewing basket in order. I sat down to mend our stockings and, finding no holes, I cut a few so I could darn them invisibly. I looked for buttons to replace those missing from my brother's trousers and sewed them on with strong thread.

Finally, no matter how busy I kept myself, It was in the air, like a thunderstorm racing across the sky. Soon the lightning would strike …

"You are going to church with us, aren't you?" Mother said. Then I knew It would be upon me before I could count to a hundred. Mother was ready to go to church, in her black dress with the white ruching. As she spoke, she fastened her gold pin. It was crooked. It was always crooked.

I tried to think of other things I must do. But everything was ready. The table was set. In the front room, where we assembled on solemn occasions before going to table, the silver tray held cups and saucers and plates of cookies, so that the people from Palace Square could have hot tea as soon as they arrived. Dora sat on the scoured kitchen chair in her starched cotton dress, reading her prayer book. She was to see that the rice pudding and the roast hare did not burn, that the potatoes were not cooked too much, and that the red cabbage was cooked enough.

I heard Mother say to Dora, "Go and see to the stoves, and then get some more wood from the attic, please." This was just to get her out of the way. Then Mother called me from the pantry. I rose, my legs heavy as boulders. I wished I might die.

Now Mother and I were standing in the dark of the pantry. The Lord would have to have eyes like a cat to see us there; but most likely He had, since He could choose whatever kind he wanted. He might have telescope eyes, for all I knew.

Mother did not say, "Have you lied? Have you stolen? If you have, you must confess, otherwise the Devil will come and get you and you will be eternally damned." No, Mother stood quietly and I could barely hear her sigh. Then softly she began to sing the old hymn:

> "The year now ends in snow and ice,
> Pray, have you spent it well?
> Forsaken every sinful vice …"

I broke down. The word "vice" was the lightning that struck me, the claw that seized my poor soul. I began to confess, without ceasing; I could not confess enough. I had lied this time and that time and many thousand times more; I had stolen to give to Poor Maren, who drank, and to Lame Sorina who claimed to have four children crying with hunger, although she was childless; I had taken the Swiss cheese from the pantry and given it to the old man weeding the pavements, because he had never tasted Swiss

cheese. I had stolen from all the bags in the pantry, and taken all the two-øre pieces from the kitchen table, and from under the paper in the sewing basket, and one that had rolled under the bed, and I had accepted carob beans from the ships' boys and hardtack from the cooks.

Confessions gushed from my lips like water from a pump. I stuttered, I hiccuped. Mother tried to stop me, but I had to go on. The Day of Reckoning had taken hold of me. I cried so that I began to cough, and in the dark I heard Mother's voice say sadly, "Think of my beloved child doing such things – lying and stealing …"

Then I remembered the saying that he who lies, steals, and he who steals, kills, and he who kills, shall be hanged. So very soon I would surely kill, and then I would be hanged … I trembled as with fever. I was a murderer. It would be icy cold in the prison and I would shake the iron bars with all my strength but they would be as thick as wagon poles. There I would have to sit until I was an old crone with snow-white hair, and have only rats and fleas to talk to … I went on confessing. At last I ran out of actual transgressions, but my imagination was always ready.

"It was I who broke into the bank of Copenhagen and took all the gold – "

Mother took hold of my shoulders and shook me.

"Child! Child!"

Perhaps she did not believe me. "I dug through the floor and made a tunnel. I went through the tunnel and found a vault, and put the money into a bag – "

What if Mother should ask me what I had done with all that money? I hurried on. "I threw the bag with the money into the fiord! You can dive down there and see!"

Mother started to speak, but she sounded very odd, as though she were laughing and somehow also crying. "Now, now, your imagination is running away with you," she said. "Wipe your eyes, child, and let us say the Lord's Prayer. You must promise God that you will never again lie or steal. Then we will go to church and ask forgiveness. Tomorrow you can begin a better life with the new year!"

I stopped, and wiped my eyes, exhausted. I had confessed my sins, as one must do on the Day of Reckoning, to get one's bills receipted by the Lord. But although I had generously admitted to crimes I could not possibly have committed, I had left one genuine sin out entirely. I had not mentioned having stolen from my own savings bank. All the rest I could confess to Mother, and the Lord was surely listening with His hand to His ear, and He would pardon me.

But to whom should I confess that I had stolen from myself?

4

An Operation

I crouched in a corner of the railroad compartment, a little five-year-old girl, almost paralyzed with fear. Through the window I saw trees and houses running past, like people afraid of a drunken man. I knew that no matter how alive trees may be inside, they are planted deep in the earth and can move only their tops and only when the winds blow. But now they were running like mad, as if they had feet. Watching them whirling past, I grew dizzy. I looked at Mother.

We were alone in the compartment. Mother sat opposite, riding backward. She looked very tired. Her eyes were closed, her hands folded, but her mouth had fallen open a little. She was probably thinking of the money it cost to ride in the train, and how much the doctor would charge for the operation.

Operation – that was a funny word. It wound itself around one's tongue and got all tangled up. I wondered if an operation was something one took with a spoon. Aunt Sophy had said not to worry about it, that the important thing was for me not to be cross-eyed any more. And now we were on our way to Horsens, I to be operated upon, and Mother to learn to make wreaths for the dead and wedding bouquets for the living.

When we got there, Horsens turned out to be almost exactly like Randers, with houses and streets and people and horses and gutters. Mother inquired the way to the home of the gardener, Mr. Clausen, with whom we were going to stay. Then she gave a red-nosed man at the station twenty-five øre to carry our trunk.

Mr. Clausen lived in a two-story house which smelled of dumplings and celery and wet moss. His little girl, Elia, who was six, had freckles and a big hole in her face where one tooth had come out. If she had gotten lost, she would have been easy to find. She could not read, but she could spit even farther than I.

Upstairs there was a room with a big bed for Mother and a little bed for me. We had bouillon with light and dark dumplings and carrots, and then boiled meat with horse-radish sauce full of currants, and then we went to see Dr. Gad.

I was very frightened. He had fiery red lips, and he stared at me as if there were glue in his eyes. I could not help staring back at him. And in that instant he had won my heart. I knew I would love to die the most terrible of deaths for him; I saw myself being hanged, or drowned, or being eaten by a crocodile. Or perhaps he might think it more distinguished if I were beheaded on a guillotine.

Dr. Gad put a little round glass window in front of one eye and turned on the light, although it was the middle of the day. He stared with that one eye as if he could look clear to the bottom of my conscience, like the Lord. I had to read to him. He was terribly curious. He must have known I could read letters, since I'd read all those books at Grandmother's. Later he lifted me up and kissed me. He had a lovely smell, so strange that it made me sleepy.

The next day Dr. Gad wore a long white nightgown and a white cap, just like a baker's. He lifted me onto a hard bed that felt ice-cold. It had no bedding, only oilcloth. "Lie down," he said. "Now close your eyes and count to fifty. But loudly, so I can hear whether you do it right!"

I began, but hardly had I got to four when I cried, "Take it away! Take it away! I'm choking!"

I could not breathe, and something dreadful ran through my nose and mouth and eyes and ears, around my neck, down my throat, into my stomach, and I started to swell like a balloon. It was a thousand times worse than dying. I knew I was going to burst. But suddenly it was lovely; I was floating like a leaf from a tree. The leaf drifts down, but I flew up, higher and higher. What colors I could see! More beautiful than all my collection of glass pieces, finer than rainbows and soap bubbles. Tiny bells began tinkling in a thousand tones. Now I was so high I had only to stretch out my hand to touch heaven …

It was pitch-dark. I did not know where I was, and I was crying. I could hear Mother crooning and humming as if I were a baby again in my cradle. But I could not see her. I was blind. I had no eyes. I would have to go from door to door, begging crusts of bread. It was dreadful for Mother, with a flock of children and a sick husband and no money, and now a blind child – dear Lord, what were we going to do?

I found myself saying, "Never mind, Mother! It isn't bad at all to be blind. It is only like waking up at night when the lamp has gone out because you forgot to fill it. But if I can't read myself, Aunt Sophy will read to me, and take me walking and tell me all she sees and whom we meet, and cut my meat, and perhaps she can teach me finger language."

Mother began to cry and kiss me and say that I was not the least bit blind. I had both my eyes behind the bandage, only they had to be protected for a while, just like fine roses in a hothouse that cannot stand the wind.

Even after I was taken back to Mr. Clausen's, one eye hurt a great deal, as if I had a piece of glass in it. Sometimes I cried and sometimes I slept, and often Mother sat by the bed and fed me. Elia came up once and said, "My, how dark it is! As dark as the potato cellar!" Then she ran out again.

Mother was busy downstairs a good deal of the time, learning to make wreaths for the dead. Time passed as slowly as though it had broken its legs and walked on crutches.

I longed for Dr. Gad to come. When his warm hands touched my neck or my arms, they felt good, like a hot-water bottle that is not hot enough to burn. But most of the time I was bored with loneliness. So I decided to commit suicide. Perhaps then Dr. Gad would refuse to eat for a whole year and become as thin as a knitting needle from sorrow and loneliness and love, and would be put into the same grave with me. I would jump out of the window and fall into the street and break my neck. I was, however, a little afraid that it would hurt a lot. Perhaps I need not actually jump out. I could pretend.

It was shortly after lunch, the hour when he usually came. I lay waiting. At last the stairs creaked. I rushed over to where I knew the window was, pushed aside the curtains, and climbed up on the sill. I hoped he would hurry. I didn't want to have to jump just to make it convincing.

I heard a hoarse shout. He ran across the room, took me up in his arms and held me very close. Then he kissed me. I melted into an ecstasy of love.

The next day Dr. Gad gave me a large doll with so many petticoats that without seeing I could turn them as one does the leaves of a book. She had braids in back and curls in front, and her eyes closed when one laid her down. I decided to give her to my sister Alma for Christmas. I could not love any doll that was not living, no matter how beautiful she was. Dr. Gad kept giving me lovely things, candy, and books for when I could see again.

I should have been very happy. But one day when I was able to see, there was a bit of yellow egg in his black beard. That put an end to my passion.

As soon as I had my sight back and was no longer crosseyed, I wanted to hurry back to Randers to show people that I could see as straight as anyone else. Mother gave me a green silk shade to wear for the first weeks. I thought that extremely distinguished. Perhaps we could charge an øre apiece for people to see me, and earn enough money to pay for the operation, especially on Saturdays when the farmers came to town.

At last Mother had learned all about wreaths. So we bade good-by to the Clausens and to Horsens. I thought it would be with me as it was with the girl who came back from a mountain after a hundred years and found nothing the same as it had been before; all the children who had dozed in baby carriages now had long white beards that dragged after them in the street; and the houses looked as if they were ready to fall over.

But Randers looked just as it always had, except that Skipper Folsack's window mirror had been smashed, and Rag Sorensen's yard had a brand-new gate that went way down to the ground, so that we could no longer squeeze under it and steal old bones to sell again in the store.

Aunt Sophy said, "Thank the Lord, we have you back! The house was so empty that I think even the grandfather clock and the pump missed you!" I was glad to hear that, for I liked them both so much.

But as soon as I no longer wore my nice green silk shade Dina Christensen cried, "Is that the way your parents waste their money? They must have plenty of it! You're more crosseyed than ever!" And the street boys took up their old jeers: *"Cross-eye, which way does the wind blow today? You used to squint west. Now you squint east!"*

Mother said I must be patient, it would be all right in time.

When it was very windy, one eye flew right over to the side, as if it wanted to run away. I was glad that the eye was tied. Otherwise it might have blown away and have fallen into the fiord. And what would I do then?

5

Flowers for Sale

Randers was the same. The houses were in their places, and so were the streets, just as they were before I had my eyes taken out and put back again. The town crier with his drum still gave the news about lost articles, runaway dogs, and cheap apples down at the fiord. Vinge's, Palace Square, the Saturday market – all were as usual. But at home we felt breathless.

It started with Mother and her sign. Mother said, "*A penny saved is a penny earned*. A sign costs money, but only once. When one advertises in the paper, it costs a lot every time." Mother would forget to serve the soup when she talked about the sign. There we would sit as hungry as wolves. But we said nothing, for one has to be quiet at table, even though one feels like a tiger smelling human blood.

The sign was to be shaped like an open book. One page would read: WREATHS, BOUQUETS, CUT FLOWERS, the other: FOR SALE AT MRS. S. BRØNDUM'S.

As soon as the sign was up, we stood behind the window in the sewing platform anxiously looking down the street. People passed all the time. There was Hollufer, the chimney sweep, so good-looking on Sundays when he had washed off the soot; there were people going into the printer's office and into Vinge's store; and there came the garbage man, and many others. But none came to us.

At last someone entered the house, right under our feet where we stood watch. We rushed into the kitchen. "Mother! Mother! Someone is coming!"

Mother looked supremely happy. She tried to appear calm, as one must when one is grown-up and married. She said, “Perhaps it is only a man with a bill. One never knows.” Bills were fearful things. They always had to be paid, but where was one to get the money?

When the bell rang, I started toward the door, but Mother stopped me. “Dora will go.”

Dora put a white apron over her wet striped one, and tied the strings on the way to the door. She came back at once.

“A lady to see you, ma’am.” Then she added in a whisper, “She’s in deep mourning.”

I wanted to clap my hands and shout. Deep mourning undoubtedly meant a wreath.

Mother smoothed her hair and looked at herself in the pretty copper samovar, but she did it secretly, so as not to seem vain. Then she looked at her hands. She had very aristocratic hands, and before her marriage she had worn French gloves, for the fingers of the Danish ones were much too big for her. She almost danced through the door.

Listening outside, we heard the woman say she had lost her cousin, the colonel’s wife, and now all the officers’ wives had agreed to buy their wreaths from Mother. “That is very nice,” said Mother. Then she added with a modest sigh, “The Lord grant that I may please them. I have had so little experience!”

From now on the kitchen table was filled with jars and pitchers and bowls and cups, all holding flowers. On nails from the plate rack hung galvanized copper wire, to be shaped into rings and covered with wet moss. Around these rings Mother wound green leaves that shone as though they had been rubbed with shoe polish.

Every day when the newspaperwomen came down the steps from the printer’s, I flew down to get our evening paper and hand it to Mother. She snatched it from me, as Sanko snatched at a good bone. We left the foreign news for my father and brother, and turned at once to the obituary page. Here the deceased were listed, each in his own black border, as if already in a burial plot, with a fence around it. Mother sighed and said, “My goodness!” But she was really glad. It was like having two smells that cannot agree in one’s nose – for instance, kerosene and cinnamon. And funeral wreaths gave us part of our living. In that way we were related to the cannibals, except that we did not kill people or eat them.

Best of all was when the deceased had been a Mason, high or low, because the Masons always ordered large, costly wreaths of palm leaves with bows of wide silk ribbon. Such a wreath might bring us in enough money for the household for a whole month. So when I said my prayers, I always remembered to ask the Lord to take some Mason.

Often there would not be time to order flowers from the Riviera. Then, unless we knew some were already on the way, I was sent to the telegraph office to ask Father to wire Copenhagen or telephone to Aarhus for flowers.

Sometimes when the winter was a cold one, Mother went around wringing her hands. “Suppose the flowers should freeze on the way!” she would say, over and over. But as soon as my brother or I started for the railway station to inquire for them, she was comforted. The box was usually there. It was hard to handle, for there was nothing to take hold of, and I got my hands full of splinters as I dragged it along. I used to think of the

poor horses who have to pull things about all day, or the snails who cannot go out for a breath of fresh air without carrying their houses on their backs.

We would open the box at once, hoping the flowers were still alive in their beds of fine cotton. First came the primroses, so frail that the stems of more than half of them broke on the way. Mother put them together again with fine wire and a bit of moss, but when she did I felt it hurt in my legs. Camelias cost a great deal. Sometimes they would all have brown edges, and Mother would weep. Camelias were for the most expensive wreaths, for people who ate salmon and shrimps every day because they were so rich. Under these lay Italian anemones, which were hardy, and rosebuds. Then some flowers that looked as if they had been dipped in yellow flour. They were called mimosa.

Dora swept the kitchen constantly. Still, it was always full of leaves and litter. Mother would worry about our getting dinner on time. "I shall be late! I shall be late!" she would say. Then she would sigh, "My goodness, what shall I do? I have only two hands." I was puzzled at that. Nobody had any more, I thought. At least I knew of no one who had.

In the living room the fine gentleman would walk back and forth and look at the clock. Naturally, he did not stamp his foot or say bad words. But suddenly he would turn around and say, "Tell Mother not to hurry with the dinner, for I am going now."

My shoes felt full of heavy stones, and my heart stopped beating. Mother would begin to cry and Dora would look as unhappy as though it had been her fault. I wondered fearfully if now perhaps Father and Mother would be getting a divorce.

At night when the lamp in my room was turned out, I would lie in my bed and think. Suppose Mother pricked her finger again with the copper wire, and the wound became inflamed … Dr. Langballe would come and cut her finger and say, "No wreaths before that finger has healed!" It would have been impossible for Mother to keep such a promise. So, when the blood poisoning hurt more than she could stand and she had to make wreaths all night, I would sneak in and take Father's razor without saying a word, and hold it over the fire. Then Mother would cut the festering finger herself.

Lying in bed, I would remember Aunt Sophy saying that every cloud had a silver lining. It was true enough. If, when I was a baby, I had not been so anxious to see my own nose, I would not have become cross-eyed, and then we would not have gone to Horsens; and if Mother had not learned to make wreaths, we would not have earned enough money for Father to go to that expensive bathing place in Norway and be cured of his tuberculosis so that he wouldn't die.

When I got that far, I turned on the other side and went happily to sleep.

6

Prison

I was seven years old and eagerly looking forward to going to school. During that summer, I often ran over to look at the building. It was so quiet that I wondered if it were hibernating, as bears do in winter.

When at last it came, the first day at school was so long I thought it would never end. The classroom had windows on two sides, but they were so high that even when I stood

on tiptoe, I could see nothing but a bit of the sky that usually looked like a dishcloth. There were no clouds and no sun and, of course, no stars.

We sat there as if we were at the bottom of the sea, shipwrecked sailors around a long black table. At one end a lady named Miss Blom presided. Curls hung down her back like a bunch of black eels. Miss Blom showed us how to do cross-stitch, which I had done for a long time. During the second hour Miss Hansen sat at the end of the table; she had two warts on her neck and pink cotton in her ears. I wondered if she kept her earrings there. She taught us to write with ink, but I had done that for a long time, too. Then Miss Blom came back. This time her subject was religion, but it all seemed so silly that I yawned and forgot to hold my hand before my mouth. I could neither fear nor like the Lord as she described Him. I could see Him walking along, leaning on a staff, mumbling like an old man, while he chased Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden only because they had stolen an apple. I could not imagine the Lord being so stingy.

During the fourth lesson, which was English, we had Mrs. Bjerring. She was a widow, with a face like tapioca gruel with milk and cinnamon and sugar – only the cinnamon was freckles. English was terribly easy, almost easier than Danish – "I have a pen. You have a book. He has a hat." The only difference was that one must remember to say "has a hat," instead of "have a hat." Then one could speak English with anybody. I decided to hurry home after school and get permission to take the boat and row out to Udbyhøj where the fiord runs into the sea. The Kattegat begins there, and after that comes Skagerrak, and then the North Sea that carries one straight to London. I could just see how surprised those Englishmen would be. They would probably not believe that I had learned to speak English in school in a single hour.

I soon discovered a secret place in the classroom.

One day I dropped a knitting needle and crept under the table to find it. It took a long time, for the needle had rolled under Louise Hassing's feet, which stood nicely side by side like two shoes in Justesen's store, turning a little outward. Suddenly the place seemed as strange as a magic cave far down under the earth. The light came down in stripes and triangles and spots and all the feet were living there; some were the best of friends and held on to each other, and some were like a father and mother getting a divorce who had to divide everything, children and furniture and all. Some looked as though they had never seen each other; and some turned their toes inward and looked frightfully stupid. Agnes Philipsen's yellow shoes had a long row of white glass buttons all the way up; one knew how glad the shoes were to belong to such nice round legs. Susan's legs were so long that she stuck them way across the floor and had put her feet on Sophy Nelleman's knees, and Sophy did not dare object. Andrea Jensen had brown shoes with black silk tassels. I knew I would never have any like those. Andrea got whatever she wanted because her mother had had consumption. If my father died of consumption, it would be quite different. We would be so poor I would probably have to sell flowers on the street.

All the shoes under the table were twins. And Kirstine's and Matthea's legs looked so much alike that one could easily have cut off one of Kirstine's and sewed it onto Matthea without anyone being the wiser.

Agnes Mikkelsen's feet were all the time stepping on one another. Alma and Hertha wore wonderfully fine shoes, brown with a broad border of patent leather, and thirteen black buttons in each. Mary Nielsen wore low shoes with pieces of iron protecting the

toes. Mary sat swinging her legs to and fro as though they were two clock pendulums. All of a sudden both of them came down with a bang, as if saying, “Good night. Now we are going to sleep.”

When I got up in my seat again, I kept thinking of all those feet down there, just like the roots of trees in the woods. Sometimes, when Miss Blom read to us from *Heidi*, I managed to slip under the table and creep up to take a look at her feet. When she sat, her dress went up a little and I could see her thin black stockings. They were without darns, even on the knees. She had, however, a little bulge on one toe, so I suppose she had a corn, and that can hurt as much as a stomachache. I wished I could stay under the table all the time. But even though I remembered to throw something on the floor whenever I wanted to visit the cave, Miss Blom would say, “I can’t understand why you are always under that table!”

Finally one day I was sent to the principal’s office, and there they all were, even Miss Metz, who looked like a feather bed. Why was I always getting under the table? I must speak the truth. Well, I did. “It is fun down there,” I said. “Above the table it is so tiresome, I have a hard time keeping awake.” They gave me “Poor” in deportment for an impertinent answer. At home Father laughed and gave me five øre. “It is all right to tell the truth,” he said to me. “But you must be careful to whom you tell it!”

Now it was as though I lived in two different worlds. In the morning, at school, time stood still like water in the rain barrel. There was always someone sitting at the end of the table, talking, talking. But in the afternoon I came to life again, at home, in the yard, or at Palace Square.

The only thing that helped the school hours to pass was to close my ears and think hard of all the nice things that might happen. For instance, there might be a murder, a fire, or a war; an earthquake, a bank robbery, a pestilence, a thunderstorm, or a smallpox epidemic. There was plenty to choose from. An earthquake would perhaps be the most magnificent of all, but earthquakes were rare in Denmark; and a thunderstorm in the daytime was so common that it would not count, unless lightning struck and there was a big fire.

But we did have high water sometimes, with a strong east wind. I would sit at school trying to hear the water slipping through the fiord, higher and higher. Now it had reached the bulwark; now the whole garden was flooded; now it was on its way through Caroline Street, perhaps it had already reached the fisherwoman’s well house. I wished fervently that the water would fill Frederic Square, turn the corner, pass Herfort’s house, and flood the schoolyard. If we heard it ripple against the wall, and the tocsin began to sound, they would have to close the school, and then some of us could swim home. But maybe they would only send us up on the roof, and we would straddle the ridge, crying, “Save our lives! Save our lives!”

I was sure Jacob Herfort would come and save me, even if he were to drown on the way. If he did, I would wear a black veil all my life. But perhaps Father and Mother had given me up for lost, and Mother was already cutting out parts of her black dress so that all the family could wear mourning, even though this would make her dress a little tight for her. And when I went home, they would all be very happy.

Our high water was nearly as good as the spring tide that Aunt Sophy told us about, when whole islands swam away, and the people and animals drowned. Suppose Denmark were at the bottom of the sea. Grandmother had seen with her own eyes one of those

islands that had sunk, had plainly seen the spire of the church down there. Suppose the bells began to toll! If I had only learned to play the organ, I might swim into the church and begin to play at the bottom of the sea.

The only trouble with all this daydreaming was that the school was situated so high that high water could not even reach it.

One day during high water, after I had taken Father's lunch to the telegraph station in a boat, I found Mother making wreaths at home, and sat down to help her. She told me about Faber, who had written our military song, "The Danish Soldier," which I knew by heart. Father once had met Mr. Faber in a train and they had become friends. Shortly afterward, Mr. Faber wrote to Father, asking him to go to China at once and head all the telegraph lines there. But he wanted an answer within twenty-four hours.

My heart began to beat violently. Had Father said yes, or no? If he had said yes, I must have been born in China!

Mother picked up a piece of copper wire and wrapped it with moss. "That night neither Father nor I closed our eyes," she sighed. "We could not decide what was best to do."

I was astonished. It seemed to me to be as easy as pie. "Why not?" I asked.

Mother stopped working and wiped her eyes. "That was before your brother was born. I would have had to stay and wait for the stork, and let Father go ahead. I had never learned any Chinese, and I might have got lost…"

I seized Mother's hand, and hoped with all my heart that Father had said no. And so he had.

Mother smiled and said now it was all forgotten and it was better this way. I must not tell anyone.

But the next morning at school I happened to say that I knew a secret so great that it reached from earth to heaven. All the girls crowded around me, and I could not help telling them I was almost halfway Chinese, and that was why the doctor had operated on my eyes, for all Chinese were crosseyed. Then I told them about Father and Mother living in China in a castle all of glass, and having silkworms so fine that each one lived in its own little house with a tower.

The principal came along just then, and heard these tales through the open door. He said I was a liar and could never tell the truth as long as I could think up a fib. I suppose that was true.

7

Our Saturday Club

We children were solemnly invited to Grandmother's for every Saturday evening. On that day we had supper at home at five. Then my brother and I, and later Alma and little Harriet, scrubbed our hands with the nailbrush, put on our Sunday clothes, and went down to Palace Square.

The spicy fragrance from the fire in the stove mingled with the appetizing odor from the covered platter heaped with Grandmother's apple fritters. The grandfather clock had

been wound so that the weights were close to the works; the little door had been left open to give the weights air and light. Everything in the house was quiet and peaceful.

We played whist with a supreme indifference to the rules. We made mistakes and we laughed. Aunt Lina could never keep her thoughts on her cards. We laughed at Aunt Lina, but we were fond of her. Grandmother always said, "She is as good as the day is long!" She told us that when Aunt Lina was in school, she came home once in her underpetticoat and knitted underwear. She had given her good dress and quilted petticoat to a ragged gypsy.

Certainly Aunt Lina was kind. Sometimes on Saturday she brought a huge cardboard box down from the attic. It was full of little toys, some of them very beautifully made. Gradually we children were given all the toys, one by one, and the empty box was finally used for Aunt Lina's burial clothes. She had pinked shrouds for hundreds of bodies, and she could not bear the thought of lying in her own coffin in such papery trumpery. So she had collected a finely embroidered linen trousseau, and a small woolen jacket, to keep her warm.

Meantime, during the years, Aunt Lina's wedding trousseau came to fill all the drawers of her dresser. It became the rule on Saturdays for her to show it to us. Each drawer was carefully lined, first with a thin white cloth, then with tissue paper. In addition, each tablecloth, each sheet, each pillowcase was wrapped separately. The finest pieces, her wedding underwear and wedding veil, Aunt Lina kept in a box on her sewing platform. In the same box lay her wedding bouquet, made entirely of the daintiest feather flowers – rosebuds, fuchsia, heliotrope and mignonette.

Aunt Lina had everything ready, except the bridegroom.

She was often engrossed in an imaginary love affair. Each time she secretly bought with her own scant money a ring which, very mysteriously, she showed to everyone. She asked each person to guess the giver. Then she would smile and say nothing. She never revealed the truth, and I only happened to learn it later through the goldsmith's indiscretion.

Once, however, she claimed my father as hero of her love affair, and nearly ruined the relationship between my parents. To all willing listeners she said that Father should have married her because she and he were congenial, whereas Mother did not understand him. Besides, Mother could have had ten others.

This tale soon reached Father's ears. He was so angry that whenever Aunt Lina "dropped in for a minute," the air became unbearably tense and I fled to the attic or the garden. Sometimes I hid in one of Mr. Bjerregaard's coffins. There I took out my treasure of glass fragments.

My pocket was always full of colored glass, picked up anywhere, in the street, the gutter, the dump heap. I would hold piece after piece up to my good eye until I found the color which oh that special occasion could banish my fright or sorrow. The effect was amazing.

Besides the hoard I carried around with me and which Mother often found and threw away, I had other stores hidden in the garden, among the gooseberries, in the laundry, in the corner of the barn, under the shavings in a coffin. Mother disapproved, because the glass cut holes in my clothing, and more than once when I fell down, into me. But the glass had a magic for me.

At first I simply enjoyed the strange change inside of me when I held a piece of colored glass to my eye. Then I discovered the effect of individual colors. If I lay on the hot, bark-strewn path in the garden on a summer day, a piece of blue glass at once gave me the feeling of a crisp, clear winter day. I could feel the cold air rise from high banks of snow; I got goose flesh on my arms, and the shoes that had pinched me a minute before grew too large. Seen through dark red glass, the world was full of sorrow, and I lost all ambition. But if I were tired and Mother asked me to do an errand for her, I held a piece of yellow glass before my eyes, and the fatigue disappeared. Green glass lessened pain, whether the pain came from overeating, a bee sting, or a thorn in my foot. Only pink glass was repulsive.

I also loved to touch things, to stroke, for instance, a flower petal or an orange. But for some reason the touch of my little sister's pacifier made me furious enough to throw it on the floor and stamp on it. A piece of flint, irregular and sharply edged, held my attention for hours, but the round, lead-colored paving stones in the yard aroused my contempt.

If clouds hung low and heavy over the town, if fog filled the streets, smelling of beer and dregs, I had only to find a certain piece of green glass and hold it before my eyes. Instantly the clouds lifted. I could breathe in the tart fragrance of earth mold. I could hear the rustle of a forest of trees – all was changed, all was good.

8

Mademoiselle

"Money troubles" meant bills and bankruptcy and having one's furniture seized for debt. My parents were careful never to fall too far behind. But the rent had to be paid, as did Dora's wages, and the taxes, whatever that meant. We had large appetites, and would eat as many times a day as we could. All that food cost money. Then there were the doctor and the druggist and Father's life insurance.

At night in bed I often wondered how in the world we were to earn our living until I grew up and wore long dresses and could give concerts on the piano, or until I could write fine books, or build cathedrals, or be a toe dancer, or an actress; or perhaps I would buy a pushcart and pick the wild whortleberries that grew so abundantly on the heath that one could just brush them off the bush. Then I would take them into Randers and sell them on the street.

In the midst of our money troubles there came one glimpse of light that I would not have missed for anything.

In a large villa outside of Randers, beyond South Bridge, lived a family by the name of Malte. With them lived a lady who had a French name on her visiting cards, but who was simply called Mademoiselle.

Mademoiselle was so tiny that she looked almost like a child. She piled her faded yellow hair in curls all over her head. On her dainty little feet she wore pink satin shoes, laced up one side. She was said to be so rich that she did not know what to do with her money, and she paid the Maltes punctually every month for her board. For all the years she had been there, Mademoiselle had her meals served in her room. She would allow no

one to clean her apartment but a woman who came once a week, and she told this woman that if she said one word to anyone about what she saw or heard there, she could leave at once. Naturally, the woman said nothing.

Mademoiselle was invited out to afternoon coffee every day, for many people hoped that since she had no heirs she would leave their children something. Being of distinguished family, she herself selected her associates, and would call on them, leaving her visiting card.

One day when I was standing at the window, I saw Mademoiselle coming across the Square. I knew her immediately from her black silk mantilla with the long fringe, her bonnet with the large bow under her chin, and her full dress, swinging and swaying about her. I called to Mother, "Mademoiselle is coming here!"

Mother thought she might want to order a wreath. But when I hurried out to open the door, Mademoiselle gave me her fine visiting card. So Mother rushed to change her dress, and I was sent to buy cake and boiled cream, "with a lot of skin," for Mademoiselle was known to like that. Later, through the door, I heard her praising my father's handwriting. She asked Mother to persuade him to write a poem and sign it.

Father did what she wanted. After some days we received her letter of thanks. I was permitted to keep it. She had written on a light blue paper with a lace edge, and made each letter of the alphabet look like a flower, so tiny that it could be distinguished only with the help of Father's magnifying glass. It must have taken her hours. Father said he had never seen anything like it.

In the letter Mademoiselle said that she was going to show her appreciation in a way that would benefit Father's children. I did not know what she meant. But Mother said it could mean only one thing. She would not tell me what that was, so I couldn't tattle.

One day Aunt Lina came in quite out of breath. She had had coffee at the Mayor's, and she had heard that Mademoiselle –

Mother stopped her. "Don't bring any gossip here, Lina," she said.

But I knew what I knew. Sometimes, when Mademoiselle was at someone's house having coffee, she would go out into the hall, saying she had forgotten her handkerchief in her coat pocket. But she would really put something into her bag hanging under the coat. Her hostess would contrive to send a maid out to see what it was. If she had taken one of the good silver spoons, the maid would retrieve it. If the object was less valuable, she left it. People did not want to have trouble with such a rich person who might will them a lot of money.

Then one morning there was a letter in the mailbox. I recognized at once all the dainty little flowers that climbed up and down the words. I rushed into the dining room. "A letter! A letter from Mademoiselle!"

Father stopped in the middle of his oatmeal – which makes one fat and is good for consumption – and read the letter twice. He called, "Mother, come and see!"

Mother read the letter. Then she clapped her hands and began to cry. But it was easy to see that she was overjoyed.

Father put the letter in the mahogany box under the sofa and stuck the key in his pocket. "That letter is worth a great deal!" he said.

Mademoiselle had written that she had looked through her collection of autographs and no other was as "chivalrous and beautiful" as Father's. She said she had not forgotten her promise and that all of us children would be remembered in her will.

Father said, “You really will have to invite Mademoiselle to coffee now. It’s the least we can do.”

Mother did not say, “But it costs so much.” This time she said, “Why, of course!”

So Mother and Dora baked a lot of the finest cookies, and we invited five other ladies. I was to pass the sugar and cream – “But, child, do remember. From the *left!*” So I put a safety pin on my left shoulder so as not to forget which was right and which was left. The table was set with the fine damask cloth that felt like silk and came from Grandmother’s home. In the center Mother put Grandmother’s decanter, which she had got as a wedding present. I loved that decanter, for it was of Irish glass, and Grandmother had had it with her when she went out into the world to earn her living. On a little silver tray, shaped like a mussel shell, lay the teaspoons from Father’s grandfather. There were only eleven, for the twelfth had been lost. I promised myself to keep a strict eye upon them.

As soon as the party was over and the ladies had gone, each of them with a bouquet of roses from the garden, I hurried to count the spoons. Thank the Lord, they were all there. Mother cleared the table herself, to be sure Dora did not break the cup handles. She was humming a song. All of a sudden she let out a scream. There was Grandmother’s decanter in the center of the table, but where was the stopper?

Mother began to cry bitterly. She knew what that decanter meant to Grandmother, and the stopper was almost the most beautiful part of it. I said a hurried prayer that the Lord would please let Mr. Ankerstjerne or Mr. Borregaard die, for they were the two richest men in Randers and their funerals would bring orders for at least a hundred wreaths apiece.

When Father came home and heard of the tragedy, he only laughed. “Is that anything to cry for?” he said. “A little glass stopper?”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Jack,” Mother said indignantly. “You couldn’t find the equal of that glass stopper if you searched the whole world!”

Father put on his hat and went out. When he returned he had a lot of small parcels, all of them containing glass stoppers. But Mother would not even look at them, and even I could see that they were not at all like ours. The next day Mother wrapped the decanter in several sheets of paper and put it away. I promised not to tell Grandmother, since it would only make her feel badly.

I couldn’t understand why Mother was so unhappy about that stopper and yet did nothing to get it back. We could have advertised: “Glass stopper lost. Mrs. S. Brøndum, Little Square, Randers. Reward.” Or, as I said to Mother, we might report it to the police. Then Mademoiselle would have to give it back. “We could tell them we don’t want her to be whipped at the city hall, or be sentenced to ‘bread and water for three times five days,’ ” I said. “She might be let off with a warning, like the district judge’s son when he was drunk and upset the tombstones in the churchyard.”

“Hush, child! For goodness’ sake, don’t say things like that,” Mother said. “Mademoiselle would never think of stealing. She’s honesty itself.”

I knew very well, however, that Mother only said that because we were going to inherit from Mademoiselle.

Then one afternoon Aunt Lina came dashing upstairs, all through the rooms, without bothering to shut any doors behind her. “Have you heard?” she panted. “She’s dead! It’s in the paper. Mrs. Malte said she did not open the door when the maid went up with her

coffee, and she suspected something had happened. Sure enough, there she was in her bed, as dead as a doornail!" Aunt Lina began to cry. "I'm so glad, so glad!" she wailed. "Now we won't have any more money troubles, and the children can go abroad …"

Mother's eyes grew blacker than usual. She folded her hands and whispered, "Glory be to God in His Heaven!"

I was sent to get a paper. There it was, inside its broad black border, three times as large as an ordinary obituary. "… Departed peacefully and quietly. On behalf of the absent relatives, Mr. and Mrs. H. P. Malte."

I was permitted to stay home from school the next day, for Mother said I was to take the cross she had made, of myrtle and roses, to Mademoiselle, in the name of all us children. I wanted to wear a black hat. Mine was yellow with a red bow, and Mother had not had time to do anything about it. I found a black tie in Father's drawer, and fastened it over the red ribbon with a safety pin. That made it look a little like mourning.

There was a great to-do in the Malte house, the family talking to callers about the funeral and answering questions about how she had died, and so suddenly.

"Go right upstairs," said Mrs. Malte. "The door is open, and you can put the cross on the breast of the deceased yourself."

I had never been in Mademoiselle's room, and never before had I seen a dead body. But I was not especially afraid, for even if she were not really dead, I could always call for help.

The coffin stood just inside the door. It was snow-white. Mademoiselle looked as if she were asleep. Small and thin as she was, she took up hardly any space. Her faded curls were rolled nicely, as if around a finger, and she wore the kind of glazed shroud that Aunt Lina pinked three times a week at the undertaker's. It was made of cotton, but looked like fine paper.

When I had placed the cross nicely on her breast, and laid her hands upon it, I couldn't help lifting the sheet. Sure enough, she was wearing the pink satin shoes. I was glad they would keep her feet warm in the grave.

It was strange to be alone with a dead person. I had thought it would be weird and terrifying. But the sun shone brightly outside and Mademoiselle looked happy. The room smelled stuffy, as if she had not cleaned it often, or opened the windows. And the floor was dusty. But the bed was very large, with curtains all around.

Grandmother always looked under her bed. The thought made me bend down and look under Mademoiselle's bed.

There were rows of glass stoppers there, as far as I could see under the bed, many more than a hundred. I could not see the stopper of our decanter, and didn't dare pull them all out, for fear someone would come. Still, Mother would be very happy if I went home with our stopper.

I listened. Nobody seemed to be coming. I began very carefully to touch one stopper after another. It was not in the first row …

Suddenly Mrs. Malte called, "You aren't getting sick, are you?"

I ran down as fast as I could. She gave me cake and half a glass of wine. I had never tasted wine before, but we drank it in memory of Mademoiselle, and my head was whirling when I went home.

When the coffin was taken to the chapel, Father went along in his stovepipe hat and his black gloves. Aunt Lina said the chapel had not been so full in many years. Everyone went around speculating about Mademoiselle's will and pointing out the bouquet or wreath they had sent. They all said proudly that, of course, they were going to send another for the funeral.

That afternoon Father suggested we all row out to Fladbro and have supper there. Mother looked surprised. After a moment she went and kissed Father and said, "Oh, Jack, I'm so afraid! Suppose – "

Father's eyes lighted up, as if a smile behind the iris had made it shine like moonlight. "Don't doubt," he said. "Just have faith!"

Aunt Lina had been accepting congratulations from everybody on our prospective inheritance from Mademoiselle. She was so happy for us that Father invited her to go to Fladbro with us. This made her even happier, for she was unused to such kindness from him.

Father and Mother sat cozily together in the stern of the boat. I rowed one oar almost the whole way, and my brother took the other. Of course, when we were rich, we would hire a fisherman to row us back and forth. Father wanted to relieve us at the oars, but Mother said, "No indeed, Jack. That is too strenuous for you."

We had sandwiches with chopped eggs and smoked herring for supper, and shrimps, too, as a surprise for Father. I could not eat any shrimps, though, because they were boiled alive, and it hurt my insides to think of it. But there were also sausages and meat balls and radishes, cheese with caraway seeds, and a small bottle with a dram for Father, such as he took hunting. We children picked heather, and Father and Mother talked of our future.

My brother Hans was a student in the Latin school, and Father said he hoped he might become a lawyer. Mother began to cry, and said she would rather have him a teamster or a common workman.

"But dear," Father said, "there are many lawyers who are honest and decent."

"That's the way the good Lord meant it to be, no doubt," Mother replied firmly, "but you know as well as I do. Jack, that a dyer cannot avoid getting red or blue dye on his fingers. And when a lawyer handles people's money, some of it is sure to stick to him."

"Suppose Hans should become a minister?" Father said hopefully.

"A minister who stutters? What are you thinking of!"

At last Father suggested that he become a doctor, and Mother thought that would be nice. Then little brother Allen might be a minister. Alma was to learn fine cooking in some parsonage or country estate. Now we could easily afford the four hundred kroner that would cost. I was to be sent to Dresden to learn nice manners, which I needed badly, whereas Alma was a born lady. Perhaps I could study music there at the same time, for I had a good ear.

At last the sun went down and a faint breeze stirred the treetops. A flock of crows cawed dismally. Mother put her hands to her ears. "Jack!" she cried, "I have a feeling that something – something is wrong!"

Just then little Allen began to cry, because it was long past his bedtime, and we started home. I counted my buttons to find out whether or not to ask Father to take us to the graveyard to see Mademoiselle. Suddenly Aunt Lina said, "I wonder if her artery was cut?"

Father turned around. “Please remember, Lina, that the children are here!”

Aunt Lina was flustered. “I only thought …” she began.

I burst out, “I’m absolutely sure that she is not dead. Shall we go and find out?”

Father stroked my hand. “There, you see!” he said angrily to Aunt Lina. “That’s what comes of all that foolish nonsense!”

But I remembered very well that Aunt Sophy, by pricking the woman who was thought dead with a flower pin, had saved her from being buried alive.

Father came home half an hour before dinnertime. When I saw his face, I thought surely we were at war, or that the king had died. But Father said to Mother in a low, broken voice, “You were right!”

For a long time he said nothing more. Mother looked at him. I heard a heart beating violently, it might have been mine, or Father’s or Mother’s. For three days we had been thinking of nothing but the funeral. We had telegraphed for flowers, and Father had promised me a black hat. Now it was all forgotten.

Then Father spoke. “It’s no use to hide one’s head in the sand,” he said. “She has simply fooled all of us. There’s just enough for the funeral, for a very modest funeral – that’s all.”

Mother did not weep. She only pressed her hands together.

My brother, who was studying his Latin, had heard the news, although he had his fingers in his ears. “That beast!” he said.

“Not a word against Mademoiselle,” Mother said quickly. “It is neither your business nor mine to judge her. Poor woman! Perhaps she really believed she had money. But then what did she live on, Jack?”

“She had an annuity of a hundred kroner a month – no more, no less. It was paid to her from Ribe.”

I couldn’t stand it at home, seeing a wet handkerchief in Mother’s pocket all the time, although I never saw her cry. So I ran down to Palace Square. I didn’t have to tell them anything.

Grandmother kissed my forehead. “Your good parents had deserved that joy,” she said. “But now you children must make them so happy that they will never again worry about your future!”

Aunt Sophy was sitting on the sewing platform knitting the heel in a stocking. She looked happy, as if she had won a prize in a lottery. But, of course, she did not gamble.

She asked me to take a little walk with her behind the gardens. That was just what I needed. As usual, we moved very slowly, like the weights of the grandfather clock. Aunt Sophy said nothing until we were at the spring, where we drank out of the tin cup. We always did that. It would have been like cheating the spring if we hadn’t, for the spring ran its water day and night just for us. When we turned to go back, she stopped and said, “I have worried a great deal about you children. But now everything is all right. I can close my eyes without fear that you will suffer harm to your soul.”

I didn’t answer, for it was as though Aunt Sophy were speaking to someone else, someone inside herself.

“There are many dangers in life,” she continued, “many things to look out for. We often stumble, and when we do, it is easy to fall. I have always been in terror of the dance

around the golden calf. When I say the Lord's Prayer, I always ask that you children will never learn that dance!"

That was all. But I decided that I would give away all the money in my savings bank, so as not to be tempted again by the golden calf.

In spite of Mademoiselle having fooled everybody, she had a grand funeral. No one wanted the others to think that they would not go to the funeral because there was nothing to inherit.

At first there was a huge mound of wreaths over her grave. Then the wreaths withered, the ribbons grew yellow and ugly, their inscriptions faded out, and the mound shrank more and more. One day the caretaker threw all the dead wreaths away and made a small mound of earth without plants.

Dora said that we had so many fuchsias that I could put one of them on the grave. And Mother gave me a creeping rose. Although I had decided I would not steal any more, I did take some ivy from the other graves because ivy grows so quickly. Before long the grave was entirely covered with green. Mother saw it and said, "Someone is thinking of her, poor soul!"

I didn't tell her it was I; it was better for Mother to think a real grown person still thought of Mademoiselle.

Mother and Aunt Sophy often said, "A kind word finds a good place." The same, then, must be true of a kind thought. So when I was in the graveyard tending Grandfathers' grave, I always went around sending friendly thoughts down into the forgotten graves. I could imagine the dead, smiling and whispering to each other, "Did you notice that kind thought coming down here?"

9

Aunt Sophy Dies

I was thirteen years old and had my own room in the attic. Through my dormer window I had a view of hundreds of red roofs, as alike as a crowd of people and as different. Those red roofs were my world, my garden full of red flowers, warmed by the sun, watered by the dew and the rain, always brilliant in new tints. When I got to be twenty years old, I was going to write a book full of poems about my red roofs.

In my attic room I lived through love adventures, now triumphant, now despairing, all created by my imagination. Sometimes I was struck by the embarrassing thought that I was just like Aunt Lina, who would embrace the grandfather clock and cry, "My beloved Otto!"

It was all the same to me, as to her, whether or not "he" loved me. It was enough that I loved "him" – unto death, or perhaps even longer. On that foundation I built castles, cathedrals, pyramids of imperishable beauty. All vanished in the blue, like the lovely soap bubbles I still blew out over the red roofs, in spite of my thirteen years.

School bored me to tears, as it had from the first day. I admired some of my schoolfellows, and feared a few. As I could not take teasing, I was an easy target for anyone who found me out.

I yearned to grow up and do what I pleased without asking anyone's permission, to undergo every experience that life could offer, the worst with the best.

One summer night I was awakened by Father. He was standing half-dressed by my bed. "Get up and dress quickly," he said in a strange, solemn voice. "The town is burning."

Wide awake, I jumped out of bed and fumbled for stockings and shoes. "The town is burning!" Never had words stirred such a sweet and yet sad feeling in my heart. For a moment I imagined our house surrounded by flames. In a little while the roof would collapse and I would be trapped. It was a proud thought, especially if I went to my death "without moving a muscle."

I was a coward about physical pain, so I liked to think myself superheroic. But my dream of a heroic death did not last. The next moment I remembered all that I had planned for my future – the books I meant to write, the pictures I was to paint, the music I would compose, music that already sang in my blood; the journeys all around the world, the adventures, the dangers. No, it wouldn't do to miss all that. I must hurry and save my life.

Outside a sweeping wind whipped the flames about, the shadow dance on my walls grew wilder and wilder. My teeth began to chatter, as they always did when I was excited. The little rattling sound they made sounded in my eardrums like the hoofs of galloping horses. I was sublimely exalted and extremely frightened. If I had been asked at that moment to thrust my hand into the flames, I should have done it without hesitation. I understood now how Nero could rejoice when Rome was burning. Rome was his city. Randers was mine. My city, my city – Aunt Sophy's …

Aunt Sophy – !

How could I have forgotten? Aunt Sophy had been ill for some days and had to have absolute quiet. But this evening Aunt Lina had come to get Mother, and when we went to bed Mother had not come back …

I leaned out of the window. Neither Grandmother's house, nor the rest of Palace Square could be seen for a waving mass of flames. I heard a seething, crackling noise. And in the applegreen sky of dawn, partly visible behind and above fire and smoke, whirled black objects of undefinable shape, like wild strange birds.

Aunt Sophy …

Mother called. "Goodness, child, why don't you come?"

Mother was still wearing her hat and coat, so she must have just returned. "How is Aunt Sophy?" I asked quickly. Mother's return could only mean that Aunt Sophy was better. In that case it was all right to enjoy the fire.

My brother, Hans, two years older than I, was leaning out of one of the open windows; my sister Alma, two years younger than I, sat in the frame of the other, hugging her doll. Father stood beside her. People were shouting on the stairs, running back and forth and slamming doors. I heard voices from everywhere, "The town is burning! The town is burning!"

Finally I realized what Mother had said, "Aunt Sophy is dying!"

Mother's eyes were swollen, her lips trembled. Aunt Sophy was also her aunt, her father's sister.

Father put his arms around her. "Well … well – none of us can know that. Perhaps she will get over it. We'll see – we'll see." He did his best to comfort her, but it was

difficult because she did not cry. She only stared into space, muttering, "She is dying – dying – " She did not even seem to notice that Allen, my three-year-old brother, whom we all adored, was awake and calling to her pitifully.

Mother stood up, to go back to Aunt Sophy. Father pointed to the weather vane across the street. "The wind is turning east," he said. "Neither you nor I can be sure that the fire won't spread to our house. Your place is here with the children."

Mother stayed. But she went around as if in a trance, constantly seeming to listen for something beyond her hearing.

I was torn in two. Part of me was in torment because Aunt Sophy, the center of my life since I could remember, was slipping away forever. Another part of me was intoxicated, wild, madly excited by the consciousness of all that those words meant: "The town is burning!"

My parents had left the room. I ran down to the street. People were running around frantically with meaningless objects clutched in their hands – empty bird cages, chickens with their wings tied together, mouse traps, old brooms, pots and pans, clocks, oil paintings. Now and then a couple of panicstricken horses with trailing reins dashed through the crowds. People wept aloud and prayed as they ran. A man sat on some steps writing in a notebook. A woman nursed her child on the sidewalk. In the wavering lights and shadows the faces looked distorted, as though seen through warped glass. Perhaps it was all a dream. Perhaps Randers was not burning at all. A town did not catch fire like a piece of paper too near a match. It was a dream …

I saw some lively, fat hogs with flabby teats. They could have come from only one place, the sties north of the town. What were they doing here? And goats with their kids, and many, many cows. Some of the cows were wild-eyed, blind with terror. They bumped against walls, into wagons. Some of them tumbled halfway down the steps of a basement. Many were frightfully mutilated, their blood flowing from open gashes, their bodies covered with raw burns.

A voice near me said that one of the big stock farms was in flames and that the animals had been set free only with great difficulty.

A wall came down with a thundering crash. Men and beasts leaped aside. Coal-black clouds shot high into the air. Parts of some machinery showered down. Tocsins sounded from St. Martin's Church, the hospital church, and the Catholic church. The noise grew. It bored into me like someone drilling a hole in my back.

For a few seconds there was a pause in the din. Then the lull was broken by a new, distant, clanging, reverberating sound coming quickly nearer. Everyone pressed back against the houses, to let a huge, unfamiliar fire brigade go by – engines, ladders, hose, all much grander than any we had ever seen. People murmured in awe, "Those are the engines from Aarhus!" One man trying to seem wiser than the others sniffed contemptuously, "Aarhus! Pooh! Anybody can see that they are the engines from Hamburg!"

From Hamburg! From Germany! From abroad – ! But then all Europe, perhaps the whole world, knew that Randers, my town, was in flames! I hoped fervently that the engines were from Hamburg. That would make the fire more glamorous.

But hardly had the procession passed when I remembered Aunt Sophy …

It was broad daylight. The sun was rising above the roofs. How long had I roamed about, seeking adventure, inhaling smoke and misery? I felt like seizing something huge

and heavy and hurling it against the sky, smashing its peaceful blue as if it were thin glass.

I began to run. Nothing must keep me from seeing Aunt Sophy, not the Lord Himself, if He really existed.

I fought my way with my fists to the entrance of Palace Square. There policemen, firemen and soldiers had stretched a cordon so tight that only the firemen were allowed to go through. I tried to force my way in, and bit the hand of the fireman who stopped me. In return, I got a resounding box on the ear. I turned and tried to make my way past the gardens at the rear.

Outside the fisherwomen's well house there was a howling, shrieking mob of half-naked men, women and children who had dragged most of the furniture out of their houses and were shouting for the firemen to come. Across the road in the lumberyard all the piles of wood were ablaze. In the midst of them stood the highest chimney of the town. I had watched when it was being built. Now I heard the chimney would fall, and it would cause great damage.

Unexpectedly my nose realized that the women in the well house were frying eels. At once I felt a hunger so great that it made me faint. At the same time I was ashamed of being "common" enough to think of fried eel when Aunt Sophy was dying.

Ordinarily the path behind the gardens was clean and dry, even after rain. Now it was a quagmire. Here also the crowd was as dense as on "free Saturday," when the farmers came to town after the harvest to buy things and enjoy themselves.

A shout grew loud in the troubled air. "The fire has spread to the other side of the spring!" In fact, the fire burned everywhere. The tocsins went on warning people, as if there could be one human being near or far who did not know that the town was in flames.

I squirmed in and out of the crowds until I reached Grandmother's garden. When I was near enough to look through the fence, I saw that Father's pride, the rosebushes, were broken and trampled. Along the narrow, bark-strewn paths, with their low boxwood borders, flowed a thick brown fluid, as though spilt from giant pots. Fire hoses wound in and out everywhere. The fruit trees were blackened, their branches broken, their birds' nests fallen to the ground. Firemen in yellow oilskins and hoods were crawling over Grandmother's high red roof. From both sides the hoses played on the house. The water streamed down the windows.

Beside the garden, separated from it by a narrow path, stood the engine factory, ablaze. At that moment one of the boilers burst. Wheels and rings whirled high in the air and crashed to the ground. The heat was intense. I felt my hair, to see if it had caught fire.

Water wagons barred the gate to the garden; close by, hissing like a mad cat, stood the steam engine. But I was bound to get in.

I took the fence in one jump. My dress caught and ripped on the spiked picket.

I was in the garden, walking through the slough. A fireman called to me. I ignored him. He tried to stop me, but I tore myself away. I was driven by passion, gratitude, reverence and, above all, by the indescribable tenderness which Aunt Sophy had awakened in me, a deep response that would go with her to the grave.

When I reached the kitchen with its red brick floor, everything was wrong. The two pails of water were missing, the floor was dirty, even the ashes from the old-fashioned stove seemed to have been scattered all over the place.

Then I heard a sound that pierced the very marrow of my bones. I had heard the sound once three years before. I had never mentioned it to anyone, but had borne it like an open wound. Sanko, our dog, had died on a cold winter night in our dark attic. I had been with him. Three years had passed since then, yet it seemed to me that I still need only put out my hand to touch the trembling, gasping animal.

I had kept what I felt to myself. So the memory had gone deeper and deeper, and become increasingly painful. Sanko died not only on that night long ago, he died again and again in my heart – until this minute when Aunt Sophy's death rattle shook my body as well as my soul. She, the best person on earth, the one I could spare least …

A couple of firemen stamped through the kitchen, shouting and laughing, and slammed down the two water pails.

The door opened. Grandmother stood in the opening, tall and erect. This was the way she must have looked when she was younger and still more beautiful. Her black eyes flashed. "In there an old woman is fighting with death," she said. She made a commanding gesture. "Let no unnecessary noise disturb her last moments!"

"The chief has given orders," stammered one of the men. "The house is in danger – we have to – "

Grandmother waved them aside. "You heard what I said!" The men no longer existed for her.

She noticed me. Turning to the door, she pushed me gently into the other room and gently closed the door. She laid her finger on her lips. I did not move. She sank down in the armchair beside the stove. Over her head hung a picture of Voltaire. I was struck by the strong resemblance between his superior, benignly smiling face and Aunt Sophy's.

Usually a high, three-paneled screen covered with faded French wallpaper hid Aunt Sophy's bed, hid the straw mattress, the thick, homespun linen sheets and the coarse, woolen comforter. But on this day the three panels of the screen were folded together. The bed lay exposed in all its poverty. The pillow was not even covered with a white case. Where the sheet had been pulled awry by Aunt Sophy's tossing body, I caught a glimpse of a hard striped pillow, covered with horsehair cloth.

In this ascetic bed lay a strange and terrifying Aunt Sophy. Her face seemed shriveled into a tangle of wrinkles. Perspiration ran down her forehead, over her pale, sunken cheeks, into the hollows of her moving jaws. Her hands had always resembled a map of the world, the veins forming rivers with strange names. Now they looked as if they were full of swollen worms, writhing over the naked bones.

Where was her lovely, peaceful smile? Where her illuminating wisdom, her deep firm calm?

She lay there, in the burning town where the tocsins tolled and called. She lay there, groaning and gasping, her eyes protruding in nameless terror. Terror of what – ? She was the only perfect human being I had ever known …

Now and then she looked about, as if seeing something she had lost or forgotten and must have at any price. Suddenly, with a strength inconceivable in her emaciated body, she sat up, folded her hands, and began in a high, singing voice: *"Our Father, Who art in Heaven – "*

She got no further. Her lips moved. But she had forgotten the words.

Her impotent anguish was more than I could bear. I threw myself on the floor before her bed and screamed the Lord's Prayer to help her. The sound did not reach her consciousness. She no longer heard any human voice.

After a short exhausted silence, she began again, whispering, imploring, desperate. "No – no – ! Not St. Helena! Great, powerful, merciful God – not St. Helena! Take my life! Take my soul! But save him – let him return to Corsica – or to Elba – to the pine woods of Corsica – "

She went on, now trying to remember the Lord's Prayer, now entreating the Lord to spare Napoleon. Now and then she fell back, silent, gasping.

Grandmother went to the bed and laid her hand on Aunt Sophy's forehead. "Rest in peace, dear! Rest in peace! You have earned it well!"

Aunt Sophy heard nothing. But abruptly she pushed Grandmother aside and rose higher and higher until slowly she stood up, swaying back and forth. She cried in agony, "I know – I know – I am the greatest sinner that ever lived! But now I'm asking for mercy – do you hear? I'm asking mercy for the greatest sinner that ever lived – !"

She collapsed in Grandmother's arms. For a while it looked as though her struggles had ended. But she began again about Napoleon, Elba and St. Helena.

Grandmother remembered I was there. She looked at me and said quietly, "Go home, child. This is not for you!"

I did not answer. I could not move.

The door was torn open. The fire chief saluted Grandmother and remained silent a moment, as if expecting her to speak to him. He gave a sign to the men standing behind him in the kitchen. "Allow me," he said to Grandmother, "to send for a stretcher. I cannot guarantee your safety here for more than an hour at the most. The wind is changing."

Grandmother turned toward him. "The Lord has protected us through many hours and years, good and bad. I cannot believe that He will fail us now. My sister-in-law can have only a few minutes left. Let her die here, where she lived, where she was born – "

The fire chief hesitated. "But the responsibility," he said. "The responsibility – "

Grandmother seemed to grow taller. And suddenly it came to me whom she resembled. It was a figure I had seen in a picture, one of Michelangelo's sibyls, in the Sistine Chapel. Grandmother motioned the fire chief to go.

"The responsibility is in His hands. Let it remain there!"

I did not see Aunt Sophy again.

How I got back home and into my own bed in the attic I do not know. When I opened my eyes again, I saw the glimmering of the fire and the shadows of rising and falling flames on the white walls. The room was hot, but inside I was trembling and as cold as ice.

The fire lasted three days and three nights.

10

I Go into Exile – and Meet a Prince

During the summer of my fifteenth year, I became "secretly engaged." In Copenhagen on a visit, I joined several other young people on a picnic. We strolled by a lake in the woods, where thick trees hung out over the water and shaded a narrow path. I was walking with a young man. He limped, like my idol, Lord Byron, although he was much less handsome. Suddenly the young man kissed me, and then we were "engaged."

I was not very deeply in love with him. My watchful nose usually told me that he had had fish for dinner. Also, I was sure he wore Jaeger woolen underwear, which seemed inappropriate for a near-Byron. I wrote glowing letters to him, however, letters overflowing with a love beyond death. I stole romantic phrases freely from the great writers, knowing that since he did not care for literature, my future husband would not catch me. We decided to marry as soon as he was promoted in his work at the customhouse. Meanwhile my parents had entered me in continuation school for courses in English, French and history. I also took Danish grammar, the existence of which I had not even suspected until then. I studied the piano under a young organist who had just come to town.

I did what I could to fall in love with that organist. I really tried. He was a composer, he played the organ and the violin. But although his face was gentle and refined, although he looked charmingly tubercular and had the same kind of drooping, melancholy mustache as my Danish idol, the poet Jens Peter Jacobsen, I did not succeed. It was not my fault – his shabby, down-at-heel slippers embroidered with stags' heads, his thick gray woolen socks, his frayed trousers, and his tobacco-stained handkerchief, made it impossible.

But there remained our music. When he played the violin and I accompanied him, I dreamed that we were giving a gala concert in a packed auditorium and that after the concert the audience would unharness our horses from the carriage and pull us in triumph through the streets. Then, as soon as my lesson was over, I would go to my little attic room and write to the boy in Copenhagen, stretching my love over many sheets of stationery.

That winter the great Norwegian poet, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, came to Randers to lecture on "Monogamy and Polygamy," a subject stirring all minds at that time. In this lecture he advocated, for men as for women, absolute chastity before marriage.

The whole town was excited about the coming of Bjørnson. I took it for granted that my parents would take me to see and hear the famous author. However, they bought tickets only for themselves. I nearly cried my eyes out, but to no avail. "The mayor is not going to take his daughter to such a lecture, and neither are we," they said. "And that's final."

On the evening of the lecture I felt that my dignity as a grown up had been outraged. When my parents had gone, I wrote a long letter to my fiancé. Naturally, so important a letter had to be mailed at once. I put on my coat, muff and fur cap, and went out into the clear, frosty night. On the way to the post office I met my fate.

This was a man with small hands and feet and a tiny mustache, waxed and perfumed, whom I had known for years, since he stood behind the counter in the grocery store where I spent all my scant allowance on candy.

He had even sent me a Christmas card, anonymously. But it contained six lines of verse, all rhymed. I was very proud of that, since he was twelve years older than I. Yet it had never before occurred to me to fall in love with him. If he had been a hunchback, or had limped or squinted, I could have borne it. Instead, he had a name which was simply impossible in Denmark because not only was it a common name, it was slightly ridiculous. He was called Mads Madsen.

However, when I met him that evening, with the snow crackling under our feet and our breath making thin white clouds, he became my fate. Together we walked past the post office and out of the town and sat down on a bench. It was so cold that we should certainly have frozen if we had stayed there any length of time. He kissed me and I knew at once that I was his for eternity. Since I was not yet sixteen, that was a long, long time. I seemed filled with sunshine. I drank in his kisses – the first real kisses I had ever tasted – and the fragrance from his hair and his mustache. If it had been possible, I would have wrapped each of his kisses in tissue paper and put them in a box lined with cotton.

The letter addressed to my fiancé lay forgotten and crushed in my coat pocket.

When we separated, I felt that surely I must belong to the mysterious category of "fallen" women. But fallen woman or not, it was wonderful.

Without doubt he was the right one, the one destined for me since the beginning of time. I do not remember whether or not on that first evening, in my superabundance of happiness, I suggested to him that we meet death together. Perhaps I did not remember to do so until later. At any rate, I learned many years afterward that he had been in terror of me because I frequently urged common suicide.

Could anyone imagine anything more beautiful, I said, than to die and be laid in a common grave? Of course, people from far and near would make pilgrimages to our resting place and eulogize this couple who had loved so much they had sought death together. At that time Henrik Ibsen had not yet written his Rosmersholm. I like to think that he got the idea from me – by thought transference.

My happiness knew no bounds. I wrote scores of poems. If only I could have brought myself to ask him to change his name, everything would have been perfect. I could not bear to go through life with that ridiculous name. Therefore I made no plans for our wedding. I did not dare to think that far ahead.

My letters to my Copenhagen fiancé benefited greatly by my happiness. He wrote ardently that "never has man had such letters from a woman." While he discussed final details of our married life and household expenditures (he seemed a very practical man), I secretly met my "real" lover several evenings a week. We kissed endlessly, and I talked, also endlessly. The odor of peat smoke from near-by huts and the sour stench from a pigsty combined with his own glorious barber's smell to make me drunk with ecstasy.

The only wormwood in my happiness came when my other fiancé wrote, insisting that I accept his ring and make our engagement public. I had not told Number Two about Number One – it would have been too embarrassing. But at last I wrote him a "final" letter, and had Number Two mail it. I received a crestfallen reply, saying he would love me his whole life, and if ever I should change my mind …

He got his promotion the next year, promptly married, and lived happily until his death.

I had deviated slightly from the truth in my letter. I had solemnly announced that I would never marry. I had decided, I said, to renounce the world and "the temptations of the flesh." What this meant, I did not know, but it sounded impressive.

The summer came, and with it a world's fair in Copenhagen. To my great joy, my parents went there to see it. Now every evening I could roam around with my beloved to my heart's desire. What he said, I do not know, for I was walking on clouds, hearing beautiful, faraway music. In the daytime he still stood behind the grocery store counter.

His occupation so humiliated me that I suggested we go to one of the South Sea islands, where we could live on nothing while I wrote poems which would be published when we had died and some missionary found them in our empty palm-leaf hut.

In the evening we sat on the sofa in our large second-floor corner room. The street lamps threw a magic light on us. Hours later my beloved would steal away, while I went to my attic and wrote in my diary. Of course, I went around telling everybody, under the promise of secrecy. The whole thing was so innocent that I had no idea anyone might regard it otherwise.

The minute my parents returned, their friends hurried to tell them of their daughter's outrageous behavior. I do not know what Father and Mother thought, but they acted as if I had committed the most frightful crime and put an indelible blot on the family name. Father wrote to my beloved forbidding him ever to cross our threshold.

Actually, the young man deserved a great deal of praise. He had in every way been considerate of my youth and inexperience. He sent a dignified note to my mother, asking her to tell me that his feelings had not changed. I thought of committing suicide – all by myself, this time. It would at least punish my parents. But I still had a great urge to know all about life. So I decided to turn my back on my native land instead and go into voluntary exile.

I searched the newspapers for a promising advertisement and found this one: "Wanted – A musical and lively young girl as governess and companion for the daughter of a consul on a barren island." I answered promptly with a twenty-page letter in which I rambled on about everything under the sun. No answer came. But one evening a few weeks later when I was having a party, the bell rang. I rushed downstairs, opened the door, and found myself face to face with a small deformed man who asked for me.

He introduced himself as the man who had advertised. I forgot his crooked back, his paralyzed arm hanging limp. I saw only his warm, beautiful eyes and lovable smile. I invited him in to enjoy my party, and everyone there felt his charm as I did.

Some weeks later I landed on the bare, sandy, dune-bordered island of Laesø, between Jutland and the Swedish coast. I sat beside the stagecoach driver, a handsome, swarthy, curly-haired young man, as we moved at a snail's pace along the deep ruts. The road was edged with telegraph poles, with white porcelain bells at the top, reminiscent of artificial lilies of the valley. In my mind I already saw myself married and living on the island, bearing children, longing for the Danish beechwoods and finally dying in a rapid decline. This was a sickness I esteemed highly because it worked so quickly and probably did not hurt much.

The island was purple with heather. Nowhere could one see a tree, a hill, a shadow. Here and there I noticed low houses thickly roofed with layers of seaweed held down by

stones and logs. Toward the west, where the great gales came from, the roofs extended to the ground. Leaning against each roof a ladder reached to the broad ridge. I saw elderly people using these ridges as porches, basking there in the sun, knitting or dozing.

In the center of the island the houses of the small "town" clustered around a little white church. A short distance away one saw the ruins of an ancient chapel that had been buried in the sand for a century. Beyond the town the island grew narrower, like a long finger, crooked with rheumatism, probing into the angry water.

When I arrived at the consul's the family was all standing in front of the house under a waving flag to receive me. Besides the consul, there were his wife, their two small children, and my pupil, daughter of an earlier marriage. I felt at home at once among them.

The year I spent in that quiet home was an unforgettable one, even though a thread of tragedy underlay the calm surface. The consul's first wife had left him on their bridal night. His second had died insane after a few years of marriage. This wife, a slender, melancholy woman, sought solace in religion.

A small fortune enabled the master of the house to act as honorary consul for a couple of distant countries. His duties included supervision of the lightships near by and watching for ships in distress. I often stood at the top of the high lookout post in a howling gale. The wooden platforms creaked and swayed back and forth, threatening to wrench their supports from the earth. But I could not take my eyes from the wild white-capped sea.

As a governess I was undoubtedly deficient. Yet I had a great need of communication. Lisbeth, my pupil, longed for adventure as intensely as I, so that in a few days we had become friends. We both were ungodly, we both despised the sanctimoniousness surrounding us. The everlasting prayer meetings, most of which we could not escape, aroused us to sharp, though private, criticism.

Then there was the dismal unhappiness between husband and wife. At first I was sure I could reconcile them, and began to tell the wife what beautiful things her husband had said about her; then I told him how she praised his great talents, his fine eyes, and so on. Naturally, my fine efforts fell flat. Still, both people remained fond of me, and confided their grievances to my sympathetic, sixteen-year-old heart.

Nor did my fancy neglect such a splendid opportunity. I told myself that should the consul's wife commit suicide or die of a broken heart, I might have to become wife number four. For how could I be cruel enough to refuse a man already, or almost, a widower for the third time? If we should really marry, I decided, he would have to shave off his full beard, to make him look hollow-cheeked and more interesting. Withal, the consul was a fascinating man, full of self-attained knowledge and of humor. Doubtless that was why three women had deluded themselves, and him, into believing that with a little good will one could overlook his physical defects.

His deformity, he told me, had made his childhood a torture. An incredibly stupid and ignorant physician had tied heavy leaden weights to his wrists to stretch his paralyzed arm and force his shoulders to straighten. Of course, the other boys in the only school on the island soon discovered that the weights made it impossible for him to defend himself. It became their favorite sport to tease the helpless boy into a white-hot rage until finally, with waving arms and swinging weights, he rushed into the sea, to the mocking laughter of his persecutors.

Perhaps he had been born with a violent temper and it had grown still worse from the humiliations of his childhood and his later unhappy marriages. At times, besides the tempests out of doors, there were raging storms indoors.

I was still as fond as ever of my sweetheart with the impossible name. Daily I went to meet the mailman, in gales, in rain and in sleet. But no word came from him. I never dreamed that he might be "faithless" to me. Of course he longed for me as I longed for him. Only his hurt over Father's letter kept him silent.

Day after day I wrote to him. Something restrained me from sending the letters, however. Almost as soon as I finished one of my voluminous scrawls, I tore it up.

In a way my mute beloved had a rival – George Gordon Byron. I had read in Danish translation all of his works that I could lay my hands on; and during the past year I had read him in English. Even the thought of his clubfoot added to his appeal. And he had written the words I never forgot:

"Mans love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

Although two years older than Lisbeth, I told her of my passion for Byron, I told her all the secrets of my life, and also the contents of all the books I had read and still remembered. I confided that I was going to write poems, all of them sonnets, since that poetic form seemed to me the most refined. Also – but this was a very deep secret – I was writing the story of my life, my memoirs. Lisbeth admired me greatly, and naturally I was delighted to have a willing audience for my fantasies. Then, she would sit curled up in a big armchair for hours while I played Beethoven on the old-fashioned square piano. I always ended with improvisations which I not only thought quite good, but worthy of following the slow movement of the "Moonlight Sonata," or the "Appassionata," both miles beyond my capacity. In the twilight the consul often came in and sat quietly in a corner. I pretended not to know I had another listener. The silent darkness seemed to inspire me and the melodies flowed from my fingertips. I was musical enough to play without too flagrant dissonances, but no more. It was very childish, but for me very wonderful. In my playing I expressed all my longing for him, and my homesickness for my parents, Palace Square, Grandmother and Aunt Sophy.

Every two weeks we had parties on the island, when the captain of one lightship came ashore and the other captain came from Jutland to take his place. Unfortunately, all the captains were so bewhiskered that it was impossible for me to fall in love with any of them.

They were all married, but what had love and marriage to do with each other? It was altogether my private business with whom I chose to fall in love; it concerned no one else in the world, least of all the object of my adoration. Besides, hearing the consul and his wife quarreling at night in the parlor next to my room had made me vow that, love or no love, I would never, never marry. I would rather die.

In no time at all Christmas was at hand. I wished to give presents to many people, but my salary barely covered the two journeys home, at Christmas and in summer. When he engaged me, the consul had mentioned the subject of my salary. I dismissed it with a gesture – money was something vulgar which decent people preferred not to discuss.

Money did play an important part in our daily lives, but so did other things, and they were not mentioned, except perhaps to one's physician.

After much thought I bought a quantity of burlap and a pound of red yarn and began to embroider laundry bags for Mother, Grandmother, friends, cousins, aunts and, of course, for the consul and his family. The large fancy monograms and broad Grecian borders made an impressive decoration.

When I went home, would I see *him* again? The journey seemed endless. Would he meet me at the station with a ring in a small red box filled with pink cotton? Had he called on Father and Mother and persuaded them to agree to our wedding? I was, after all, sixteen years old …

My whole family was at the station. *His* name was not mentioned.

But the next evening Father sent me to the post office with a letter that had to go by the night train. I prayed that I would meet *him*. Then I chose the street where there was the greatest chance of meeting him.

And there he came.

I did not have a stroke.

He greeted me, put his arm through mine, and whispered, "You understand, don't you, that I could do nothing after that letter from your father?"

I understood. If he had spoken Chinese, I would have understood him. We walked through the snowy night to the small bench where we had sat on the first frosty evening. We did not freeze to the bench.

I have no idea why I gave that man my first real love. I do not remember ever having discussed anything of importance with him. But it was doubtless a feather in his cap to have an innocent, homely, vivacious little girl openly infatuated with him.

Probably I radiated happiness when I went home, for I was not asked to take letters to the post office again. And I was closely watched.

Some days after Christmas there was to be the usual dance at the club. This year I was old enough to go. The seamstress came to make over Mother's wedding dress for me – my first grown-up evening gown. I was deft with my fingers, and the seamstress and I worked quickly while I told her in strict confidence of my secret love.

In the afternoon I suddenly felt tired and feverish. My hands grew damp, everything looked strange. I spent the evening lying on a sofa in the living room. The next morning Mother sent for the doctor. I had influenza.

He and I had not arranged any future meeting, but I knew without being told that he was going to the dance. I was determined to go, too – determined to see him, dance with him, be near him …

The evening came. I wept and declared that I was going. Father and Mother nodded at each other. Mother said, "In God's name then, child, go to the dance!"

I got out of bed, and immediately collapsed on the floor. I was not fated to go to the dance. That disappointment stung for many years. Who knows what might have happened if I had seen my beloved again!

As it was, I saw him no more. When the holidays were over, I returned to my barren island and discovered, to my great joy, that I had been missed very much. The family lighted the Christmas tree again in my honor, they received me with flowers and gifts, and Lisbeth and the consul had written me poems.

That winter was unusually severe. Northern lights flickered and glowed in the sky. The snow did not melt, although the sun shone every day. In the afternoons I tramped across the snowy heath until I reached the sea. Under my arm I carried a book and a bottle of hot coffee wrapped in several heavy woolen stockings. I would bury myself in the dunes, drink my coffee, and read.

One day the sun shone so warmly I decided to lie down on a small elevation on the way to the sea and read. My coat was only a short fur-trimmed jacket, but I did not care. I was in the middle of *Niels Lyhne*, a novel by the Danish poet J. P. Jacobsen, whom all young writers then tried to imitate. Suddenly I felt a chill, and realized that my back was ice-cold.

This time it was not influenza, but a serious attack of pleurisy. Naturally I did not tell the doctor I had been lying for several hours on my stomach in the snow.

The consul and his family did everything they could to get me well in time for my birthday on the twentieth of March. The day before, the first boat in two weeks succeeded in getting across to us with mail and packages. There was no letter from him.

Among my gifts was Karl Eltze's biography of Byron, with an etching of the poet. No work of art, Greek, Roman, or modern, ever filled me with such radiant joy as this picture with its unearthly beauty, beauty that belongs to genius. It was as if Byron rose from his grave to come into my room, to stay by me day and night. With all his irresistible attraction for women, Byron never made a quicker or more violent conquest than that of the sick little girl on Laesø, more than half a century after his death. I kissed his pictured face again and again, without feeling at all unfaithful to him in Randers. It was simply that I loved two men at once. I had done it before and was to do it again often enough. Byron was helpless and had to put up with it.

Few exciting events occurred on the small island. There was a shipwreck now and then, but always too far away for me to see, and nobody ever drowned. But we did have a visit from a prince.

In the early summer it was announced that Prince Valdemar, a naval officer and the youngest son of our king, Christian IX, would come to the island on an inspection trip. Captain Maegaard would accompany him.

It seemed beyond belief that a real live prince should stay in our house. Yet the consul was the first man on the island, except for the bailiff, who lived on music and drink and so was not fit to receive distinguished visitors. I bought a new diary. "Truly, it was not prophesied at her cradle that she was to be under the same roof as a prince," I wrote, "and was later to go up the church aisle at his side …"

Here I stopped. It was better not to anticipate too far ahead.

No one knew exactly when the prince would arrive. We had to be prepared. We sent for all the fine food that could be bought in cans and jars, and soon had enough for a long siege. Gertrude was coached to offer the courses from the left side, and not to tap the guest on the shoulder when she wanted him to take another helping. The younger children were taught to bow and curtsy.

At the beginning of summer vacation, the consul's wife had to go away to stay with her mother, who was seriously ill. She appointed me acting hostess.

Daily Gertrude made cookies and daily we ate them, for, of course, they had to be quite fresh for the prince. The consul wrote dozens of "improvised" speeches. He would

stand for hours in front of a looking glass and practice them, with gestures. Soon we found the pages tucked under all the mirrors.

The consul and the schoolmaster both decided that all the island houses should be illuminated, and each of the school-children arranged a triangle of candles in the window of his parents' cottage.

I secretly prepared my virgin bower in the hope that should the exalted guest wish to spend the night, he might use it. Should I put Thorvaldsen's *Three Graces* on my bureau under the window? Should I tear Byron's picture out of the book and frame it, to show the prince that I was familiar with the world of the mind? But perhaps the prince did not know who Byron was. Royal persons did not have to be as well educated as the rest of us. Should I leave my new powder puff on the bureau, Or would that be indecent? I had powder, of course, but was afraid to use it. Finally, I placed my pink pincushion in the center of the dresser, and the hymnbook from my confirmation on the bureau. The prince need not know that I was not exactly pious or devout. I hid my diary under the mattress. Although I had told all my secrets to anyone willing to listen, I would rather have been skinned alive than have a soul read those pages.

One morning very early Bjørn, the tailor, came rushing up to the house with a telegram. Immediately the house was like a disturbed anthill. The consul ran around in his shirt sleeves, his suspenders dangling over his uniform trousers. He climbed the lookout to scan the horizon with a long telescope. He gave countless directions to Gertrude and Lisbeth and me.

Of course we must have a triumphal arch for the prince to come through. Quickly Lisbeth and I wove a garland of flowers and leaves and hung it up. Did one or did one not spread rugs in front of the house for male royal persons? The dictionary said nothing about this, neither did the court guide. In the kitchen Gertrude labored on the "completely improvised luncheon" that had caused us so much planning. She had breathed on each wineglass before rubbing it; and polished the silver to the last degree.

I was decked in my very best, which was nothing much. Around my neck I had tied a black velvet ribbon holding a gold cross; on my little finger I wore a ring with a large amethyst and two small pearls. I thought myself ready for any occasion.

Suppose … I looked at myself in my small mirror and blushed. Suppose – well, I was about as homely as I could be and that was a long way from being a raving beauty. Still, there was Countess Danner, nee Louise Rasmussen; she was certainly no beauty, and she was made a countess and later married King Frederic VII morganatically. "Married to his left hand," they called it. Right or left, who cared? Aunt Sophy had been left-handed all her life.

As for being a raving beauty, well, royalty was so used to being courted by beautiful women that they might prefer someone plain. Just as with cake – if one had to eat cake from morning until night, a piece of bread and butter would taste ten times as good. Suppose that he … that he … and I …

Of course, he would think he was the ruler. But I would certainly put through some good new laws, for instance, one to make millionaires give half their money to the poor. And I should quickly do away with schools for rich children. There would be just one kind of school for all.

I came back to earth and sent Lisbeth to the school to remind the children of the illumination. The candles had stood in the cottage windows for two months in the sunshine. Now they were bent to one side or the other, and some of them were half-melted. But the islanders knew what was proper. In every cottage the candles stood burning in the broad daylight.

The consul rushed in. “They are here! They are here!” Out he ran again, in his gala uniform with the three-cornered hat on his head and the ribbon of the order of Dannebrog in his buttonhole.

Down the road came the prince and Captain Maegaard, both in white flannels and navy caps. I peeped through the window. Prince Valdemar had whiskers, just like my father! Why couldn’t he have been content with a little mustache?

The prince started at the sight of our rather pathetic triumphal arch, but then, of course, we had wanted him to notice it. Then he entered our house. The floors had been scrubbed so clean that the bones of dead men and camels bleaching in the desert could not have been whiter. Round the parlor table stood six large, upholstered armchairs. On either side of the piano were the two most conspicuous vases, flanking the “Sonata Pathetique.” I hoped the prince would ask who played. The consul would say, as he always did, “Katharina plays like an angel!” Whereupon, with a masterful movement of my hand I would sweep aside the music, open the piano and play the “Pathetique” by heart, from beginning to end. The places where I fumbled could be skipped. The prince would be too overwhelmed to notice.

In the evening, when the full moon had risen, we would walk together across the heath under the unearthly northern lights. He would tell me that never, never had he heard music that affected him as had mine … I would not answer. Soon afterward he would gently grasp my arm, raise my head, look into my eyes, and say as though uttering a sacred vow, “You – or no one!” And our pact would be sealed.

I was presented to both gentlemen and we sat down around the table. Lisbeth brought wine and cookies. The prince spoke, and he was in no way more noteworthy than any of the young men in Randers. He looked nice. Unfortunately, one could not fall in love with him.

As for the piano, he sat with his back to it. The conversation dealt with lightships and mail boats and harbor projects – things about which I knew nothing. My lips were glued together. How could I make an impression on him, I wondered. Now and then he looked at me, smiling, and said something directly to me. I answered, and again my lips glued themselves together.

At last the big moment came. The consul said, “Shall we have a little luncheon? Altogether improvised, you understand. What can one do when the mistress of the house is away?”

The prince nodded kindly. “Unfortunately,” he said with regret, “I am not able to stay with you for lunch. I had promised friends in Frederikshavn to spend the rest of the day with them.” And he added with a smile, “I am having some slight indisposition, and the doctor has put me, I’m sorry to say, on a diet of crackers and milk.”

An hour later the three gentlemen went to the sea by the narrow path in the heather. In the kitchen Gertrude cursed and scolded. Here she had scrubbed the kitchen, and

herself, and the prince had not so much as stuck his head through the door. I knew how she felt.

The consul returned happily. “Now we shall eat all the fine food ourselves, eh, Katharina?” He turned the heavy chair the prince had used upside down, and wrote on the wooden frame the date and year, and added, “On this chair His Royal Highness Prince Valdemar sat from eleven forty-five to twelve-thirty.” Then he took the prince’s wineglass and scratched with his diamond ring, “Prince Valdemar drank two glasses of Malaga from this glass.”

I was disappointed. I had expected a romance, and no matter how I looked at what had happened, I could not make it seem like a romance. Well, I thought, now I shall be spared the trouble of ruling the country. And what about my fiancé in Randers? Suppose I had been married to “the left hand” of a royal prince! One might, of course, deceive a little, but it was risky. One might easily be imprisoned or exiled or something equally unpleasant.

That evening I went to bed with Byron’s picture under my pillow. I slept soundly and I slept long.

11

I Go to Copenhagen

Eventually, and with heavy hearts, my parents gave up even their minimum ambition for me – to see me a respectable telegrapher, growing old enough in government service to collect a pension. My temperament, they feared, was much too frivolous for such a responsible position. My father had long since relinquished the hope that I would go through the university and fit myself to be head of a girls’ school, or perhaps become a physician – for women only, of course. The Russian woman who taught me languages and history told him that I was gifted, that I had brains and that I ought to study.

But Father knew that I was also superficial, that I began many things with enthusiasm and a week later dropped them with an equal indifference. My father drew consolation from my sister Harriet, who had decided to become a physicist. According to my plans, she would soon be Mr. Edison’s secretary and would help him invent.

I had brought my parents much sorrow. They admitted it frankly. I had never learned how to walk, to greet people properly, to manage my hair. I did not know how to put on or remove my gloves, how to lift my skirt so it did not fall into the gutter, how to fasten my veil like other girls, to make it hang straight above the upper lip and not to have it crawl eternally inside my mouth. I had been observed eating chocolate cakes filled with whipped cream on the main street of the town. And Heaven knows how many of our neighbors had seen me smoking cigarettes beside an open window. These were not crimes, but they caused talk, which was almost worse. Would I ever mend my ways? Mother prayed to God; Father relied on time and experience.

There was, however, still one ray of hope. I was undoubtedly musical. Three months’ preparation with one of the great teachers in Copenhagen would enable me to settle down as a piano teacher in Randers. Perhaps I would even learn good manners, would become, not of course a real lady like my sister Alma, but at least decently behaved.

Three months in Copenhagen would be frightfully expensive. One hour with a great teacher cost more than Mother spent for a week's food for the whole family. But my parents were willing to make any sacrifice to obtain for their children educations suitable for people of quality – a class to which we very much wished to belong.

My father took me to Copenhagen to be heard by Victor Bendix, who was a pianist, composer and conductor all in one. I, of course, fell in love without wasting a minute. Bendix said that most of his students were further advanced than I, and suggested that I study with one of them. I said flatly, "I will play with you or no one."

That settled the matter. He assured my father that I had a beautiful touch and a good ear. What more could one want?

Father arranged for me to live in the home of a jeweler's widow with three daughters and a son, all unmarried. Their apartment was large and comfortable. I shared a room with the oldest daughter. There was, I learned, another son. He had, it seems, just married a girl right out of "an unmentionable place." I was delighted. Now I could not only meet one of those mysterious creatures, I could talk with her, learn her dramatic life story, and then write a novel. Alas, when we did meet, I found her a mousy creature, no more interesting or remarkable than any of my schoolmates in Randers.

The unmarried son was away when I arrived. But I was much impressed by the pride with which his mother said, "My son, Abel, thinks …" and the sisters said, "Brother Abel says …" One morning he was there. He had a pink face, pink hair, and, I think, pink eyes. His mouth was no bigger than a strawberry, and when he smiled or ate it became a tiny red "o." He was short and squarely built and looked extraordinarily well scrubbed. I soon saw that he was interested in me, although not enough to commit suicide if I should refuse him. Still, I was terrified. Naturally, if he asked for my hand I would have to say yes. But then I would have to be the mother of all his pink children. I would have to marry him. But I was just as certain that I would also have to betray him with a lover. That reflection helped me to resign myself.

At the same time I was still desperately in love with Mads Madsen, the man in Randers. He had not changed his name, although it would have cost him only thirty kroner. Yet the smell of his hair and mustache haunted my dreams. I tried to find out where one could buy the stuff he put on his hair. To have a bottle for my own would have been just like possessing him day and night.

Shortly after I went to Copenhagen, however, Mother wrote that Mads Madsen had married one of my school friends. So ended my first really great love. But I resolved to find another as soon as possible.

That fall Henrik Ibsen's *Bygmester Solness* (*Master Builder*) was published. Everybody talked about the book, but nobody seemed to know how to pronounce it. Was it a short or a long "o"? To me it was very important.

Georg Brandes' brother, Edvard, an author of books and plays, was the reviewer on *Politiken* at that time. He was known as a great Don Juan. I think that was why I decided to write him rather than his brother. In my letter I asked him to please tell me how to pronounce "Solness." I also told him, thinking it very relevant, that I was going to be a concert pianist and a composer and would perhaps conduct my own compositions. I did not conceal from him that I wrote poetry as well as prose and would like to become a famous painter.

Two days later, just after morning coffee as I was about to begin torturing the piano with four hours' exercise, the maid brought me a card: DR. EDVARD BRANDES.

My cheeks felt as though the blood were going to burst through the skin, but I said, "Show the gentleman in," as haughtily as possible. As soon as the maid's back was turned I smoothed my hair and looked at my nails, always my weakest point.

In came an elegant gentleman in an expensive fur-lined coat, bringing with him a wave of *peau de Russe*, a goldheaded cane, and beige gloves which felt like a baby's skin. I was still crimson, but I managed to ask him to sit down. He let me tell him a few more chapters of my highly interesting life story. Then he said, "So you would like to know how Bygmester Solness pronounces his name? Are you also going to become an actress?"

I had never thought of it, but the idea immediately seemed irresistible. "I would like very much to play Hilde," I said promptly.

"Hilde? The star part? Why not – why don't you and I play them together, Hilde and Solness?"

If I had only had a hint of what was coming! To act Hilde on the stage with a real Don Juan … It would be almost like acting with Byron himself, although Edvard Brandes was not nearly as handsome as Byron, nor did he limp. I'm sure it would not have been any trouble at all to have fallen in love with him. But this – ! I was completely unprepared for such a suggestion, and from him, and the tears suddenly welled up in my eyes.

At that moment Brandes rose gracefully, took his hat and his gloves, kissed my hand, and murmured that it was indeed a pleasure to have met me. At the door he turned. "Will you tell me how you happened to write to me?" His voice sounded strained.

Again I was taken by surprise. I stood there awkwardly silent.

"Did I, long ago, know your mother?" The words fairly burst from him.

My mouth dropped open. I was awe-struck at this thought. He shook his head in bewilderment and left.

Had he met my mother? He was old enough to have been a grown man when she was a girl. What an exciting possibility! But immediately I had to relinquish it. For Mother had been in love with Father since she was fifteen and he was seventeen, and they had been engaged for twelve years. When would she have had time for any other love affairs?

So my adventure with the elegant Brandes died before it had come to life.

Still, there were others.

There was my teacher, Victor Bendix. From the beginning my passion for him never lessened. But I did not dare lift my eyes that high. His wife was a real baroness and, much more important, the goddaughter of Hans Christian Andersen. I had often grieved that Hans Christian had not visited Randers before he died. Then I could have met him; we would have fallen in love with each other, although I was then only four. Mohammed had fallen in love with his twelfth wife when she was nine … And Hans Christian Andersen was as ugly as I. To have been his wife and to have helped him write fairy tales – !

Tuesday morning, nine o'clock, was my lesson hour. I was always early and trembling with eagerness. Bendix came in precisely one minute after nine, smelling fresh

and clean. A maid followed him with a cup of coffee which my nose told me was extremely strong. We sat and talked while he drank his coffee.

His legs were much too short. But I could have looked at him for hours, with his brown eyes, and his big square white teeth strong enough to bite through glasses and cups. Sometimes the corner of his mouth curled so that one wanted to kiss him just there. When I was playing and used the wrong fingering, he would take my hand and place it properly, finger by finger. That always made me feel drowsy, and a little excited, too. But I did not let him know.

We had a great deal to talk about besides music. Very often he put a lighted cigarette between my lips and we sat by a small semicircular table, talking and talking. I sometimes wondered if he preferred my conversation to my music. After a while we went back to work – I played, or he played for me, or we played at sight for four hands, which I loved most of all.

I felt as though I had wings, as though through him I was lifted up and capable of things which were impossible when I was alone. We flew together, and when we stopped, his cheeks were red and he put both his hands around my neck as if he were going to choke me. "Oh, you … *you!*" he said. I wondered why.

At eleven o'clock a knock came at the door: lunchtime. I always got up quickly, as if I were going. He always took my wrist, "Oh, no! First come and have a cup of coffee." And in we went to the dining room. There was the baroness, the godchild of Hans Christian Andersen. In the beginning I was in awe of her. I thought of her as Michelangelo, she was such marble perfection. I could either not speak, or my tongue galloped on like a runaway horse. I wanted dreadfully to ask about Hans Christian Andersen and how he wrote, but I did not dare. One thing came clearly through my panic – Bendix was not very much in love with his wife. Was he a little afraid of her, too? She was so big and so inflexibly straight, as though she could not possibly bend a little, to tell even a necessary lie.

As soon as lunch was over, Bendix and I went back and played until the next pupil came at twelve-thirty.

I knew that when I returned home I could go straight to the piano and play as expressively as Bendix did, just as if his fingers moved through mine. By the next morning the magic had vanished, and I played as superficially as ever.

One day he scolded me and I smiled, thinking it foolish to bother with a trifle. He flared up in a rage and scared me half to death. I thought he would hit me or even throttle me with his strong pianist's hands. The ever-ready tears came to my eyes, and to keep him from seeing, I snatched up my hat and coat and ran home at top speed. Once there, I treated myself to a good cry, and then began a new book.

Soon there was a knock at my door. A messenger handed me a telegram – from Bendix: "Please come back at once. I must talk with you."

I hurried back, my ears ringing with excitement. He must have been listening for the bell, for he opened the door himself, drew me inside and held me close. "Foolish little girl! Foolish little hareheart! Did I frighten the baby?" he whispered into my ear. "I did not mean to frighten you. Such a thing has never happened to me before. Are you angry, little hareheart? Or will you forgive me?" A hundred kisses fell upon my face.

That was the beginning of a beautiful relationship, a firm and precious friendship, seasoned with pinches of love-making much as one seasons a stew.

Victor Bendix was a powerful influence in my development. He began the education I so sorely needed. He was the first man I could talk with – not at – about the countless things crowding my mind. He guided my reading and lent me folios containing reproductions of great painting and sculpture.

He asked me one day if I had ever written music. "Why, of course," I said. It was nearly true. I had spent many hours at the piano improvising.

"When you go home, send me some of your music," he said. "I am sure there is some gift slumbering within you, like the Sleeping Beauty."

On my way home I bought score sheets. That night I mailed my compositions and was quite unastonished to receive, before noon the next day, a wire saying, "Come as soon as possible. You must play your music for me yourself."

Now at last I knew for certain my future career. I would be a Schubert, a Bach. My father was already a little deaf. Soon I, too, would lose my hearing, and then like Beethoven I would hear heavenly melodies and write them down.

When I arrived, Bendix hardly let me take off my hat and coat. He took my arm and pulled me to the piano. "Now," he said, "let us hear."

My heart knocked so loudly at my ribs that I looked down, expecting to see it fluttering my white blouse. I played.

Then silence, a long silence. At last he said hoarsely, "My God! It's worse than I thought. I hoped you did not know how to write it down. It is impossible! Completely *impossible!*"

Another of my castles in the air fell with a crash. Slowly Bendix's face cleared. "It's my fault, not yours," he said. "I still believe in you. What about writing? If you can't compose music, perhaps you can write – "

I could smile again.

"Don't be too sure of it," he said. "But try." He played for me from his symphony, inspired by a visit to Russia. I seemed to see the vast steppes, to hear balalaikas echoing over rippling waters and the stamp of dancing Cossacks.

Before I realized it, my three months were nearly gone. My father wrote, asking me to draft an announcement of my becoming a teacher, and reminding me to get a certificate from Bendix.

I blurted it out at my next lesson, as if I were confessing a theft. He was horrified. "You! You imprisoned in a narrow, provincial town? If you told me you intended to sail around the world in a mixing bowl I would wish you luck. But a teacher – you … !" He laughed and kissed me. "In six months you would have lost all your pupils and be involved in some scandal. No, I cannot permit you to bury yourself alive. Let's think about it. Maybe we'll find a way out, even if we have to lie a little." He snapped his fingers. "I have it," he said. "Smoke a cigarette. Before you go, the whole thing will be settled."

He sat down and wrote a letter to my father, in which he said that my progress had been so great that it would be a shame to take me away so soon. I had, he said, unusual talent, but I absolutely must go on studying a few months longer. He promised Father to help me get a fellowship.

When the third month ended, he refused to accept the money due him. "Are you trying to offend me?" he asked. Never again did he permit me to pay anything.

I was puzzled. Did this mean that I really was unusually gifted? Or did he only want me to remain in Copenhagen? I decided to find out. I was working on some of the minor compositions of Emil Hartman, the oldest and most famous composer in Denmark. With unmatched aplomb, I called on him without an introduction and offered to play them for him.

Professor Hartman received me graciously, listened politely to my chatter, and agreed to let me play for him. I sat down and did my best, which was certainly mediocre. The professor, however, must have been intrigued by my nerve. He smiled and nodded benignly while I played again and again. He gave me wine and cake and, before I left, wrote in his own trembling hand a most flattering opinion of my musical gift, my expressiveness and my touch.

At my next lesson Victor Bendix asked me, laughing, "Did you really play for the old gentleman?"

I blushed. "How did you know?"

"I met him the other night. He asked me to take good care of you. He said you will go far, that you are unlike any other musician!" He looked half-pleased and half-vexed. "Naturally, I didn't contradict him. And perhaps you are unlike any other musician. But I'll tell you this, little Katharina, you will never, never go far as a musician, even if the venerable Hartman did say so."

My beloved Bendix did not believe in me as a musician. Well, I would be a writer. Or some other kind of an artist. After all, there were seven muses. I would try them all if I had to.

I had written a lot of short stories and poems in Copenhagen. I had even ventured to show one story to Einar Christiansen, the editor of our most important weekly magazine, *Illustreret Tidende*. He had enormous bushy eyebrows, big dark eyes, and a mustache that made him look like a cannibal. I was immediately interested in him. And he was most kind and appreciative, asking to see more of my things, particularly poetry. My writing was, he said, interesting and unusual. But he did not even try to kiss me. I had become accustomed to being kissed by any man with whom I had any sort of conversation. But Einar Christiansen only shook my hand. It was so disappointing that I forgot to send him any poems.

But now Bendix wanted me to write. Even without him, I would have done so, and for another reason. I had formed the habit of going each Tuesday morning to a confectioner's and eating a rich cake with whipped cream to keep from getting too hungry during the long lesson. There, for the same ten øre, I could also read in *Politiken* a serial story by Peter Nansen, the diary of a girl named Julia. I became deeply absorbed in her, and envied her for her love affairs. If I could only live like that! If I could only write like that!

I took my little poems to Bendix. This time he did not groan, "My God!" He said, so low that I could hardly hear him, "Child! You were born to write … "

Bendix was Georg Brandes' cousin, and so he must know. From then on I felt myself a writer.

In the meantime the letter to my father had succeeded. Only I had to find a still cheaper place to live. I found it in one of the oldest, narrowest and most winding streets in Copenhagen, Leath Street, entirely inhabited by orthodox Jews. My asylum was a small kosher boardinghouse with a few roomers. I shared what had been the servant's

tiny room, narrow as a coffin, with Miss Lassen, the landlady. For the equivalent of six American dollars a month I received bed and board. I was saved from marrying the pink man.

The kosher boarders could not do enough to make life pleasant for me. These kind, decent people arranged their meals for hours when they would not interfere with my practicing. One brought me sweets, another some of her grandmother's lace, a third his ticket to a concert. They were like the little Jewish girls I had loved and admired in my childhood. Those girls not only wore the most beautiful shoes under the schoolroom table, they were the only ones who did not yell "Cross-eye!" at me in the street.

Miss Lassen was almost too kind. She set such a good table that often she could not pay the rent. So we were always moving. The last place was the best, a pretty, sunny house at the corner of King's Square, in the very center of the city. But here I was worse off, because there were fewer rooms. Miss Lassen had even rented the servant's room.

Because these people were so nice, and the rent was so cheap, I determined to stay with them if I had to hang outside the window on a string during the night. Then Miss Lassen found a solution. In the entrance hall of the new house there was a closet not much higher than a big dog, that was meant for rubbers and umbrellas. We made our bedroom there. We could not go to bed until everybody was either out or asleep. Then we arranged our two narrow mattresses side by side and lay down. Our legs and feet stuck out into the hall, but unlike our heads, they had air.

We slept with one ear alert for the return of a boarder. The minute we heard a key in the lock we had quickly to draw in our feet, shut the closet door, and wait in the dark stuffiness until the guest had gone into his room.

One rainy night we heard someone coming in. In a second we woke up and had snatched our legs and feet inside. All of a sudden the closet door opened again and two soaking-wet galoshes found our faces.

12

Tao

Tao and I met in the house of a friend who was a composer. From the first moment, we found it natural to be together and, when the party broke up, not to part. Instead of going home, we walked. Slowly we left the town behind and wandered through the marvelous woods surrounding Copenhagen, and along the sound that glistened in the moonlight all the way over to the Swedish coast.

As we walked we told each other of our lives. For once, I was more interested in listening than in talking. I heard of Tao's poverty-ridden childhood, of the encouragement of his teachers because he was not only gifted but diligent. His mother died when he was a year old; his stepmother when he entered the university. Out of loneliness, his father then married a woman with a very bad reputation. Tao had been taken into one of the best homes in his native town of Odense as a foster son, but although he was forbidden to visit his own father, he felt he could not abandon him. He had sneaked out of the house in the evening, gone to his father, and got back again without being seen.

I wept with pity. I promised Tao that if I should ever go to Odense, nothing would keep me from going to see his father. Then he wept, too, and I consoled him. A little later he began reciting his own translations of Baudelaire's wonderful poems. On and on we walked, mile after mile, increasingly absorbed in each other's lives.

At last we came to the Ermitage plain. All over the vast space from the shore stretched hawthorn trees in blossom, like giant lace umbrellas. We were intoxicated with the enchanting perfume, the crystal quiet of the night, broken only by the low and distant murmur of the sound and the ghostly whisper of the trees. New-mown grass, piled in haystacks, invited us to rest and to sleep.

This was our wedding night.

Late, toward the dawn, we heard a multiple pattering, a light galloping. We lay there in the spicy aroma of hay and hawthorn and listened. Suddenly, out of the milky haze of the waning moonlight, we saw as in a vision hundreds and hundreds of deer flying through the night. They took possession of the plain, as though we did not exist. I slowly extended my hand, hoping that one of the fleet-footed animals would nuzzle my palm. They ignored me. But a very young doe foraged for hay so close to Tao that he could feel its breath, and a drop of saliva from its soft mouth fell upon his hand.

In the morning we swam in the sound and dried ourselves by running back to our haystack through the dewy grass. We waited for the little restaurant inside Ermitage Castle to open and happily consumed an enormous breakfast.

When at last we separated, we had not spoken of the future, no mention had been made of marriage, or even of an engagement.

But every single day I received a love letter with a poem by Baudelaire or Verlaine, or a new one of Tao's own. And this in spite of the fact that we spent every evening together, usually in Tao's book-lined room facing one of the lakes in the middle of Copenhagen.

From the moment when Tao and I first embraced each other, I was aware of something odd about him. I missed something, something important, but I did not know what it was.

At home I no longer had to sleep in the rubber closet with Miss Lassen. I had been promoted to a divan in the parlor. Lying there one night, listening to the echoing footsteps of the passers-by, I realized what it was that Tao lacked. My lover had no smell. He was like the man without a shadow.

Or could it be that something was wrong with my indefatigable nose? Had my sense of smell died? My entire life had revolved around my ability to detect the faintest of odors. Since my childhood days when street urchins had yelled "Squint-eye!" at me, I usually walked looking down at the pavement. Nevertheless, I could recognize a friend approaching by the smell. And now I was deeply in love with a man who had no odor at all. If he should be lost, I thought, my nose could never trace him.

Both Tao and his very beautiful sister Luise had the same sort of skin. One never saw a spot of dampness on their clothing, even on the hottest day. Tao, in fact, was too clean. I would have preferred him to be a little less immaculate so that he would possess his own individual smell for me. Again and again I tried to search out a faint odor. I had heard that there were musical tones too high for the human ear to hear; did Tao have his secret aroma, too exquisite for me to detect?

Tao's smellessness was to me a fault. But it was his only one. I liked his looks, I liked his manner, I liked his low, frightened voice. I did not like his real name, which was Sophus. It reminded me of a crippled boy near my childhood home who used to whimper heartbreakingly when his drunken father beat him. From the first Sophus was to me Tao, just as he never called me Katharina, but shortened my baptismal name to the much lovelier Karin. Tao also gave me the nickname of Little Troll. Soon everyone took it up.

At first I did not think of Tao as a prospective husband. He had not, I was sure, been born for one woman. He had mentioned many previous experiences. I found out that when I met him he had been very much attached to another young girl. He admitted it with some embarrassment. He added, to my astonishment, that he could never have loved her completely because she had no sense of smell! Unless she could see them, he said, she could not tell a garden of roses from a pigsty.

During the many years we stayed together, I never told him of his own deficiency. And I think he never knew.

We both wanted to travel, to see and to experience everything that life had to offer. We both wanted to write.

But now for the first time I understood how frivolous I had been to boast about being a writer when I had accomplished nothing. Tao was always the most modest of persons, even though I felt in him an intense inner absorption in his work. He would never, unasked, mention anything he had written, much less praise it. I not only stopped bragging, I began to feel inferior. It was not just that Tao wrote poetry. I did that, too. But my poems were merely words put together musically to please my eye and ear. Tao's every line was filled with beauty, knowledge, and wisdom. I took the first figure of speech that occurred to me. His metaphors were always carefully chosen, original and surprising.

I became aware that I stood on the lowest rung of the ladder leading into the clouds of real renown. Tao had read some of my things, and with his invariable kindness spoke appreciatively of them. My sensitive ear, however, heard what he did not say – that they had no value at all.

The realization did not sadden me. I did not think of suicide even once. I was content if only I could go on writing. I sent stories to the Family Journal, a popular but hardly literary magazine. They, too, were rejected. I was still trying to find myself.

Gradually I changed a great deal. I thought more seriously of my responsibilities in life. My handwriting, which had been rambling and full of characterless flourishes, became smaller and firmer. And instead of dreaming for hours at the piano, I sat at my desk enchained by a compulsion to follow where my pen led, to write on and on until the pen itself stopped.

Tao and I began going to the houses of our friends. Soon everyone we knew felt as we did, that we belonged together.

I had, of course, told Victor Bendix about Tao. He was not angry or surprised. "There will be many after him," he said simply. "Then you will settle down with one man for years, or perhaps for life."

"Tao is the one man," I said. "He is my love for life."

He smiled.

Each spring Victor had a concert of his pupils. Often these appearances led to real concert engagements in the fall. I was to play the same sentimental little compositions of Hartman that I had performed for the aged master himself.

Now, with my altered attitude toward life and my place in it, I decided not to play. Alongside students who had studied in Paris, London, or Berlin with the most famous pianists in the world, I would have made too poor a showing. The day had gone when I would jump at the chance to show off. I was, at last, growing up.

Bendix did not try to persuade me to appear. But he made me promise to play with him as long as I stayed in Copenhagen. He also asked me to spend one evening with him before he left town for the summer.

We had the apartment to ourselves. The corner room where we sat was lighted only by the street lamp. I remembered the times when I had sat in a similar room with a similar soft light with Mads Madsen, the grocery store clerk in Randers.

But now, instead of a bakeshop with potted roses in the window across the street, there was the wide lake facing us, crisscrossed with gaily illuminated boats. I felt happy – wishless. What more could I want of life? On the other side of the lake, was Tao in his book-lined room; here, on this side, Bendix sat with me, talking. I loved his caresses just as I loved those from Tao.

"In your life," I asked him once, "have you had many loves?"

He did not answer for a long while. Then he said the one word, "Love," as though turning it over in his mind. "I don't know what it means. Once in my life," he went on slowly, "only once, did I believe that I was in love. It lasted for two days. I found out that whatever I felt – it was not love. Never since then have I cheated either myself or anybody else."

When we had been together for some months, Tao went to the north of Italy. I envied him the trip, for neither of us had ever been out of Denmark. Yet I knew that he went partly because of me. He was not quite certain that I was the one woman with whom he wanted to share his life.

After some weeks he wrote me that he could not face the future without me. Would I please marry him as soon as he got back?

I liked him very much. And, except for the near-Byron who limped, Mads Madsen, and a tubercular painter, he was the only man who had wanted to marry me. So I accepted at once.

Naturally, even with our midget income, we had to have some kind of establishment. I was not interested in beds and chairs and tables; I planned simply to have one enormous room with an oriental rug in soft, marvelous colors, and a huge crystal chandelier.

"Little Troll, such things would cost a fortune!" Tao remonstrated mildly. "And where would we sleep?"

"Oh … well, on the rug, of course!"

Tao smiled. "I will take care of everything," he said. "I will go to old Lars. He is the best cabinetmaker in Odense. He will make what we need, and we can pay him in installments."

Seven years older than I, Tao was twenty years wiser, so I gave in, although I knew he would plan an apartment to look just like everybody else's. All his imagination went into his poetry.

We found a place by the lake with a study for Tao, a living room, kitchen and bedroom, all very sunny. We borrowed the money for the first three months' rent from Father. And I was lucky enough to get some piano pupils. But how could I teach without a piano, and how could I get a piano without money? I was in despair. Then one of my former fellow-students gave me a tip – one could get a fine new piano from the factory, play on it for months to limber the action, and then send it back for another.

We went to sign the lease on the apartment. We found that that, too, cost money. And we didn't have any more. Again we were in despair.

Suddenly I began to jump up and down with excitement. "Tao! Tao! We have the spoons!" The minute our engagement was announced my parents had given us two wonderful old spoons engraved with the names of my ancestors all the way back to 1754.

Tao looked at me gently. I stopped jumping. With his unfailingly exquisite manners, he was much too kind ever to reproach me for being a hoyden. He knew, I think, that I often tried to behave like a lady. But, somehow, something always happened and I forgot. "The spoons?" he echoed. "What about them?"

"We can pawn them, Tao."

"But your parents – "

"We won't tell them! Come on!" So we pawned the spoons and paid for the contract. We also got a lot more for the spoons than we needed. Instead of putting it into something sensible like linen or soap, we bought a bottle of fine wine, some special cigarettes, and a box of raspberries, and spent the evening lying on the rug in Tao's room planning our life together.

It happened that we did not need to pawn the spoons, after all. Shortly afterward Tao accepted an offer from a newspaper to review all books, all art exhibitions, all theater first nights and all concerts – for what in American money would be five hundred dollars a year. He began at once. But he could not possibly do the whole business alone; we did it together under his name.

Just before our marriage Tao took me to see the furniture he had ordered from the best cabinetmaker in Denmark. It was a shock to me. His study was not bad; it was covered with books and he had a fine big writing table. The bedroom was an unfortunate replica of all the other bedrooms of that tasteless period. But the living room was a horror. The couch and the easy chairs were upholstered in a bright green plush. My parents had exactly the same in red. In the center of the room stood an octagonal table with so many spindle legs that it looked like a centipede. The rug, a gift from friends, hurt one's eyes to look at it. A high oak cabinet held our china. I loved only one thing, a little rococo chest of drawers, mirrored to the bottom.

With genuine pride Tao showed me my writing desk. Of very fine wood, its drawers were lined with olive. It had cost more than our whole bedroom. It was exquisite. But it was also so small that I could not put both elbows on it at the same time. And as a working place for me – my God!

For once, I thought before I spoke. I managed to swallow the lump in my throat that was the crystal chandelier and to utter some convincing words of praise.

Tao's angelic sister, Luise, was to go with me to Randers for the wedding. A rather tragic, dark beauty, she was the most perfect person I have ever known, next to Aunt Sophy. Luise loved me the first day we met, loved me perhaps more than any other

human being has ever done. She loved the ground I walked on. The little I gave her in return was like the light of a candle compared to the sun.

It was fall and the weather was rough for our boat journey. Still, Luise went on deck. I had had almost no sleep and felt a cold coming on, so I lay down in the little salon and tried to sleep. Wedding guests, whom I had just met, sat around drinking coffee and talking, but their voices were low and I soon drifted off. I awoke to hear a whispered discussion that must have gone on for some time. After the first few words I wished desperately that I were still asleep. They were talking about me.

What a pity, they said, that the highly gifted, well-educated Tao should marry me. They spoke without reserve of my homeliness, not neglecting my squinting eye. They asked each other what kind of wife I could be. One of them said wittily, "Well, at least he can be sure she will not betray him!" Everybody laughed. I listened helplessly in agony. Another woman said, "You must admit she has a kind of charm about her!" But this only evoked a unanimous protest.

I wanted to crawl away somewhere and hide, like an animal fatally wounded, trying to reach a thicket to die in privacy. I felt hysterical tears coming. Then, as always when in trouble, I thought of Aunt Sophy. I was back walking hand in hand with her in the garden, hearing her say, "Naturally people may think as they like about others, and may say what they think. But remember, dear child, never repeat what another has said. Then it becomes a sin."

I grew calm once more. Nobody in the little salon had intended me to hear. They supposed, of course, that I was still asleep. I closed my eyes peacefully. It would make them uncomfortable to know that by chance I had overheard.

The lesson learned that stormy day shielded me later from countless disappointments and much bitterness.

I arrived in Randers coughing and sneezing. Mother made me take all sorts of evil-tasting preparations which only upset my stomach.

At the last moment we had a narrow escape from scandal. And my poor innocent mother was the cause of it. She had made a list by numbers of her favorite hymns and sent it along to the minister to be sung at the wedding. He replied that Hymn 215 seemed to him very inappropriate for a marriage ceremony. Mother was indignant. She refused to change the list.

The day before the wedding Mother had just forced down my sore, unwilling throat another of her abominable concoctions when the doorbell rang. It was the minister himself. "Mrs. Brøndum," he said solemnly, "I am sorry, but I must ask you again to choose another hymn to replace Number 215."

Mother drew herself up haughtily. "I have my own reasons for selecting each of those hymns," she said. "I decline to change any of them."

The minister shook his head. "I do not know what has happened between you and your daughter," he said gravely. "And I have no intention of interfering. But I ask you to reflect. To have this hymn sung at your daughter's wedding would ruin her reputation."

"Her reputation! Why, what in the world – " Mother was furious.

"And," the minister went on, "if you still insist, you must find another minister to perform the ceremony." Seeing the blank look on Mother's face, he took the hymnal from

his pocket, opened it to Number 215 and read the first line: *"Oh thou, who hast in sinful lusts indulged ..."*

Mother had used a very old edition with quite different numbers.

The wedding morning came. My nose was red and my throat felt like sandpaper. Mother had laced my corset until my pale face was nearly purple. But all that was as nothing to the pain in my feet. For months I had scrimped to be able to buy a pair of white satin slippers and one pair of patent leather street shoes.

Both pairs came from the very expensive court shoemaker in Copenhagen. When they were finished I told him that they pinched me all over. "You'll soon forget about that," he said blandly. "And just see how fine and narrow they make your feet look."

Everyone knew that this craftsman had one fault – he always made one's shoes too small. Yet he had such a reputation that he constantly received orders from Empress Dagmar of Russia as well as from Queen Alexandra of England, both daughters of our King Christian. But the shoemaker was a real democrat, making no distinction in one's station. Again and again I got shoes fitted to Queen Alexandra's last and the Empress Dagmar got shoes meant for me. I liked Alexandra's best; they did not hurt me as much as my own.

Well, now I was dressed for the ceremony and had to keep my slippers on. But I could not stand on both feet at once. I kept shifting from one to the other. "You'll have to stand completely quiet," my sister said.

"What will you do at the altar?" my mother demanded.

I did not know.

All through the wedding and the elaborate dinner at the club I could think of nothing but my tight corset and my burning feet. I smiled and smiled and heard nothing that was said.

It was all the more agonizing because Tao's foster mother was there and he had asked me to be nice to her. I never felt less like being a lady. Yet, probably because she was kindness itself, I found myself promising to bring Tao to stay with her during the Christmas holidays.

At last I could take off the wedding dress, unlace the corset and remove the Inquisition shoes and get into a comfortable tweed suit.

Finally the train took us away. Surely we were a strange pair of newlyweds, the bride coughing and blowing her nose in misery, and the groom patiently trying to convince her that a bad cold was not necessarily fatal.

13

Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson

In the first years of my marriage to Tao I published two small volumes of short stories which, as we Danes say, I "shook out of my sleeves." They created no furor in the literary world. The critics agreed benevolently that I had a remarkable talent, but that I abused it by choosing brutal, unpleasant subjects.

Tao's publisher, Salmonsen, was an excellent person, kindhearted and decent, who lived alone with an older sister. I always thought of him as a sort of male spinster. Salmonsen found my stories disgusting and disliked everything I wrote. Still, he admired Tao so much that he took me in the bargain.

In the spring of 1903 all Europe celebrated the seventieth birthday of the Norwegian poet, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. The Danish writers brought out a book of poetry and prose, a paean of praise for the great Bjørnson. Tao, a poet by God's grace, not only wrote a poem for the book, but a magazine article, and composed as well the festival cantata for the celebration at the University of Copenhagen.

I was asked by Rigmor Stampe, the wife of Victor Bendix, who edited the woman's page of a large daily newspaper, to write a poem for her column. It did not take me long – my heart was full of admiration for Bjørnson.

The birthday came and passed. Two weeks later I received a note: "Thank you for your poem. It touched me deeply. But tell me, Karin Michaelis, are you a man or a woman? – Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson."

Tao and I wrote him together, and received an invitation to come to Aulestad.

Bjørnson's home was half a day's journey from Oslo. From the station at Foberg we drove up and around a mountain and finally turned into a narrow avenue where the flags of all nations, topped by the Danish flag, waved a welcome to us.

There on the veranda stood the white-haired poet-king, large and powerful, his arms opened wide.

Bjørnson had a wonderful personality. Wherever he appeared, he dominated everyone else in the room. He was as changeable as the weather, as hasty as the wind, as full of charm as sun on beechwoods in the spring. He was both mild and severe, humble and proud.

His beloved wife Karoline was small and plump, with hair as white as sea foam. She was totally deaf and completely lovable. Although she was at least forty years older than I, Karoline could still giggle and be as silly as a schoolgirl. Her deafness neither isolated her nor made her suspicious. She was interested in everything. She turned her big brass ear trumpet this way and that so as not to miss anything, especially a funny story.

Aulestad was not at all imposing. A long white building with beautiful views on all sides, its furniture was worn, old-fashioned and heterogeneous. But the minute one entered the place, one said, "It's good to be here!"

Bjørnson and Karoline played whist with us. Or they played double solitaire, both of them cheating outrageously. Karoline cheated to win, Bjørnson because he did not want her to be discouraged. Sometimes they had an argument. At once Bjørnson's voice boomed out like thunder among the mountains. I trembled, but Karoline would only look at Bjørnson with a teasing smile. Suddenly he would bend over and kiss her small white hand, and exclaim under his breath, "Oh, you – Karoline!" In his words there was a world of love and anger and understanding.

Karoline told me how, after the birthday celebration had passed, Bjørnson had called the family together. "Come here," he said. "Come and listen to this poem. I found it in one of our Norwegian papers, taken from a Danish one." He had then read my little poem aloud again and again. Bjørnson spoke of it to me, too. "Of all the kind things that were said, little Karin, nothing pleased me as much as that poem."

I was enormously pleased. But, of course, I realized that coming to his attention first when all the festivities were over, my poem had the advantage of being unexpected. Also, like me, Bjørnson was an enthusiast.

During our first summer at Aulestad there was such a crowd of guests that many of them overflowed into the farmhouse of Erling, Bjørnson's youngest son. Another son, Bjørn, returned home from producing plays in Berlin. The oldest daughter, Bergljot, the wife of Ibsen's son, could not come. But Dagny was there – Dagny, with her red hair, her sylphlike figure and her mermaid eyes. She was not only her father's favorite, but the unattainable ideal of innumerable poets, musicians and painters all over Europe. Married to the German millionaire publisher, Albert Langen, Dagny was, like her father, intelligent, charming and unpredictable.

One day Dagny and I were riding in Bjørnson's carriage, Dagny driving and I in the little back seat. We were laughing and being very silly and, in fun, she struck me. Her ring cut my mouth and broke a corner from each of my front teeth. As I spat out blood and pieces of tooth, I found to my amazement that Dagny was laughing heartily. I told Bjørnson about it, hoping for sympathy. He, too, burst out laughing. "Do you know, Little Troll," he said jovially, "now you are not only a bit squint-eyed but also squint-toothed!"

After some wonderful weeks at Aulestad, Bjørnson asked Tao and me to go with him to the little town of Gjovik on our way home. There he was to begin a debating tour. In his youth Bjørnson had fought for adoption of the so-called Maal language, supposedly the original Norwegian tongue. Norway, no longer ruled by a Danish king, naturally wanted its own language instead of a sort of Danish with different pronunciation. Now, however, Bjørnson was convinced that Maal would not solve the language question.

When we entered the hall at Gjovik, everyone rose. A moment later Bjørnson's opponent arrived, and stood looking a moment for a seat. Bjørnson, with his incomparable dignity, arose and insisted that the man take his place. It was a beau geste, and increased his popularity.

The man spoke well for the new language, clearly and convincingly. When Bjørnson's turn came, he stood quietly on the platform with his head slightly bent. Then he began to search through all his pockets. Finally he shrugged his shoulders and took out a ragged fragment of paper.

Not knowing that Bjørnson could be a consummate actor, we thought he had lost his lecture.

He turned the scrap of paper as if he had never seen it before, and read half a dozen lines from it in Maal. Then he analyzed each word – this one of pure Danish origin, that one and the other from Old Norse, still another from Latin; here one from Russian, there from Sanskrit. How, he demanded, could this language be "pure" Norwegian? It was a tour de force. None of us realized that this little scene was the result of careful study.

When Bjørnson finished, the response was overwhelming. His opponent had nothing to say.

At the banquet after the debate Bjørnson was in fine fettle. Suddenly he came up to me, took my head in his hands and kissed my forehead.

I have always been grateful for a kiss, and take it for granted that others feel the same way. Anyway, to be kissed by a man more than forty years one's senior is not exactly intoxicating. Yet as soon as Tao and I went to our room, he reproached me

severely for my "behavior." I was amazed, and we had a bad scene. Then I admitted that perhaps I should not have let such an old man kiss me. If only he had been thirty years younger! Both of us laughed at that and were friends again.

On our first long journey we went to Italy. I felt very clever because I arranged to pay part of my expenses on the wav by selling articles to the newspaper *København* at five øre a line. One column of a hundred lines brought me in all of five kroner, equal to one American dollar! But I always managed to see enough to make my articles two columns long; that meant ten kroner – to me, fairly good pay. Unfortunately, I never actually received a check that large. The old editor who handled my stories found them too long. So, without reading them, he simply took his scissors and cut out the middle parts. Naturally, the rest made very little sense. All my Danish friends thought I had fallen in love with Italian wine, or had begun to write in my sleep.

Despite the glowing adjectives in my articles, I was very much disappointed in Italy. I had expected the Alps to be a thousand times as high as they were, and St. Peter's in Rome looked very little larger to me than St. Martin's in Randers. We went through the catacombs – where were the lions eating martyred Christians? Since my childhood, Venice had been my ideal of beauty. But nobody had told me the canals would be narrow and full of garbage and dead cats.

The Blue Grotto at Capri, however, was an unforgettable experience. No words, not even music can describe that blue – it made me weep.

Remembering it, we could view our squalid hotel indifferently. We had, as always, sought out a cheap place. An ancient and dirty waiter brought us water for the basin. He was tipped. He went away and came back with one towel for the two of us. He was tipped. He then brought two glasses and a pitcher of water. He was not tipped. When I rang to find out where the bathroom was, nobody answered. Exploring, I came to the kitchen. There was the waiter, wiping off a huge table. A door – made of clear glass – beside him led directly into the bathroom.

Later in the evening I groped my way to the kitchen by matchlight. A tall male form scrambled off the table where he had apparently been sleeping. It was our waiter, clad only in a nightshirt. Ceremoniously he lighted a candle, placed it inside the toilet, shut the transparent door, and stationed himself on guard outside.

Back in Copenhagen we took up our life, feeling immeasurably richer. We had had two wonderful weeks in Vienna, where an acquaintance connected with the Burg Theater had given us a box every night. After the performance we went with him to a coffeehouse and sat with Joseph Kainz, then the greatest German-speaking actor. Kainz had a unique technique. He hurried through passages of a play, if they seemed unimportant to him, like a wind through withered leaves. At the first line of a meaningful scene his voice became as full of color as Rubens' palette. He could make the smallest phrase come alive.

We had had a month in Paris. Our custom was to divide our money in half. Each of us had then used his part as he liked. I passed up the wonderful French restaurants in favor of seeing Bernhardt from a good seat as often as she played. I read French fluently, for Georg Brandes had put his large French library at my disposal. But I spoke it like a babbling infant, and could therefore understand little of what Bernhardt said. But the

music of that voice! When she said “Mais oui!” as she did fairly often, one seemed to see bright sunshine and to smell the fresh breath of spring.

At home again, Tao and I worked very hard. But it did not seem as though we did anything but enjoy ourselves. All the book reviews appeared under Tao’s name, but many of them were written by me. I did not mind lying a little to praise a book.

My disappointment with our furniture had passed. Tao possessed a beautiful bust of Napoleon, whom he admired extravagantly and liked to think he resembled. This bust I placed on the mirrored chest. The rug faded until it was rather lovely. Mv desk held framed photographs, and I wrote at the octagonal table.

We went everywhere. Being young and gay, we were very much in demand for dinners and parties. And we had many friends, among them Herman Bang, whom I have always cherished as the most beloved of all writers – after, of course, Hans Christian Andersen.

It did not matter to me that, unhappily, he loved men instead of women. He was still a sweet, clean-minded person with a wonderful heart. I sometimes wondered if his deviation from the normal did not add to his insight into human nature. I have never known a writer, man or woman, who understood so intimately every fiber of the female heart – sexual and maternal.

To Tao and me, Saturday was the gala day of the week. After lunch we went to the center of town, walking as usual to save carfare, but in time for the first performance of the new movie. As soon as that was over we went to the next picture house for a second new movie. We had coffee and cakes to revive our strength, and then greedily we saw the third, and last, new show of the week. If there were a first night at the Royal Theater, we staggered over there without having time to go home to dress or to have supper. On Sunday we wrote our reviews.

Clothes were a matter of indifference to me. I had one black velvet evening gown, and I wore it on every formal occasion. One evening Georg Brandes, my dinner partner, said, “Karin, aren’t you going to buy a new evening dress soon?”

I was astounded. “But why should I?” I asked.

He laughed. “I was just trying to count how many times I have seen you in that frock,” he said. “It is at least a hundred.”

I glanced down at the dress. It looked all right to me. “But this one isn’t torn at all, and it has hardly any spots!” I answered. “Why, my grandmother, who lived to be eighty-eight, never had but one evening dress, a marvelous one of black silk brocade that would stand alone. When she died and my mother inherited it, it was almost as good as new.”

“On that basis, Little Troll,” he said with a twinkle, “your gown has quite a few years’ wear left in it.”

Just before the turn of the century Copenhagen was crowded with visitors to an international congress. There were parties from morning till night. I had never met so many new and interesting people, and felt intoxicated the whole week of the congress. Some of the Italians flattered me enormously, and I liked that. In turn I tried to fall in love with as many as I could. Tao and I never got home before the early morning, but we felt that since we slept doubly hard we could afford to stay up half the night.

We were leaving for Holland and Belgium shortly after the congress and went for a day to say good-by to friends on the coast. The train back to Copenhagen was jammed.

Still, we found a compartment with two seats separate from each other. Our faces probably showed how happy and how much in love we were, and after a while two people in the middle insisted on our taking their places so we might be together.

We had hardly taken our new seats when the train gave a dreadful lurch, and there was a terrific, grinding, thundering crash. The train shuddered to a halt. The air was filled with smoke and steam. I felt a sharp pain in my head and, looking up, saw the bland summer night sky through a jagged split in the roof. The sides of the compartment were smashed. I did not faint, but I could not move or think. I could not even feel.

Abruptly the deafening noise ceased. There was a silence as though time itself stood still, as if the earth had stopped in its orbit. I heard a weak voice saying, "Save yourself, darling. I am dying …"

I accepted this statement as a fact, but with complete indifference. I was alone. Only I counted. I had to get out, to get away from what the light through the roof revealed.

The six people who had sat opposite us still sat there, motionless. But their faces were livid and green and they were covered with blood. The face of the man who had sat next to me was the same. It had been thrust so close to me that I felt the nausea rising acidly in my throat. With difficulty I turned my head away. I had no feeling for him or for the others. Even my husband did not exist. There was no such thing as time.

I was hauled out of the wreckage and laid on the ground with others. I heard very low moaning. I heard the staccato sound of a death rattle. Someone sighed deeply. Then silence again. The rescuers walked quietly back and forth. One bent down and asked, "Are you in great pain?" I nodded and he gave me an injection. My head and one foot hurt, but not too badly. Yet when I was asked again I nodded, and received a second injection. Then I felt wonderful. I was two persons: one lying there, and another writing about it.

Now and then my thoughts touched on my parents, my brothers and sisters, my friends. What would they say? I wept a little from self pity. I remembered that many people had told me that if once I had to face death I would turn to religion. It was not true. I was not afraid of dying. I was only afraid of suffering.

A doctor whom I knew came to me. "Why, it's our Little Troll!" he said sympathetically. My eyes filled again with tears for my unhappy plight. "Where is your husband?" he asked softly. "Is he … ?"

For the first time I remembered that I had a husband, a dear husband who had said that I must save myself, and leave him to die. I began to scream, "He is in there … in there – !" I tried to get up and go to him, but I could not use my legs. Had they been cut off?

"Here is your husband!" They were carrying someone toward me. Tao's face was so twisted with pain and I was so confused that I did not recognize him. "What happened to him?" I asked, but it was difficult for me to speak clearly.

"His legs," they said. "His legs were caught between the seats." They did not tell me he had been badly scalded by steam. I ran my hands down his legs. One was broken in two places. I thought anxiously of his feet of which he was so very proud. They were so small that he always wore women's shoes.

Suddenly I became as sensible as I had been irresponsible. I took a walking stick from the first man who passed by, stripped off my stockings and bound both of Tao's legs together, with the stick in the middle. He was more comfortable, but now he moaned

with thirst. I got up. Although wobbly, my legs seemed to be intact. Stepping carefully among the wounded and dying, I finally found a half-filled vat, but the water was very bloody from handkerchiefs and bandages. Some porcelain bells used for telegraph poles lay on a shelf. I filled one and drank eagerly. But the discoloration would have made Tao ill. I waited until he had closed his eyes and then poured it between his lips.

He groaned. “That was good … good . . he whispered. After that I begged every doctor who came by to give him an injection. After three or four he felt no pain at all, and lay murmuring and smiling as if in a pleasant dream.

We were the only people in our compartment who had not been killed.

When the rescue train neared Copenhagen, clusters of silent people stood near the tracks with bared heads. Outside the station the square was black with the crowds. No one spoke. One by one the wounded were lifted onto stretchers and put into ambulances. As soon as Tao was safe in a hospital bed, I went home. I had to notify my family that we were safe. My sister Harriet, who had arrived from the United States shortly before, helped me off with my blood-soaked dress and into clean clothing. Then I sent a wire to my parents.

Father received the telegram at dawn, and not understanding what on earth I meant by “We were in it, but are safe and sound,” dressed quickly without waking Mother and rushed to his office in the telegraph building.

He leafed through the dispatches about the accident sent during the night and found one saying, “Among the most seriously wounded are Sophus Michaelis and his wife.”

Father was forbidden by his official oath to tell even my mother any news before it had been released to the press. He could, however, give her my telegram. It reassured her until she saw Father pacing the floor, his face ashen, his eyes full of tears. What hidden knowledge tortured him? She dared not ask. Those were long and dreadful hours.

In a crisis my mother always had to be doing something. She went to the kitchen and began to fill the kerosene lamps. Her Finnish maid touched her sleeve. “Don’t cry so, Mrs. Brøndum,” she said. “Your daughter is fine. Don’t you see her? Look, she’s right over there in the corner, smiling and waving to you.”

“You don’t even know my daughter. You’ve never seen her,” my mother said angrily. “And you are wicked to make jokes at such a time.”

“Mrs. Brøndum, I am not joking,” the girl insisted. “Your daughter’s picture is all over the house. I know what she looks like. And I will tell you what she is wearing. Her dress is the color of coffee with cream; it has little different colored spots all over it. The dress is bloody, but your daughter is smiling.”

Later, when Tao and I went to Randers, I took the dress I had worn the day of the accident to my favorite cleaner there. Mother exclaimed in amazement. “But – but that Finnish girl was right! This is exactly the dress she described!”

In the meantime, however, I suffered a concussion of the brain as a result of the collision. I was taken to the hospital and with Tao was put into the largest room they had. I was not ill very long. But it was weeks before Tao had recovered. And ill or well, every day we had what amounted to a reception. Countless visitors streamed in and covered us with tears and kisses and flowers, as though we were corpses awaiting burial.

It happened that Tao and I were the only well-known people who had been on that ill-fated train. That is, Tao was well known, and I had never hidden my light under a

bushel. Nothing occurred without my publishing an article about it in the papers. So we were very popular.

The whole royal family came many times to see us, bringing flowers and books. The hospital people treated them just like any other visitors. It was hard for Tao and me to reconcile the stories we had heard abroad of the terrifying formality in the Danish court with the simplicity of the elderly king and queen as they walked along talking to everyone, as cordial to the charwoman as to the chief physician.

The one face I might have missed – if I had thought of it – was that of Prince Valdemar, the one who had not asked me to play the piano that far-off day on the island of Laesø. Several times since then I had danced with the two grandsons of Christian IX, both of whom became kings in their own right – Christian X of Denmark, and Haakon VII of Norway – but never again had I seen Prince Valdemar. He had married Marie of Orléans. And I had married Tao. So there was no more chance of my marrying "the left hand of a prince."

14

Peter Nansen

It was years before I knew what he meant to me. I cannot trace back to the hour, the month, nor even the year when I first consciously longed for the sight of him, the pressure of his cool, slender hand. When at last awareness came, I also realized that every book I had written since we met had sprung from an inner need to be with him, if only during the brief hour in which I took him a new manuscript.

And it was a book that brought us together.

Salmonsen had just published my third book, *The Governor*, a novel laid in the bloody fifteenth century, on which I had spent a great deal of time and research. When he read the manuscript he said bluntly, "If it were not for your husband, I would not touch this book with a pair of tongs."

The critics tore it to pieces. One of the most reputable compared it to an insipid novel written by a young girl for young girls. The latter book, he said, was like "refined violin music," but mine was like "noisy brass."

I broke down and wept. I was very proficient at crying. My darling husband did his best to stem this tidal wave of tears, but I wept until I could not squeeze another drop from my burning eyes.

Suddenly I found myself, hiccuping a little and still sobbing, at my ladylike desk with my pen in my hand. My thoughts were dark. I remembered a young friend named Gerda. She had long been bedridden with Bright's disease. Her father, a physician, had concealed the cause of her illness and his knowledge that it was fatal. She knew only that she was deeply, painfully in love with her uncle, who flirted with her gay and vivacious cousin. Gerda had suffered agonizing headaches, and eventually had gone blind. I had been in Greece when she died, but now sitting at my desk I began writing of Gerda as I had known her, with her extraordinary charm mixed with a childlike and touching helplessness.

I told Tao nothing of the book, which I called *The Child*, and decided not to take it to Salmonsen. This manuscript I sent to Peter Nansen at Gyldendal's, one of the most reputable publishing houses in all Scandinavia. Nansen, the firm's guiding spirit, had long ago enchanted me with his *Julia's Diary*.

The next morning a telegram came: "This book will go all over the world. Let me see you as soon as possible. Congratulations. Peter Nansen."

I pinched my arm; it hurt – this was no dream. Tao was as excited as I. An hour later, my cheeks blazing, my heart thumping like fire-alarm bells, I stood in the venerable and dignified offices of Gyldendal. Nansen came to me, both hands outstretched.

"So this is Karin Michaelis!" He took me into his office, a beautiful room with a high ceiling.

Talking with him, a new world seemed to open to me. Was it his understanding of Gerda that affected me so deeply, the sound of his voice, or his way of investing every word with meaning? "I wonder why we have not met before?" he said suddenly. "What a pity!"

I was startled. What did he mean?

He rang a bell for a secretary. "Will you please bring me a contract," he said. Then he turned to me and began explaining the terms. I refused to discuss money.

"You know, you are an unusually sweet person," Nansen said, "but are you sure you are quite grown-up? Do you want me to believe that you are actually an old married woman?"

Was he laughing at me?

When I left, I felt bewildered and disturbed, without knowing why. Tao asked a dozen questions about the interview. Every word was burned into my mind, but I could not repeat a single one of them. I could not – nor can I still – even describe Nansen's face.

I remembered it well enough. Often before I went to sleep I used to take his picture out of my memory and gaze at it, cherishing his pallor, his voice, his walk, everything about him.

Nobody who ever met Nansen was insensible to the magic in his personality. Authors took their rejected manuscripts out of his office feeling that he had conferred upon them some priceless gift. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson said he had never seen a Greek statue with a more beautiful head. People of all ages and all walks of life responded to him as to a magnet.

During a saunter about town in the soft sun of an early summer day, Tao and I saw Nansen at a table in front of the Angleterre Hotel. He beckoned and we sat down with him. Beside his chair lay a pile of faded and withering roses, bought from every flower vendor who had come by.

An old woman, evidently a former prostitute, brought her tray of lifeless blossoms to the table. Nansen gave her one of his beatific smiles, as if she were a reputable acquaintance. "How much?" he asked her.

"How many flowers do you want?" she asked in a voice without hope.

"I will take them all," he said.

Her eyes filled with something between deep sadness and deep joy. "All of them?" she said dully.

He put a bank note into her hand.

"I have no change for such a big note," she said. Her voice was bitter.

He closed her hand over the bill. "It is for you," he said. "I will take all your flowers." He smiled again. "You see, I have so many lady friends."

Slowly she left us, too overwhelmed to thank him. It must have been, I thought, a long time since anyone had treated her as a human being.

The Child, published in the United States as *Andrea*, was, as Nansen had predicted, an instant success. Thanks to him, it came out in Germany simultaneously with its Danish appearance. Within the year it was translated into sixteen languages.

In July Tao went to Paris for a writers' congress. I had suffered from the heat there the previous summer, and decided to stay home, give the maid a holiday, and write a book.

Every morning I went to a neighboring market and bought food. Then I sat down at the desk and waited for my pen to write.

For two days I waited in vain. I grew desperate. Without realizing it, I was consumed by fear. For if I could not write a book now, I would have no manuscript to take to Gyldendal …

On the third day I felt the secret fluid running through my right shoulder, down my arm, and out through the fingers holding the pen. One dip in the inkstand, and the pen bolted along like a colt smelling fresh meadow grass.

Again it was a sad tale. A mother, deserted by her husband for another woman, brings up their daughter with strict and unloving discipline. A village doctor, whom she had rejected eighteen years before, now proposes again. Instead, she gives him for his wife her sixteen-year-old daughter. The girl lives in despair with her elderly husband in a lonely cottage, bearing his stillborn children, companioned only by a deaf and dumb housekeeper. The book ends with her suicide.

Every day I worked long hours. When the evening fell I walked through the shadows out to distant Frederiksberg Park, where white swans drifted on the silent water, and loving couples whispered under the arching trees. Then back to bed and to sleep.

In two weeks the book was finished. This time before going to the Gyldendal office, I let a hairdresser make artificial curls of the nice waves nature had given me. I soaked my hands in hot water to make the nails shining and transparent. Although they tortured me, I wore a pair of my Queen Alexandra shoes.

Nansen was astonished to see me with another manuscript. "You don't mean to say that you have written a second book in these months!" he exclaimed. "You'll have two best sellers in a year!"

I hurried away as if I were tremendously busy. Yet as soon as I got out of the building, I stood for a long time looking back. I could not understand what made me act as I did.

Again Nansen was right. *The Child* had been a huge success; *Little Mother* was an even greater one. I could not keep track of all the foreign publishers who wanted translations.

Now, however, strange experiences began to come to me from *The Child*. Women I had never heard of wrote me from all over Denmark, accusing me of having stolen the diaries of their dead daughters. One mother threatened me with a lawsuit if I did not return her property.

Was it possible that Gerda's tragedy as interpreted by me had been enacted in so many homes in the land?

And there was Gerda's own home … Her father had always been an extremely sophisticated man. After the girl's death he seemed to take a great liking to me, inviting me constantly to the house. He always turned the conversation toward his dead daughter, and once when we happened to be alone he said morosely, "I feel I cannot go on living without Gerda. Somehow, reading and rereading your book brings her back to me. But it also makes me realize her loss more than ever.

One day his wife and I went for a walk. He asked us to stay with him. I urged him to join us. He excused himself and stayed at home. As we returned, one of the neighbors came running to meet us, her face shocked and sad. Gerda's father was dead. His wife was told he had succumbed to a heart attack. Actually, he had shot himself.

In the autumn of the same year I had to undergo an operation. The Bjørnson family came through Copenhagen on their way home from a winter in Italy. Bjørnstjerne wrote me that he and Karoline could not possibly go on to Norway without seeing me. They would come to the hospital the next day. I was not surprised that he wanted to come, but very pleased. All the doctors and nurses and the other patients hoped to get a glimpse of him.

When he and Karoline came into my room, Bjørnson gave me a hasty glance and looked quickly away, as though he had seen something repulsive. "I promised to come," he muttered angrily. "And here I am!" Without another word, he sat down in a far corner. As usual, Karoline and I found plenty to talk about. But we had hardly got started before Bjørnstjerne looked at his watch, stood up and said, "It is time to go." He marched out without so much as shaking my hand.

I was dumfounded. What had I done to make him angry? Karoline burst out laughing. "Didn't you know, Little Troll, that Bjørnson cannot stand the sight of anyone who is ill?"

"But I didn't ask him to come, Karoline," I said in distress.

"He himself proposed it."

"Yes, I know. Because he loves you and admires you." She smiled. "You don't realize what it means for him even to enter the room; so please do not be offended that he left immediately. Now you will have to be content with me."

I did not know which was more dear to me, Bjørnson or Karoline.

One day, lying in great pain on my hospital bed, I felt an inexplicable happiness pervade my entire being. A few seconds later a nurse came in. "What is it?" I asked feverishly.

"Nothing. Nothing at all," she replied.

"I tell you it is," I insisted. "It's something for me. Bring it to me! Now, *please*, bring it to me!" I began to cry.

The nurse went out and returned with a superior smile. "Only more flowers," she said. "As if you did not already have enough."

I tore the paper away. But I did not need to look at the card. I knew the flowers were from *him*. "With all best wishes," he had written, and signed his name.

It did not seem a little thing to me.

I had written another book. So now I could go to see him again. I left the house feeling gay and expectant. At Gyldendal's he came out instantly to greet me. "I'm so sorry, but I'm in the midst of an important meeting," he said with his charming smile. "Can't you come and see me tomorrow?"

I nodded, unable to speak. He looked at me. His expression changed. "Or perhaps you would like to take a walk," he said slowly. "I'll be free in an hour, and completely at your service."

An hour later, to the minute, I walked into his private office. Without a word he took me into his arms and kissed me and held me close for a long time. Then he murmured, "So that's what it was! You sweet little fool, have you known for a long time?"

I nodded.

"How blind I've been!" He kissed me again. "Is it good now? Are you happy?"

I could only nod again. I was happy. I was part of the world, and the world was part of me. It was more than good.

He kissed me over and over, and whispered in my ear. I did not hear the words. I could not think, I could only feel. But neither then nor at any other time did he say the three words that every woman longs for. He never said, "I love you."

The reason was simple. He did not love me.

I knew, and he knew that I did. There was never any pretense between us.

I knew with equal certainty that he felt a great warm affection for me.

In addition to the intoxicating happiness of being held tightly in his arms during those eternal moments, there had been still another. It was his very faint, very male and very heady odor, which he did not share with another human being. There was the calm sweetness of fern, there was the pungency of jungles and of wild animals in that smell; there were still other ingredients that I never could identify.

No one can say which is the most important of the five senses. Still, although I often hear music tactually, as though the sounds actually touched the surface of my skin, and although I would rather be blind than deaf, the sense of smell has always been my most precious possession. When I stood beside *his* chair, holding his wonderfully shaped head to my heart, I often vainly tried to solve the mystery of that irresistible fragrance that made me slightly dizzy.

Never for a second did I feel that I was betraying my husband, or he his wife, Betty, who later became my close friend. Perhaps I could not think straight. Or perhaps I was governed by a remnant of old-fashioned morality – which defines betrayal as committing the sexual act.

Yet, to press close against him, to have his mouth on mine – was that not the highest sexual intimacy?

I have at least a spark of what is called the "sixth sense." One evening I went to a meeting of writers at which we were to make a rather difficult decision. As chief of a great Scandinavian publishing house, Nansen had sent word to me that he would not be there. I sat in the front row. Suddenly I became restless and anxious, as if I were expecting something to happen. My head kept turning toward the door. I knew it was foolish, for the person I wanted to see would not come. But my head would not obey. In fancy I heard his footsteps drawing nearer. I shook myself angrily. Just then the door opened and there he was.

Later in the evening we had a few moments together. “How did it happen,” I asked, “that you came to the meeting, after all?”

When Nansen smiled it was as though northern lights had made all the firmament sparkle. “You called me.” He looked at me. “Yes, you called me! I was taking a stroll without the slightest intention of coming here,” he said. “Something simply dragged me here, forced me to come. I don’t know anybody with will power like yours, so it must have been you.” His voice caressed me.

He was probably joking, but I drew the words eagerly into my heart.

Usually we met only now and then at some party, and a couple of times a year when I went to his office for half an hour. That was enough for me. All I wanted was to be permitted to love him, nothing more. That was possible even if he had not known about it. Since he did know, I felt that now we belonged to each other.

I say I was satisfied. But I also craved contact with him. Sometimes unspoken words crowded my throat and threatened to choke me. When that happened I sat down and wrote him.

I poured out my love shamelessly. Yet never forgetting that love was one-sided, my words were humble and modest. When the letter was finished, I felt comforted. I put it away in a desk drawer with a sensation of solace. I had no need to hide it. Tao and I were so close to each other that any prying was unthinkable.

Sometimes I sent one of the letters to Nansen, but I did not expect an answer. What could he write to me?

During our happy marriage Tao and I had roamed in many countries. We had been introduced to mummies, pyramids and camels. We had visited the poet-king at Aulestad, we had survived the worst railway accident in Denmark, we had written books that had been praised and books that had been damned. We had tried almost everything except a summer in the country.

Most of our friends moved out of their comfortable homes for two or three months every year to go and live in ugly little cottage rooms with the smells of fish, seaweed and tar in their noses, and flies in their food. We could not understand it.

We sometimes stayed with the elderly state councilor’s widow in Odense, in a mansion with old-world atmosphere and customs; we went to my parents in Randers. But in neither of these places could I work very well, and summer is the ideal creative time for writers.

Then one year – it was about 1907 – we returned from Egypt in May, and somewhat to our own surprise settled down in a tiny seaside cottage in the south of Denmark, near Svendborg. The countless small islands mirrored in the clear water all around us seemed to change their shapes and personalities in the shifting light of the day. They were a world in themselves, and we never tired of looking at them.

In this cottage, set in the middle of an old orchard, we spent two fertile summers. The rent was one hundred kroner a year, unfurnished. We had two small rooms, one for each of us. Besides our trunks with clothing and books, we brought two tables, two wooden chairs and two Japanese easy chairs that served as beds. The easy chairs were so narrow that once one was settled for the night, one could not turn over.

On the two large tables stood inkstands, ash trays, piles of paper, and books. One table was in the most immaculate order; on the other confusion reigned. When we had

overnight guests we turned the washhouse into a guest cabin. That meant that our Julia had to move her cot into the kitchen.

We went to sleep to the rippling of the water and the sobbing of nightingales, and awoke to the cooing of doves and the lilting of larks. The wind sighed in the trees and sang the eternal melodies of the leaves; clouds raced by, along with swift little boats whose pointed sails flapped like wings when the sailors tacked. English ships passed heavily laden with coal from the mines; and there were German vessels filled with travelers carrying their own sausages.

We wrote a great deal; we rode bicycles, we swam far out into the blue water. In the evening we scattered crumbs on the floor for the mice. We liked to listen to their quick scurrying, and proudly learned to tell the sound of grown-up mice from the patter of the young ones.

In the orchard wall, where a stone had fallen away, a huge toad squatted every afternoon. Tao insisted that he could see a long pipe in its mouth. And it did look exactly like a rich, self-assured old farmer, gazing contentedly out over his wide fields.

Years before, in Pompeii, Tao had said that one day he was going to write a play about a girl named Elaine.

"What will it be about?" I asked.

"Heavens, little treasure! I'm not that far yet," he said. "I've only got the name of the heroine. Elaine – lovely, isn't it? But some day I am going to write that play."

Now, in the cottage under the cherry trees, Tao came to me and said in the soft light voice that meant he was excited, "Tomorrow, Karin, I'm going to begin that play about Elaine!" Then he almost whispered, as if there were some need to apologize, "I'm also going to write a play about Napoleon and you know what …"

I knew. Long before, a newspaper had reported the finding, on the body of an old Polish woman, of a love letter from Napoleon, carefully preserved in an ancient leather purse. Often Tao had said, "That letter is the key to an unwritten drama. Perhaps I shall be able to write it."

Now the time had come. "Were going to stay here until the middle of September, aren't we?" he asked. "Each play will probably take me six weeks, so I shall be finished by the beginning of September. We'll still have time to go to Odense and to your parents."

I never ceased to be astonished at his method of work. "Tao," I exclaimed, "do you really know how long each play will take?"

He hesitated a moment, smiling absent-mindedly. "I think I can write about ten pages a day," he said. "Of course, I'll have to do some revisions. But I should be all finished by the first of September."

"I simply don't understand it! How in the world do you know *anything* about what you will write tomorrow or the day after – ?" I stopped.

This was an old topic between us, and Tao might with equal truth have said that he could not understand how I did not know what I was going to write tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

Our life was intimate to a rare degree. We opened our souls to each other. Each of us even tried to give the other access to the workshop of his mind. But there at the threshold we stopped: here was the boundary between our wish and our ability. We were frank with each other, yet each had his secret thoughts. Never were two people born, I believe, able

to give themselves completely to one another. When Tao told me how exactly he constructed the conversations of his plays, how clearly he knew every word of every scene before putting his pen to paper, I sometimes wished his method were mine. Yet that was as impossible, I knew, as for him to write as I did.

What he wrote lived within him. It followed him wherever he went; dreaming or awake, it was in his mind. And he would sit at his table quiet as a mouse, carefully putting down the neat letters that seemed to caress the fine vellum paper. He did not sigh or whistle or grunt or mumble or smoke while he worked; he just sat there listening to an inner voice and writing what had long been growing in his mind. Now and then he would take a short rest on the procrustean Japanese bed, lying so still that it did not even creak under him. At other times he would suggest a swim, or an expedition to the garden to see the toad or the wasps.

When it did not rain we had our meals in a corner of the orchard. There were scores of detached espaliers of apple and pear trees, like wings of a stage, on both sides. A colony of wasps lived in the grass at a short distance from our table. Since we did not poke in their hole, but left them alone, we were soon good friends and they knew our habits. On Fridays, when the main dish was fish, they would go on excursions elsewhere. But we had ham with good vegetables at least twice a week. Then they buzzed so happily above the table that we almost felt it our duty to have ham every day.

We had to work out a technique with our meals. Each of us would quickly take one or two large slices of the ham to start. As long as there was any left on the platter, we could eat our slices in comparative peace. The wasps would settle on the ham in the platter with a slow rotating movement, then sit a moment meditating. Finally they would fly away with their loot, leaving small circular holes in the meat. But when we picked up the last slices in the dish, the wasps would attack our portion. One had to be extremely deft to get the fork into one's mouth without also imprisoning a wasp.

We always had fruit pudding with cream for dessert. When we filled our plates from the glass bowl, we had to be careful not to chop off the head of a wasp just getting its share, and not to get it between our teeth either.

Some wasps liked fruit pudding and cream separately, others preferred it mixed. A couple of generals among them organized a sentry system. A wasp stationed itself at either corner of our mouths and would not allow us to chase it away. With rapid little movements it feasted on every drop of cream or morsel of pudding in those few seconds while the spoon journeyed up from the plate and into the mouth.

I was stung only once, and that was my own fault. I went around a corner of the cottage and bumped into a wasp too quickly for it to recognize me.

One day in the beginning of September before the leaves had begun to fall, Tao laid before me two neat manuscripts and said, "These are for my little treasure!" He had calculated almost to the day how long it would take him to write both plays.

Although *Napoleon on St. Helena* possibly had greater poetic value, it was never quite as successful as the play about Elaine. Under the title, *A Revolutionary Wedding*, that one became a great European success and even reached New York.

It was a summer's work of which even a writer as self-critical as Tao could be proud.

And I – ? I had a new book ready to take to Nansen.

15

One Ending to a Happy Marriage

Tao was faithful to me – painfully faithful. That is, in his actions. I know enough about women to realize that although that kind of fidelity is actually not worth anything at all, most wives value it highly.

But no matter how dutiful a man may be, no one can control his thoughts. Tao accomplished the superhuman in being technically faithful for thirteen years to a woman who was not only no beauty, but whom he had never imagined to be one even in his most rapturous moments.

Yet there are few men who loved every aspect of beauty as Tao did. He loved a piece of Murano glass, a handsome bit of silver or furniture, a gleaming emerald set high in a ring, a peach or a plum of delicate hue. He adored a sleek and lovely cat; he cherished the nightingale's song, the murmur of the waves, the music of a harmonica on a distant boat. He would stand absorbed in the fading sunset until the stars were bright. I have often seen him pick up a little pebble and admire it, look at an unfolding rose with tears in his eyes. To walk with Tao through the Acropolis, where he knew every pillar and every stone, was to share his tumultuous joy in beauty.

That this man could remain faithful to one homely woman was proof of his character. Perhaps I did not appreciate his steadfastness as I should. I was too deeply absorbed in my own blurred love life.

I was sure that we would grow old together and sit under a tree like Philemon and Baucis and tell the world what happiness really was.

And we were happy. Our life flowed by as gaily as a rivulet ripples through green meadows and tree-clad hills. We were content with our work, our friends, with each other; we lived at peace with ourselves and the rest of the world.

Sometimes I felt rebellious. Life was too smooth. My sensation-loving nature yearned for a thunderstorm and a downpour of rain to make the sunshine seem new again. Other couples quarreled about money or children or both. We had no children, we never quarreled, we had no scenes.

I knew better, of course, than to imagine that Tao sacrificed all his inner love at my altar. During any period I could have told him exactly with whom he was secretly in love. But he not only never divulged his feelings to his current inamorata, he acted with such restraint that she never guessed. Only I knew him well enough to follow the trail of his longings. And all of these little underfed love affairs died of starvation.

Then everything changed.

We had planned and just completed a modest summer home on the enchanting little island of Thurø, and settled down there for the season to write a play together for one of the private theaters in Copenhagen. Our immediate neighbors were the director of the theater and his young wife, who was small and slight and rather like an elf. We wondered how the wife could go on year after year being infatuated with a husband who betrayed her as often as he had a chance – which was very often indeed.

I was aware that Tao's eyes lighted up whenever we met her, but I never actually thought about it.

Gradually our idyllic home life changed, so imperceptibly that I could not at first have told where the difference lay. From being unvaryingly kind and considerate, Tao began to have spells of sullenness and to ridicule my remarks, even to snap at me. I asked him what was wrong.

"What could be wrong?" he asked acidly. "Nothing can change between us. You know as well as I that we are not a married couple – we are an institution!"

Then a group of us, including the theater director and his wife, got up a picnic to another island. The wife was in our boat. To my surprise, I discovered that Tao was also moody and unpleasant with her. She told a rather silly joke. He flared up. "Please don't repeat such stupidities," he said sharply. "If you do, I shall jump into the water."

To tease him she did repeat the joke. And he jumped overboard.

I wasn't frightened. The water was calm and Tao was an excellent swimmer. I only regarded it as a thoughtless gesture which had ruined his new suit.

He made no attempt to get back into the boat, but swam along behind us. "Oh, stop this childishness, Tao!" I called out. "Don't make a fool of yourself." I realized that I sounded very dictatorial.

He crawled into the boat and turned on me with unmistakable hatred. "Like the devoted husband that I am, I obey when my master speaks!"

The others exchanged glances.

It was long past midnight when we returned from the picnic. Instead of the affectionate good-night chat we had never missed, we undressed in complete silence. Somehow, without even meaning to speak, I heard myself saying, "Tao, tell me frankly. Do you want a divorce?"

He gave a short harsh laugh. "Divorce! Words, words – ! You know very well that you would never think of divorcing me under any circumstances!"

Of course, I said immediately, "I swear I would, Tao. Evidently you do not love me any more. Why should we stay together and make both our lives a hell?"

He spun around and came over to me. "We can never part!" he exclaimed passionately. "We are like a tree. Not only have our roots grown together, but our branches as well. Everyone knows how happy we are. We have always known it ourselves." He burst into a wild weeping. "Why should we be divorced? I've always loved you. I always will. No one could take your place in my heart."

I felt a little reassured. Then he added, "There is no one you love more than you love me. And I – Great God! – I've never dared lay eyes on another woman!"

I smiled. "You don't need to tell me that," I said. "But you are always a little in love with someone or other. I could just count on the fingers of both hands the women you have been in love with. I don't mind at all, Tao. It's your nature. You simply must be in love with a beautiful woman."

"And now?" he said, barely above a whisper. "And now?"

"This time it is our little neighbor." I smiled again. "I certainly can't blame you for that. She is so young, so lovely, and so unhappy with that brute. Who could blame you?"

He threw his arms around me. "You're wonderful … wonderful! You know not only all the ordinary things, you understand things I have kept secret from myself. Suppose that I, as you say, am a little in love with her. What would she think if she knew?"

Tao had just said I was wonderful. I had to be wonderful. "Why don't you tell her?" I said.

"How could I?" he said miserably. "She thinks of nothing but her husband. No, this little love will remain our secret. You and I will stay together always."

The dawn still found us talking, kissing and crying. Each of us was eager to sacrifice himself for the other. Then Tao said, "Beloved one, you who understand so much, understand this much more. We have been happy if anyone in the world ever has. And yet – sometimes I wonder if perhaps there is a still greater happiness in store for us somewhere else?"

I lay silently beside him. I saw that Tao had longed, as I had, for greater excitement in our calm lives. Now he simply wanted to try something different. The knowledge made me feel extraordinarily strong. I could help him, I felt, and I would. I offered him his freedom, and promised that we would always remain friends. But he would not settle the matter one way or the other.

The next few days went by in unhappy indecision. I made up my mind to go away for a little while. "Then we can find out what we want to do," I said to Tao. "Will you write to me as soon as you know?"

"I will write."

I went from one little town in southwestern Jutland to an other, restless and sleepless. I had had Tao to care for me for many years, to share my joys and sorrows. I tried to realize that very probably all that was over. Alone … alone … I said it again and again. But it still did not seem true.

In the old-fashioned town of Tonder, crowds from all over the section had come to a large horse fair. The only inn had but one room left, a tiny affair next to the stairway. All day long the horses were trotted up and down the narrow streets as the dealers shouted and cursed and laughed and spat. All night dealers and customers tramped up and down the stairs, their coarse, drunken voices sounding as though they were right in my room. I could not sleep. Suppose one of those men should come in by mistake? Then for the first time in my life I found myself wishing that such a thing would happen – that a strange man would end my solitude. I could even imagine myself confessing to Tao, "There you see," I would say, "how unhappy I was."

I got up and made sure the door was locked.

Tao's letter came next morning. My hands trembled so that I could hardly open it. But it was empty of feeling or of meaning. Many times he said "darling," "beloved," "my only one." He "missed" me and hoped that soon I would return "refreshed by the trip." That was all.

Never before had I had any reason to feel that Tao was not being quite honest with me.

When I got home again, Tao admitted that he was very deeply in love with the director's young wife. She still had, he said, no inkling of his feelings. I felt very chivalrous. "You must see her," I said. "Talk with her; tell her how things are with you and see what she says."

"But where could we meet?" Tao asked. "Her husband guards her like a jailer, even if he doesn't care a thing for her."

I remembered that my sister Harriet and I were leaving for London for the Franco-British Exposition. "You can meet her here, in your own home," I said.

We went to London. Harriet said the exposition was marvelous. I was in too much of a daze to take in anything we saw.

A letter came from Tao – from Dresden. He had talked with his inamorata and she had admitted liking him very much. But she could never leave her children. He was in Dresden to be alone and think things out.

Hardly had I returned to Copenhagen, however, when the theater director came unexpectedly to see me. Apparently I had been extremely naïve. The husband revealed that we had both been fooled for a long time. When he found out, he had confronted the pair with an ultimatum: either Tao would leave the country at once, or the director would throw his wife out of the house. She had chosen her home and children and Tao had quit the country.

The man's evident enjoyment of his own power was offensive. He seemed to forget that he himself was a notorious philanderer.

I felt more sad than bitter. I wrote Tao and received a penitent letter. Yes, he said, he had lied. He added that the young woman did not believe in the permanence of his love. That was why she had refused to leave her husband.

I knew him so well … I ached for him as well as for myself.

If he was indecisive, it had never marred our happiness. But now it kept him from acting as he yearned to do. Obviously he was panicky with fear – ill with it. He wanted me back. But I was no longer in a magnanimous mood. I demanded a divorce. He agreed. But his letter was heartbreakingly humble and despairing.

I went to Norway, to Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. With him and Karoline I hoped to find composure and peace. Tao remained in Germany.

16

Fifty Golden Years

Once more the flags of all nations waved a welcome to me. And both Karoline and Bjørnson stood waiting on the veranda.

Karoline took me upstairs. "We understand, Little Troll," she whispered. "Tell me, who is it? Do we know him? Are you very much in love with each other?"

They thought, as had many of our other friends, that it was I who had broken up our marriage! Tao had always been tenderly at my side; he had never gone to a stag dinner or an evening at the club. People even scolded me for being an ingrate.

Aulestad was the center of violent storms that year. Dagny, too, was in the throes of getting a divorce, and the eldest son, Bjørn, had come home to arrange for a divorce from the famous singer, Gina Oselio, so he could marry someone else.

Actor, violinist, author of novels and plays, and theater director, Bjørn was artistically the most talented of Bjørnson's five children. He possessed, in fact, too many gifts. At fifty he had never become really great in any one field. We were instant friends. Bjørn needed someone to listen to him and I was at hand. For that matter, the whole household shared his confidence. But even if I were dressing he would burst into my room without knocking, impatient to read the latest letter from his wife or his sweetheart, or the newest version of his play.

The play was autobiographical. But with Bjørn's temperament, the plot changed as often as his mood. When his beloved wrote him she would go through fire and water to

be with him, he rushed about the house embracing everybody, shouting and singing. Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson would beam.

Then a letter came from Gina Oselio, who was singing in Rome. She refused Bjørn a divorce. Now Karoline beamed, father and son grieved. Bjørn changed the play – Gina was an octopus, holding him with long, cold arms. He wrote a sonnet to his divinity. Then the divinity sent a tear-stained letter. She could not part with her two children. She was resigned to going through life "just a mother." Again the play changed. The beloved one was a heartless flirt.

This turbulent situation had not resolved itself when I left. Several years later Bjørn married another woman whom he loved until he died at the age of eighty-two.

I had long been aware, of course, of Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's stature as a writer. His first stories and novelettes about the Norwegian peasants belong with the foremost writings on people of the soil. His real pre-eminence came, however, with the publication of his big novel of Norwegian family life, *Det Flager I Byen og paa Havnen* (*Flags of the City and the Harbor*). Without, I am sure, his intending it, this book was also a powerful argument for woman's rights.

His poetry is music in words, and his close friend, Edvard Grieg, set many of the poems to actual music. Grieg was an indifferent pianist. But to listen to his little gray-haired wife, Nina, with her small, true voice, sing those songs to his accompaniment was to hear two great artists create a world of sweetness and beauty.

I saw them often at Bjørnson's, diminutive and modest, and as alike as twins. Bjørnson towered over them, as he did over most people. He was a giant in everything.

By simply being alive, Bjørnson seemed to bring sun and rain, storm and quiet. His love burned limitlessly; he loved every living thing, he loved nature, and he loved art. He could change his opinion overnight, and defend one day what he had attacked the day before. But he was always genuine, constant in his inconstancy. In daily life he was charmingly modest and courteous. He shared everything he had with those around him.

All through the first years of their marriage Bjørnson and Karoline were poor. Karoline worked in the house with the maids and outside with the hired men. Even when he had attained world fame, Bjørnson never had enough money to maintain a bank account.

In the early days Karoline had one "nice" wool dress. Often celebrities from foreign countries would come unexpectedly to see Bjørnson. So she had the nice dress made big enough to drop from its hook right down over her working clothes.

One day a maid ran to her shrieking, "There are maggots in the butter! We're all leaving! Maggots in the butter!"

Karoline knew this was nonsense. "Show me the maggots," she said. In the pantry some firkins of butter stood under a number of smoked hams hanging from the ceiling. Evidently one of the hams was wormy, and the worms had fallen into the butter. But how to convince the servants? They must not leave in the middle of the harvest.

Quickly she bent down and picked up a maggot from the open firkin. She put it into her mouth, bravely bit it in two, and spat it out. "You silly girl," she said. "Don't you know the difference between butter maggots and ham maggots? Here, take it and taste it. You'll see – they're nothing alike!"

None of the servants left.

Not long afterward, another of the maids began going around with red eyes. “Tell me, my child,” Karoline said, “what’s the matter?”

The girl was going to have a baby without being married. She said the other maids were making fun of her, and she was trying to get up courage enough to hang herself in the hayloft.

Karoline laughed. “If you aren’t the silliest girl in the parish,” she said. “Not married – what nonsense! I never heard of anyone having a child without being married!”

The girl wept. She held out her left hand with its bare ring finger. “But married people always have a wedding ring,” she said. “Everybody knows that!”

“Oh, well perhaps you are right about that,” Karoline said. “Here are ten good kroner. Now go down to the village and buy a gold wedding-ring and put it on. Then if anyone dares to say you are not married, you just send him to me!”

In spite of the emotional upheavals in Aulestad that summer, there were many healing moments for the unquiet soul.

When Bjørnson returned from his daily walk in a happy mood, he sometimes offered to read to us part of his recent translation of a story by Victor Hugo. We assembled expectantly in the wide living room. Outside the shadows slowly cloaked the mountains, cowbells sounded on the evening air, the smell of burning peat foretold the supper hour. Bjørnson’s expression was grave, as though he had become one with the story he had just clothed in his own words.

Pacing up and down in the darkening room, he told in his beautiful resonant voice the story of Ruth and Boas. He was the wind that made the ears of grain tremble in Ruth’s hands; he was the old man stirred by his love for the young woman; he was the drifting clouds – the evening stillness.

Abruptly the time was upon us for a great event – the Bjørnson’s golden wedding anniversary.

Americans know Bjørnson less well than Ibsen. But uniting as he did the humanity of Tolstoy and Zola with the innocence and naïveté of Hans Christian Andersen, Bjørnson was more truly representative of the sons of Norway. No one felt close to Ibsen; Bjørnson was Norway’s heart. When he laughed, Norway laughed, when he was sad, Norway grieved. He had raised his thunderous voice in European affairs. He helped to bring about the acquittal of the Italian Linda Murri, accused of murdering her husband; he championed the oppressed Czech nation, and his name is carved on the face of the deep mountain cliffs near Prague.

Now, the whole world prepared to do him homage.

Guests began to pour in from near and far. Although the main house was not large, its capacity seemed inexhaustible. Soon every inch of space there, in the guest cottage across the garden and in Erling’s house, was occupied.

The night before the anniversary, we had a hard time getting Bjørnson and Karoline out of the way in bed. His Copenhagen publisher had sent a whole truckload of Empire furniture as a gift, and we needed the house to ourselves to unpack and place it. We were happy and excited. Correct old Empire furniture is always exquisite and rare.

Finally we began. Bjørn took the new pieces out of the truck, some of the guests unwrapped them and carried them into the house, and the rest of us carefully took the old furniture across the yard.

Suddenly Bjørn gave an exclamation of dismay. We all rushed into the living room. The furniture was authentic Empire, all right, but it was brand-new! All the lovely atmosphere of the room had vanished. Instead we had a lot of chairs, tables and bookcases shrieking of the factory.

We moved it all out again and replaced the old pieces. They may not have been beautiful or in especially good taste, but they evoked an atmosphere of charm; they had taken root, they fitted the lives of their owners.

The next morning the guests, the children and grandchildren and the servants stood at the foot of the stairs watching the bridal couple descend. Karoline, in white as always, had placed a few sprays of wheat in her hair that looked like cotton blossoms. Bjørnson wore one of his old-fashioned vests of heavy brocade, with sprays of wheat in his buttonhole. The grandchildren sang the chorale they had practiced so long. The day had begun.

Truck after truck arrived with its load of gifts – fruit, paintings, casks of wine, flowers, porcelains, embroideries. All day long mail carriers emptied bulging bags in the hall and hurried back to the village for more. There was hardly a king or a president who did not send either an envoy or a personal letter to the poet-king and his golden bride.

After the banquet Bjørnson made a deeply moving speech. We all had thought we knew what Karoline had meant to him during fifty staunch and devoted years. Yet when he spoke it was as if he revealed depths of feeling we had never suspected. He ended with indescribable humility: "I pray, Karoline, that when you dress me for my last sleep, the shroud will cover also many of my words and deeds."

A deep silence fell upon us. No one could speak.

At twilight the last of the deputations from France, Germany, Italy, Holland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway had left. We stood gazing out over the Gudbrand valley at what looked like thousands of fireflies. The people of the mountains and the villages were assembling the first torchlight procession in the history of the valley.

Slowly and heavily the stolid Norwegian peasants carried their flaming torches up the narrow, winding paths of the mountain. Here and there groups united like little rivulets, finally forming a great blazing river of light. When they were all in the yard at Aulestad, wine was passed around. Although Bjørnson was so happy he could scarcely speak, he said a few eloquent and touching words. Everybody sang the lovely Norwegian national anthem, beginning with the words, "Yes! We love this country …" They were Bjørnson's words – one of his many gifts to his native land.

By tradition the people should have piled the torches together in a gigantic bonfire. But they did not know. So when they said good-by and went down the mountain, each of them held his torch high. We watched them for a long time, until darkness lay heavy over mountain and valley.

In Copenhagen some weeks later I sat close to Nansen at a banquet in his honor, and filled my eyes with the blessed sight of him. There were many distinguished guests from abroad, but only he existed for me. It was very late when the party broke up. Then for the first time – and the last – it was he who drove me home.

A man will usually try to conceal his love from others, to keep the sweetness of his feeling to himself. A woman always wants to cry her love aloud.

That night as we passed through the silent, lamplit streets, I had only one proud wish, that everyone we knew could see him holding me in his arms, his lips on mine.

Still, we were not two lovers hurrying toward a bed of joy. The man at my side had known all variations of love. The happiness he gave me sprang from affection and kindness. And I never dreamed of going to sleep in his arms.

We arrived at my door. Nansen came in with me. He knew how desolate I felt over Tao's behavior, how I hated to go back to empty rooms where there was no one to turn on the lights and make me feel at home.

Nansen took me upstairs. He lighted the lamps; he helped me undress and put me to bed. He covered me as tenderly as a mother, he kissed me, turned off the lights, and left.

I went to sleep supremely happy.

The following week Nansen telephoned and asked to see me as soon as possible. We met that afternoon in a restaurant. I had guessed at all sorts of reasons for his unprecedented request. But not the right one …

"I've had a letter from Tao, from Dresden," he began. He did not need to say any more, but I let him go on. "It's a very touching letter. He writes to me in the hope of getting you back. He says I am the only one to whose advice you would listen." Silently he took my hands in his and played with them. "Little girl," he murmured, "poor little Karin."

I did not say a word. "Tao wrote," he continued after a moment, "that as soon as this foolish affair was over, he realized what you meant in his life. Without you he faces nothing but emptiness. He implores me to do what I can to persuade you …

I sat silent, drinking in that faint, special aroma of Nansen's, and listening to him beg me to go back to Tao.

Nansen stopped playing with my hands, and folded them firmly in his own. "Do it, Karin!" he urged. "You two will live comfortably and pleasantly together as though nothing had happened. And – think it over – nothing really has happened. He has betrayed you much, much less than you have betrayed him. Less, little girl, than you betray him at this very moment. Am I not right?"

The restaurant was deserted except for ourselves. Nansen rested his forehead on my hands for a second.

"What do you want me to do?" I said.

"I suggest that I write him that you are coming to Dresden, and that you simply send him a telegram. That will be easiest for both of you."

I went straight to the telegraph office and wired the date of my arrival.

So Tao and I met again. He showed me such sweetness, such humble repentance that I lost any fear of resuming our married life. Childishly we even made as a sort of pilgrimage the same journey through Jutland that I had made alone the summer before. We competed with each other to prove that we were as happy as ever. And perhaps we really believed it.

But one night in Copenhagen I woke up to hear Tao moaning as if in pain. I spoke to him. In an ineffably tender voice he answered, calling me by the name of the young director's wife.

I never mentioned the incident. I realized how hard he had fought to overcome his feeling.

We began to travel to and from Berlin for the rehearsals of *A Revolutionary Wedding*, in which the great Ida Roland played Elaine. During this time I had another one of my romances. A young, rather overrefined, but extremely handsome young man fell in love with me. It was a circumspect affair, but I felt myself free, and his admiration helped restore my self-esteem.

Soon Tao and I left on our first trip to the United States, to see his play put on there. I stayed only a short time because I wanted to get home again and begin a new book.

But both Tao and I were struck with one thing about Americans – they seemed to us much more proper and chaste than we Nordics. At the climax of *A Revolutionary Wedding* the hero and the heroine, knowing that the next morning he is to be executed, meet and kiss passionately, intending to spend their last night together. In Europe the audiences sat in breathless excitement while the couple held each other in an abandoned embrace. We were astonished to find that in New York this scene was considered indecent. It was impossible in 1909 for two actors to kiss each other on an American stage. The curtain in Tao's play fell as the couple came toward each other, and reached the floor while they were still safely several feet apart.

Once the play was well launched and running well, Tao became restless. He left on a voyage around the world, and I sailed back to Denmark.

17

A Love Affair and a Divorce

On the ship I felt again the powerful spell of the sea – the endless vista of the waves that lulls the mind, the gently sensual movement that stirs the heart, the strong clean air that heightens the feeling of being alive.

The ship was the same that had taken me to the United States, and again I sat on the captain's right. He seemed like an old friend. We walked the deck several times a day, we talked about everything under the sun, at first about a book I had just published, in which a merchant marine captain who loves his wife still is tempted to betray her when in foreign ports. In desperation he takes his young daughter on a voyage, hoping her presence will protect him. He drags the girl through a hell for the sake of his fidelity. The story was true enough. I had based it on an experience of my own in Alexandria the year before. But my new friend angrily refused to admit that any Danish sea captain would behave like the man in the book.

As we talked and walked long hours under the North Atlantic sun and the stars, the captain confided in me that although he naturally had plenty of opportunity, he had had an extramarital affair only once. His wife had found it out and had made such heartbreaking scenes that it had cured him for the rest of his life.

One day I was standing forward, dreaming and wishing I could have a swim in the lazily rolling waves, when a steward gave me a note from the captain: "Please, may I see you for a few minutes?"

Puzzled, I went to his cabin. Inside the room, he stood quite still, tall and very handsome, a strange expression in his eyes. He opened his arms. With an unexpected

feeling of joy, I went into them. We clung silently to each other for a long time, almost as though there were danger of our being torn apart.

"It's terrible, Karin," he said at last. "And yet it is wonderful, too. When I first saw your name on the passenger list, I had a feeling … I have fought so hard, so hard. Do you hear? Yet I had to send for you – it would have killed me not to. Perhaps I hoped you would not come … But you did. What am I to do? You are married, I am married – what am I to do! Help me, or I'll go mad …"

I did not tell him that I no longer had any reason to feel married to Tao. For once in my life I acted wisely. I made him sit beside me and let him talk until he was exhausted.

"You need not be unhappy," I said. "And don't be afraid – I could never make another woman unhappy." There was a desperate question in his eyes. "Yes, I'm glad you sent the note," I said. "I did not realize then that we had drifted together, but it seems now that perhaps it began on our first voyage, that other time. I like you. If you were free – as free as I am – well …"

"Thank you," he said softly.

"I can't very well speak of virtue," I went on, "since just now I have the same fever in my blood as you have. But I also know that it will not ruin our lives to give up something that would be very sweet to both of us." He remained silent, but he pressed my hand.

At sunset we were still sitting there in his cabin. He had forgotten it was time for him to take the watch until the first mate came for him.

From then on we were inseparable. I never again spent more than a few moments in his cabin, when we clung to each other as though each embrace were a final parting. But we were never far from one another. Fortunately for both of us, the captain was beloved by both officers and crew.

When we anchored at Oslo most of the passengers strolled about in the beautiful hills surrounding the town, fragrant with wild strawberries and forest flowers. We did not dare trust ourselves to such an atmosphere.

The ship hoisted anchor late in the evening and set its course down the fiord. The rails were lined with passengers drinking in the sight of the enchanting shore, the multitude of islands, and the ships cutting through the calm water. The captain and I also stood by the rail. We talked very little, each of us content with the sweetly felt presence of the other. The dinner gong sounded. We heard it without moving. The darkness came, and the stars. It was time for him to take his watch, and to be at the helm between Skagen and Sweden. The first mate came and stood near. The captain looked at him and nodded. "I am coming," he said. But he did not make a move to leave me.

Once or twice he murmured, "Tomorrow – tomorrow …" I did not answer. Only once did he speak directly to me. "Can't we see each other occasionally?" he asked. "Only occasionally?"

"No, my dear," I said. "Not at all, ever again."

We could barely distinguish the shores on both sides. The first mate had long since left us. The cool dawn brushed our faces. Then the red rays of the sun shot up through the applegreen clouds. Still we stood at the rail.

The second mate hesitantly came up. "Captain," he said, "we are nearing the sound."

"I am coming."

Still he did not leave. I broke the silence. "You must go …" I felt his lips on my cheek. Then I was alone.

The idea for *The Dangerous Age* had haunted me for a couple of years, although in the meantime I had written other things.

Long before it occurred to me to make any literary use of it, I had been puzzled by the strange behavior of several middle-aged women. A friend of my mother's suddenly developed such an obsession with cleanliness that her husband and children hardly dared move for the eternal dusting, polishing and scrubbing. Another became a miser and nearly starved her family to save money. Later, the older sister of one of my friends who had been an innocent flirt, involved herself in one serious affair after another. There were many other such instances. And most of the women concerned ended in the divorce court, or disappeared for a time into a sanitarium. They were diverse individuals, but in one thing they were all alike – they were between forty and fifty.

The book had taken sufficient form in my mind the last time I was in Aulestad for me to talk with Bjørnson about it. We were on a long walk, and now and then he stopped and laid his finger along his nose, as he always did when he was thinking. Once or twice he patted my head. "You must tell Karoline that," he said. "She'll be immensely interested."

"But what do you think of the plan?" I asked.

He stopped and faced me. "Little Troll," he said, "I told you that Karoline will be enthusiastic. Don't be offended, please. But surely you cannot expect a man to be interested in a book whose main character is an old woman over forty!"

Bjørnson was then in his seventies.

His attitude was not at all unique at the beginning of the twentieth century. And when one remembers that in Balzac's *Femme aux trente ans* the woman is already growing old at thirty, one can see that it was at least an improvement!

My immediate impulse to begin the book at last came from Thora B's divorce. Slender, gracefully built, Thora attracted men as sugar draws flies. Her husband, a dark, handsome musician, adored her. It was not difficult to see why. She was not amusing, she was not spiritual, and she never said anything original. But she was a good listener. She had a way of smiling quietly, her nearsighted eyes crinkling at the corners, that made most men believe that they had found the one woman who really understood them.

As a girl Thora had earned her living as a waitress. She married the restaurant owner, and inherited his fortune. Now she was getting a divorce from her second husband, the hot-blooded musician. She said she intended to retire from social life, and enter her old age in solitary dignity. There was no other man, she said, she merely longed for some years of contemplation and meditation.

Here, I thought exultantly, is my heroine for *The Dangerous Age*.

I was no more than halfway through the book, however, when Thora fooled us all. She married Alberti, the Minister of Justice.

I was in a quandary – should I abandon my book? Or revise it? I went ahead.

Nansen carefully examined the manuscript to make sure that this time there were no passages which would enrage the critics. But neither he nor I could possibly have foreseen a fraction of the controversy critics and public alike waged over that one book. It went all over the world, and in every country it was the women, as one body, who

repudiated me. I was a traitor to my own sex, they said. I was also a liar. Not a single woman anywhere would admit that there was ever a period of her life when she was not at her best.

I began to give lectures, not only because I was in great demand, but to defend the book. Regularly the hall was packed, and with equal regularity I was loudly booed. The crowds were often so angry that I felt in actual physical danger.

Fortunately, for every thousand indignant women there were a hundred doctors who officially backed me up. Eventually, as a result of all the arguments and excitement, some European legislatures softened the punishment for crimes committed by women during what I had christened their "dangerous age."

Traveling for months from one country to another, giving the same lecture over and over, I got so that I could have repeated it if suddenly awakened in the middle of the night. I don't know whether or not my audiences were bored. After all, they had to sit through it only once, while I had to listen to myself saying the same sentences again and again. Once in Goethe's town of Weimar, I went sound asleep in the middle of the lecture. I woke up, however, to hear my voice going on as usual and to behold the usual sea of upturned angry faces.

The Dangerous Age would have been a gold mine for me if I had not been a fool about money matters.

I had always thought my German publisher, Ehbock, a nice man. So when he wrote me that because he planned to spend a great deal on advertising the book, he could not afford royalties, and offered to buy it outright for two thousand marks, about five hundred dollars in American money, I was not suspicious. I demanded three thousand marks, thinking I was very shrewd, and it was settled.

On publication in Germany, however, the whole first page of the *Berliner Tageblatt* was filled with a review by the famous nerve specialist, Professor Eulenberg. He hailed *The Dangerous Age* as a revelation. In the next two weeks, eighty-five thousand copies were sold. When I went to Berlin to lecture, the writers' association insisted that Ehbock make out a new agreement. He gave me a letter, beginning with: "Although I have no obligation to Karin Michaelis, because of my admiration for her, I agree to pay her a royalty of ten per cent." He also secured the right to handle all translations. For a while I received my royalties. When publication reached 285,000 and I had received nothing from Germany for a long time, I asked Ehbock for some money. He refused any further payment, pointing out that he had stipulated that he had no obligation to me. My lawyer said, "Only a rascal would take such a stand."

"Well, maybe I am a rascal," Ehbock replied with a smile. "But you cannot force me to pay a cent!"

John Lane in London and New York bought the English-language rights. Marcel Prevost did the French translation, which sold over one hundred thousand copies. Eventually the total sales amounted to more than one million copies; and three times the book was made into a movie.

Through one of my lectures, my first in Vienna, I met the woman who became the most wonderful friend anyone could have. In Hamburg somebody said, "If you're going to Vienna, I shall write to Genia. She will undoubtedly meet your train and want you to stay with her."

"Genia?" I asked. "How will I know her? What does she look like?"

"Genia Schwarzwald. But it's impossible to describe her. She's unique. And you'll know her, never fear!"

And I did. Two laughing eyes met mine and it was Genia. We embraced, and before we had reached her house, were old friends. "I don't like *The Dangerous Age*," Genia said frankly. "It's the only one of your books I don't like."

I didn't mind. The book meant very little to me.

"Now you are going to meet some of my menagerie. You will love each other," she said warmly. "But tell me – how can you be heard with your lecture in the enormous Sophiensaal? You have no voice!" Then she turned to me and clasped my hands. "I think you can smile your way into everybody's heart," she said. "Then the voice won't matter."

We arrived at Josefstadterstrasse, the ugliest of streets, where every one of the hideous stucco houses seemed to be falling apart. I was appalled. Then the cab turned into an entrance between two tall houses. And before us stood a beautiful hand-wrought iron fence, a paved courtyard, and a charming dwelling, designed by Wagner. It was a miniature marble palace, set in a garden with a splashing fountain.

We went in, mounted the broad curving stairway, and sat down to a late cup of morning coffee with the "menagerie." Immediately I felt that I had known them all my life. Genia herself, with her innocent mouth, pointed chin, close-set ears and unruly hair, was the dynamic force in the group. Yet she also brought out in each person his most vital self.

Breakfast had been served at eight-thirty. It was now nearly noon – and a dozen people still sat at table. Guests arrived and left all day long. Early ones often accompanied Genia to her school, later visitors dropped in for a chat or a game of chess with Herman, her husband, or to walk with him to his office.

At lunch I met Herman. A short slender man, with one leg shorter than the other from a childhood accident, "Hemme" Schwarzwald was then connected with the Chamber of Commerce. Later he went to the Board of Trade, and later still twice refused to become Minister of Commerce. "I will not give the Jew-haters anything more to talk about," he said. "We have enough Jews in high places now. I won't be the one-too-many."

Adolf Loos, the renowned architect, made his home with the Schwarzwalds. He sat at my left. He had brought a new style of architecture from America, and with it doomed the prevailing use of ornate stucco. But the simplicity of his architectural line frightened people. When I met Loos he had just finished restoring a house opposite the centuries-old Burg Palace, and the newspapers were screaming indignation. The house was "an offense to good taste," a "fraud against the owner," and so on. Ironically, this same house has for many years been considered one of the most beautiful buildings in Europe.

On this day, as Hemme sat at one end of the broad, hospitable table opposite Genia, I heard one of the guests ask Loos, "Whom do you love most, Hemme or Genia?"

Loos smiled. 'Which do you like best, your right or your left eye?"

After lunch Genia went back to her school. Genia's school was her child; it had come to life through her own vision. She maintained scholastic standards so high that her graduates could go straight into the university. At the same time she strove to give her students wisdom enough to deal wisely with their problems throughout life. She

introduced the coeducational system, a revolutionary step in the Europe of that day. More, she made it work.

Not a day passed without Genia speaking a word or two to every one of her five hundred pupils; they were free to come to her for help and advice. Often enough the trouble lay in the home.

"The children are all right as long as I have them with me," Genia said many times. "But one year of gadding about with those empty society people, and all my work is undone. Sometimes, when the parents are willing to co-operate with me – ah, then there's no limit to the wonderful development of a child!"

Oscar Kokoscha was a guest in the house. Like many other artists, he owed his career to Adolf Loos. The day I arrived Kokoscha asked me to pose for him. I refused. I had sat for several painters, and loathed it. Two days later when I was packing he came to my room with sketchpad and pencils. He could see that I had no time, so he told me to go ahead. Then he followed me around maddeningly, crouching on the floor and crawling on the floor if I stooped over to my suitcase. The result was horrible. Kokoscha had made me ten thousand times worse looking than God had done. I complained bitterly.

"That's the way you look to me," he said. "Anyway, I'm not drawing your visible face. That's the face you conceal from the world. And to me it's not ugly, it's tremendously interesting."

At Genia's I met, too, Elsa Wiesenthal and her sister Grethe. All five of the Wiesenthal girls had danced since they could stand up. Their father was a painter who never sold a painting. He painted only his own family, and when a canvas was finished he could not bear to part with it.

The Wiesenthal dancing daughters, with their unique wavelike rhythm, became the symbol of the Viennese waltz. Not even Pavlova could equal them in that. Could it be, I wondered, that these ravishing girls, with feet too weak for toe dancing, had also some peculiarity of bone structure in the knee or hip that produced that indescribable undulating effect?

On one of my many lecture trips, I saw a newspaper report that I immediately mailed to Tao in Denmark. It told of the suicide of the theater director. He had been involved in some scandal and faced a long prison sentence. I wrote Tao that if he still cared for the young wife, now was the time when she would need him.

Surprisingly Tao replied that he no longer felt even affection for her. "I feel," he wrote, "as though she were dead and had long since turned to dust."

When I got home again, I found Tao very much changed. Every time the telephone rang he jumped nervously, as though he were frightened. Certainly something had happened.

He waited about, fidgeting, until I had unpacked. Then he asked me to go for a walk. On the street, he did not dare to look at me. The words emerged with difficulty through his dry lips. "A woman I know," he said, "is going to have a baby."

"I see," I said. "Is it someone I know?"

"No. No, you've never even heard her name."

"Well, Tao, you must get a divorce and marry her. Whether you love her or not, you must protect the child."

Tao did not in the least appreciate my gesture. On the contrary, he began to sob. He tried to convince me that I had no obligation toward either the mother or the child. "Besides, suppose it isn't true?" he exclaimed. "Suppose the woman only wants to get married?"

"Tao," I said. "You know that I cannot have anything to say about that!"

Yet from Tao's question I had already received the impression that she might be that sort of woman. So I would not have insisted if he had not continued. "You may say, Karin, that we should have thought of all this before … ah, before … Well, we did. She – she asked me what would happen if she should become pregnant."

"And?"

"I assured her that she need not be afraid," he said sadly. "I told her that you would never let the child suffer, that you would divorce me."

I felt as though I had been forced to listen at the keyhole during a moment of whispering in the night. I knew that Tao had no wish to be rid of me, but I also knew that he had been cold with fear lest he fail to persuade the woman. If he had wagered me in a card game it could not have hit me any harder.

"Now, Tao," I said quietly, "child or no child, I want a divorce."

He argued with me for hours. But I forced him to give in. Then began the necessary visits to the lawyers and the minister. We went together, arm in arm. It caused a lot of talk, but we were not enemies, we were close friends. Tao gave me what I liked of our common possessions; I gave him whatever he wanted. We were both prosperous, he with *A Revolutionary Wedding*, and I with *The Dangerous Age*. We found two very nice apartments.

But when I moved in, I had no idea how to hang my paintings and arrange my furniture. Tao's taste was so far superior to mine that he had always taken care of such things. And it seemed perfectly natural to us both that he should spend the whole day and often the evening sorting books and placing the rugs and furniture. We had our meals together and together we rambled through the parks. We sat for hours smoking, drinking coffee and talking. Often, as he always had, Tao asked me to play for him – the Beethoven sonatas, the Chopin preludes, the Bach suites. We forgot the passing of hours in the music we both loved.

Frequently it was a matter of sheer will power for us to separate at bedtime. And, truthfully, we did it very seldom.

No one could blame the other woman for feeling neglected, and also unsafe when we were together. She telephoned at least once a day and asked for Tao. I always said, "Why, I haven't seen Tao for a week!"

Then she would invent some disparaging remark Tao was supposed to have made about me. Knowing him to be contentedly sitting in the next room, I paid no attention.

Our divorce came through quickly enough. By itself, even that did not break up our companionship. But then I did something for which many of our friends have never forgiven me. I forced Tao to marry the woman. There was, as he had suspected, no child on the way. I did not feel vengeful. It was simply that I could get the divorce only if she signed a statement admitting her intimacy with Tao. And once she had done that, I felt it would be too humiliating for her not to get him for a husband.

In the early spring, when they were married, I was on my way to the United States.

18

Marriage to a Stormy Petrel

I stopped off in Oslo to see Susanne Ibsen.

During many visits at Aulestad I had heard Ibsen's name mentioned often, with respect and usually without criticism. But also without particular warmth. When Ibsen's only child, Sigurd, married Bjørnson's oldest daughter, the names of the families were joined, but that was all.

Still, I knew that Bjørnson and Ibsen, and Karoline and Susanne, had been intimate friends all during their youth. What would have happened, I wondered, if Ibsen had married Karoline, and Bjørnson Susanne? What difference would there have been in their work from the influence of different wives?

When Bjørnson was praised, Karoline exulted; when he was unjustly criticized, she hid her small clenched fists and whispered smiling comfort into his ear. She nourished his soul, made him laugh or cry.

Ibsen seemed always to be alone, rising from the sea like a steep and threatening rock. His quiet, unobtrusive wife took no part in life outside her home, and people often forgot that she existed. Neither she nor their son appeared to have any connection with Ibsen's inner life. We do not know whether another woman ever touched his heart and made his senses tremble. Nothing he ever wrote reveals a hint of his secret thoughts. He went his solitary way, like a planet in its orbit. And his life-companion followed at a distance, proud and grave, demanding by her example the utmost in him.

If one asked what sort of person she was, as likely as not one was answered with a shrug. After Ibsen's death I heard her described as an unsympathetic wife who had always been a hindrance. The writer who spoke of her told about a visit to Ibsen's house, and of hearing Ibsen scornfully dismiss an artist who had just died. Susanne broke her silence to exclaim, "Don't say that, Henrik. Once you were close friends!"

Her husband ignored her and went on mocking his former friend.

"Stop it, please!" she burst out. "I cannot stand it! Have you completely forgotten how fond of him you were not so long ago?

When he still paid no attention, she left the room. Was this being unsympathetic? It only made me want to meet her and know what sort of person she really was.

But everyone discouraged me. One friend said she would not receive me. Another said, "Even if she would let you come to see her, you would be disappointed. Let her alone. She does not like strangers." A Norwegian friend said, "If you go, you must take a stunning bouquet along, something with roses or orchids – a large and expensive affair."

At the florist's I asked for buttercups, lilies of the valley, hepatica, English daisies – just enough to hold in my two cupped hands. When I rang the bell to Ibsen's house I threw away the wrapping paper.

An elderly housekeeper took me through two large dark and airless rooms. The chairs and tables looked as though they were nailed to the floor; the tall, severe bookcases could have been prison guards. I went into the inner room. It was equally cheerless. At a big table, under an old-fashioned hanging light, a little old woman sat wrapped in a thick woolen shawl. It was Susanne Ibsen.

She had been taking a nap. Slowly she rose from the chair and came toward me with open arms. I thought she had mistaken me for a friend, and drew back. But she embraced me as tenderly as if I had been a lost child restored to the family. She pointed to a row of worn-looking books on the table. "Those are yours, Karin," she said. "I read them again and again. Some of them from cover to cover – oh, I don't know how often …"

My thoughts went swiftly to my first welcome at Aulestad, the flags fluttering along the avenue lined with birch trees, the laughter and the happy voices. Now I stood in dying rooms where everything spoke of silence and melancholy on a bitter January day. Yet, I thought, Susanne's welcome was as warm as the Bjørnson's.

During our long talk I found that from my books she knew my mind and my heart better than I did myself. Her body was delicate and bent, yet I saw that she had great strength. She looked sibylline, as though she might prophesy far-distant events. Her eyes were at once mild and penetrating. Her speech was grave. When I mentioned Karoline, her face became transfigured. One by one she picked up the small flowers I had laid loosely on the table. "These are like Karoline," she said. "This is the way she looked – like a garden in the spring. Karoline Reimers – now Karoline Bjørnson …"

For a while she was silent. She gathered up all the flowers and smiled as she let them fall, to pick them up again singly.

That was the only glimpse I saw of Susanne Ibsen's past youth.

I perceived that she must have greatly influenced Henrik Ibsen's work. Her deep knowledge of human nature, her philosophy, her noble integrity, must have colored his thinking, although she told me that neither she nor Sigurd even knew of a new play until it was finished and copied.

Susanne was a person who did not try to make life easier for herself. People drifted, she said, because of their passions. And the drifting was always eventually punished. "You see, Karin," she said, using the intimate "Du," "I have lived very quietly. I have lived entirely for my husband and my son."

As she spoke we heard measured footsteps approaching. The person who made those ponderous sounds knew his own worth. Susanne looked toward the door. I thought her eyes were anxious. "It is my son who is coming," she said slowly.

Sigurd Ibsen strode into the room. He greeted me so coldly and so politely that I left immediately. He was not unfriendly, but he brought with him an icy wind that pervaded the room and made me tremble.

I went on to the United States and stayed for four months, sometimes with Harriet in her New York apartment and sometimes with Alma and her husband, Baron Dahlerup, in their large, lovely home in New Rochelle. We three were very close. Joost Dahlerup was the one man in the world who deserved my angelic sister Alma.

I would undoubtedly have loved him anyway because of his patrician good looks. But in addition, he matched Genia in selflessness; he had an original mind, an irreproachable character and, by way of leavening, exquisite humor. The few books he had written earlier in life were unique for their sincerity and simplicity. Joost's grandfather was the famous Admiral Dahlerup who had in 1848 created a fleet for Austria at the request of the young Franz Josef. As a young man Joost had edited and published the old admiral's autobiography, with extraordinary critical and financial success.

I was very happy with my sisters. But I am by temperament incurably restless. I began to long for old friends, for more familiar places. Above all, I longed to be with him who by his mere presence filled me with peace. I sailed for Denmark.

The ship was so crowded that I had to share a cabin with two other passengers. But after the first day or so I hardly noticed there was anyone else on board. For I fell in love.

Not at first sight. When I met the man who had the deck chair on my left I put him down as handsome but insignificant. He was an American, but his dark burning eyes, pale, narrow face with a long upper lip, and wavy brown hair made him look like a southern European. He looked also like a young naval cadet, too young, in fact, to be interesting to a woman of thirty-nine.

Actually he was a professor of economics, the youngest full professor in the United States. His name was Charles Stangeland. And every time his smile touched my face like a caress, a wave of heat washed over my skin.

At the table, on the deck, we talked about everything and nothing. Charlie confessed that he had arranged to sit next to me as soon as he knew I was to be on board. He did not read novels, so he had only heard about my books. But he had thought I sounded like an unusual person. I sensed, without his putting it into so many words, that he also had thought I would turn out to be a light woman with many love affairs. This was an alluring prospect – as long as we were nothing to each other.

All the afternoon of the first day we stood at the rail. He remained silent, and I talked. Every time I stopped, he said in a low, imploring voice, "Please, please go on!"

My vanity was pleased. Further, I had the feeling that I dominated him – through the sound of my voice rather than by any thought or experience of which I spoke. Once when I turned to him I saw his beautiful eyes swimming in tears. Neither of us later remembered a syllable of what was said that afternoon, but he often repeated that nothing had ever moved him as what passed between us then. We both realized that our meeting had become a momentous thing. From then on we two were alone on a ship taking us we knew not where.

The second day we kissed. For me it was as though we had dived down into a sea of fire. Did we mean this to be the great love? Or were we even then half-aware that it was only a hapless passion that would soon consume itself and us …

I was bound for Copenhagen. Charlie was to leave the ship at Christiansand, to represent the United States in Oslo at the fourth centennial of the Oslo University.

He did not need to tell me that I was his first love. He showed it in every move, every glance. Of course, he was attractive to women, but he had had, so far, only a few short and unimportant affairs. Feeling as I did, it would have been natural enough for me to have gone with him to Oslo and stayed there with him for a while. It never occurred to either of us. Our love was too holy, too unique for us to want an ordinary love affair. Curiously enough, we did not discuss marriage. Charlie was too much in awe of me to propose and I did not want to live in a small university town. He had told me of his own resentment of the extreme conventionality which would, for instance, have regarded his taking even a glass of beer in public as scandalous. I knew I would smother in such an atmosphere.

It was sad and difficult to part in Christiansand. When I reached Copenhagen my friends instantly saw that something had happened to me. During my first meeting with Nansen, who was now divorced from Betty, I told him the whole story. He did not try to

tease me, or to belittle the experience. “So he was the first after Tao?” he asked with a tender smile. “He will not be the last, little Karin!” Then he added, “Amuse yourself as you like, as long as you don’t forget me.”

These unmeaning words made me ridiculously happy. “You know too well,” I said, “that there is a world between you and everyone else.”

“I know, I know,” he murmured. Then he said, “When are you going to get married?”

I did not answer.

“Do you understand each other?” he asked. “Can you talk together?”

Still I did not answer. For in those few moments I had been able to see clearly. Charlie and I did not understand each other; we had never really talked together. We talked and wrote endlessly to each other, driven "by that desire of the first, blind period of love, to reveal ourselves completely, until we stood as naked as Adam and Eve. Charlie’s confidences disclosed only a very young and inexperienced heart, while I had a long and happy marriage to account for, besides other, small love affairs. We exchanged every secret, as though they were gifts or caresses. Yet we did not understand each other.

Nansen and I would still have been in perfect accord if we had both become blind deaf-mutes. Between Charlie and me words were like stones falling into a bottomless well, leaving only a faint momentary ripple on the surface.

The moment of self-revelation passed. I was too overwhelmed by my devouring passion. To me Charlie was unbelievably marvelous; a love like ours had never before existed. Every day I received from Oslo an envelope crammed with closely written pages. It seemed impossible that Charlie could find time to write me like that and still attend all the countless university functions.

In the end it was I who proposed marriage. At the same time I made it clear that he would have to find some other outlet for his abilities besides teaching. His reply flowed from a happy delirium. Over and over he asked, “What can I give you in return for such a gift? I am nobody, nothing. How can I make you happy? Yet, after all, there is one thing I can do. I am going to try for the consular service. That sort of life will be happier for us both than being cooped up in a university town.”

When Charlie went back to the United States I set out for Vienna to tell Genia of my new love and our plans. My description of Charlie made her very happy. But she was puzzled by my tears whenever Charlie’s letters arrived. “What is it, Karin?” she asked. “Love letters don’t usually make people weep.”

The truth was that Charlie wrote at the dictation of his moods. And he was incredibly volatile. If he began with a hymn to my perfection, he would soon be accusing me of imaginary misdeeds until I sounded like a hardened criminal. Then, his desperation exhausted, he would cover me with love words like diamonds and sapphires.

I met the American ambassador at a dinner, and talked with him of Charlie’s ambition. “Why not the diplomatic service?” he asked. “That would certainly be better. You would find brilliant material to write about. And from this photograph, the man has a fine appearance in addition to his qualifications. I think he would make an excellent diplomat.”

Ten days after Charlie received my letter with the ambassador’s suggestion he took the examinations for the diplomatic corps and passed with distinction. Shortly afterward

he was appointed secretary of legation at La Paz, Bolivia, and was due to leave for his post a month after our wedding in February.

I was wild with joy. The thought of exploring with Charlie an exotic and little-known country made me sing the whole day. Then I found that I could not go to La Paz. Genia insisted that her doctor examine my heart, and he forbade me to go anywhere near a city twelve thousand feet above sea level.

Charlie cabled that he would refuse the appointment. I replied that I would sail at once, we would be married and have at least one long month together before he had to leave.

Of course, if my common sense had not entirely deserted me, I should have postponed our wedding until his return. I did not think what it would mean for a young man to have to tear himself away from his bride. In a dim romantic haze, I thought only of how wonderful it would be to have an adoring husband in a distant land writing me adoring letters.

My sister Harriet and I arrived in New York harbor the day before I was to be married. Charlie looked pale and ill. He had been so afraid I might change my mind, he said, that he had been unable to sleep.

We went to my sister Alma's house in New Rochelle. She was my matron of honor, and Professor Charles Beard was Charlie's best man. Charlie had, for some reason, insisted that there be no throwing of rice or old shoes. Yet, after the wedding luncheon, when we stepped into the car, Alma's little daughter carried out the age-old custom. Charlie was furious. He slammed the car door so hurriedly that he caught his hand in it, and we drove away with his blood dripping all over the carpet. It was not a serene beginning for a honeymoon.

As we settled into our suite at a Washington hotel, I began to realize how little of serenity there could be in anything connected with Charlie. He was as full of sun and sudden squalls as a tropical sky.

Our hotel rooms were filled with red and white roses from Morgenstjerne, who was then secretary of the Norwegian Legation in Washington, and Charlie's dear friend. But he and everyone else respected our desire to be alone. Every morning Charlie went to the State Department. He did not ask me not to go out, but he seemed unhappy if I did, so I stayed in and read or played the piano. We lunched and dined in our drawing room, we went for long walks in Rock Creek Park. One day when I was alone a young woman who said she was an old friend of Charlie's came to call, bringing a large bouquet of flowers. I thought her charming and we had a pleasant visit.

Charlie returned, saw the flowers and heard of my visitor. He flew into a rage. "That damned woman! She had no right to intrude upon my wife!" he exclaimed. "Why did you let her in? She was only curious. You should have refused to see her. It's indecent for a woman to have guests when her husband is away!"

He rushed out into the hall and told the elevator operator that under no circumstances was he to let anyone come to our apartment if Charlie was not in. "If you forget, just once, I'll see that you lose your job!"

Thus he made me virtually a prisoner in the hotel. But when he came home to his impatient Griselda, Charlie's exuberant happiness and tender love-making was suddenly all there was in the world.

It was the same on our walks. We never returned in the same mood in which we set out. Try as I would to avoid any topic that might anger him, I always failed. Too late I realized that my long letters had been much too frank about my life before I knew him. He not only had not forgotten one word, he turned every trivial detail against me to prove my general worthlessness. It never took more than an hour of this inquisition to reduce me to helpless tears. Immediately Charlie would repent and beg forgiveness.

It is impossible to measure passions. Charlie and I were not congenial. But we were wildly, deeply in love. And Charlie suffered agonies over our coming separation. One night I woke up to find the lamp lit, and Charlie leaning over me. His dark eyes were filled with love, gratitude and sadness. He clung to me and wept, his tears bathing my face. "I cannot bear to leave you," he said desperately, again and again.

So determined was he that no one should disturb our privacy that he refused an invitation to dinner from his superior, Huntington Wilson of the State Department. Mr. Wilson, however, said that just married or not, we had to attend. All the newly appointed secretaries and their wives would be there.

At the dinner I was seated at Mr. Wilson's right and Charlie next to me. Halfway through the meal Mr. Wilson discovered our relationship and, with much joking, sent my husband to sit at the other end of the table. Charlie's face was black with anger, and I perceived that he had taken the change as a personal insult.

That was not all. Charlie had warned me not to let anyone know that I had written *The Dangerous Age*. He thought it scandalous, almost pornographic. If I had been in prison for forgery he could not have had a more genuine contempt for my work as a writer. I did not understand his feeling, but I had promised to keep my shameful identity secret.

When dinner was over, the sister of one of the new secretaries made her way to me and spoke warmly of my books, particularly of *The Dangerous Age*. Would I, she asked, stay with her and her mother when Charlie had left?

Charlie did not mention the occurrence, but he did not forget it.

Our month together was drawing to a close. We went to New York for the last days. I took diction lessons from Frederick B. Robinson, later president of City College, in preparation for a lecture at Carnegie Hall. It was characteristic of Charlie's unhappy, contradictory state of mind that his arguments overcame my reluctance to give the lecture, and at the same time he insisted that no one must know who I was.

We went several times to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Charlie had traveled a good deal and had an amazing memory for everything he had seen. I had visited and loved the art collections of many countries. One day I stood admiring a beautiful marble Apollo. Charlie rushed over to me, grabbed my arm and dragged me out. "I won't allow my wife to look at a naked man!" he almost shouted. "Are you deliberately trying to shame me in public?"

Both of us were miserably unhappy. The nights were torture. I could not get used to seeing Charlie cry like a child for hours. One night I suggested that he resign. "I can make enough for us both," I said, "until you find something that won't separate us."

He pounced upon that. I was, he said, thinking only of my own success. What did I care for his career? "You want to use me as a playboy," he said bitterly, his tears forgotten. "Other men may be willing to live as parasites on their wives. I won't!" He flung out his arms. "Don't you understand? I feel desperate. It's your duty to make me

face my fate. You are incredibly selfish! I saw how flattered you were when that silly girl at the State Department dinner recognized you! Oh, I wish I'd stayed a professor! In a university town you'd have to behave – you couldn't write any more filthy books. But you'll suffer for what you're doing to me, you'll see …"

At last, worn out with weeping, we fell asleep in each other's arms.

Finally he was gone. I fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion. In the succeeding days I had to admit that it was a relief to be alone, to live quietly without quarrels.

But it also meant living without love. I missed Charlie intolerably.

Each of his letters was long; sheaf after sheaf of thin, closely-written pages. Often they reflected twenty different moods. He might begin with a vivid, gay description of the people and the towns in Bolivia. The next paragraph would hurl one accusation after another at me. "You say you love me. It is a lie," he wrote. "You only love yourself. It means nothing to you to ruin my life as long as you are mentioned in the papers and people tell you what a wonderful writer you are. Don't you know that behind your back they call you a whore? And you are a whore. A wife who loves her husband will glory in his name, not go around as you do with another's name, one you should be ashamed of, a man who betrayed you from the first day of your marriage. And you answer his letters! Don't you realize that is a heinous crime against me? … You don't know what love is. You have never loved; you will never know the bliss or the sufferings of love …" And so on for many pages.

Poor Charlie. I had been grossly unfair to him. But did I deserve this?

I tried to forget my unhappiness in getting ready for my lecture. With my defective English and strong accent, it was a foolhardy venture. The thought of that large hall terrified me. I had spoken to audiences as big in Europe. But they knew me. Here I was a stranger. Mr. Robinson made me repeat the written lecture over and over until I could at least be understood.

But, as the Danes say, "a man with a sled got in the way."

Three days before my lecture the *Titanic* went down at sea. New York became a city of mourning. Carnegie Hall was not more than half-full. And my heart and the hearts of the audience were so heavy that it is a wonder I got through it at all.

I went back to Denmark, to my parents, and then on to Genia in Vienna. If anyone could get me on my feet again, I knew she could.

Vienna, in the fall of 1912, was perhaps the gayest city in Europe. At first I lived in my own half-dream world of longing for Charlie and sorrowing over his letters. Each Bolivian mail, once a week, brought a thick bundle of sheets containing a complete diary of his life with every thought and feeling set down in painful nakedness. He described the tortures of his loneliness, his matchless love – and the lengthy calendar of my sins.

His early praise for his minister was replaced by criticism. The two men simply did not work well together. Then the minister went back to the United States for a long vacation and Charlie was promoted to charge d'affaires. He could work without friction. But he complained unceasingly of the climate. And all misfortunes were, somehow, my fault. Six days a week I waited for these letters. On the seventh I read them and wept.

Yet it was impossible for anyone to be near Genia for long without absorbing some of her warm radiance. Charlie's letters became like the heavy clouds which blacken the sky, but with their passing leave the sky blue and serene again.

19

Two Reunions

Nansen was coming to Vienna. I stood waiting on the station platform in the cold early-morning air of autumn. All night I had traveled with him on his long journey. To think that he would make such a trip just to see me …

The train came, and there he was. I touched his hand again. Here he could take me openly in his arms. No one in Genia's circle would think twice about it. Was his greeting warmer than usual – or was my imagination, like a boat with a clever navigator, taking me where I wanted to go?

If we had been truly one person, Nansen's reactions to Genia and her friends could not have been more like mine. He felt instantly at home, as though he had spent half his life in the house in Josefstadterstrasse. Before the end of the first day he had made friends with Karl Blau, the pianist and engineer; he had promised to sit for Oscar Kokoscha. Kokoscha, like Bjørnson, said again and again, "What a head for a painter!" And, like Bjørnson, he put his hands around Nansen's head as if to "see" the nobility of its structure with his sensitive fingers.

Seldom do two men, both of whom possess great and legendary charm, meet and like each other. But Nansen and Adolf Loos, the architect, were friends at once. Nansen said to me privately, "Why have you never mentioned this Loos?"

"I don't know," I said. "Why?"

"Why? Karin, that man has a beauty that I thought only possible in a woman. And he is enormously gifted besides. Is he married? Which is his wife?"

"I don't think he is married now. But he has been, many times. Usually to someone he could help," I said. I was happy to tell him about any of my adopted family. "Two of his wives were tubercular. Oh, and once a young girl told him she had been in love with him since she was seven. So what could he do but marry her!" Nansen laughed with me. "Now, of course, he has so many people to take care of that although he is very successful, he lives practically from hand to mouth," I finished.

At midnight nothing would do but poor tired Nansen must be taken off to a coffeehouse to meet the "Conscience of Austria," the man who was called "*Fackel*" (Torch) Kraus, after the little monthly magazine he wrote and published. A rich man's son, he had long before severed all connections with his family, and gave every penny he earned from *Fackel* to the poor. He had been ridiculed and scorned, until through his powerful exposure of every kind of corruption and abuse, both governmental and private, he came also to be feared. The press considered him a renegade, and refused to print his name. The first time he was even mentioned abroad was in an article I published in *Politiken*. But Nansen spent unforgettable hours with this man of brilliant mind and crusading heart.

Nansen was taken also to the home of the dancing Wiesenthal sisters. By this time Grethe had become famous for her grace and a certain magical kind of magnetism.

Emmy Heim sang for him. I did not think Nansen very musical, but he listened to her with open mouth. She had the same exquisite expressiveness that Jenny Lind must have had to make Hans Christian Andersen fall in love with her. In addition, Emmy could sing

like an angel in all languages, even those she did not know. She asked Nansen if he would like to hear some Danish folk songs. I had taught her the melody of "Det var en Lørdag Aften." Nansen whispered to me, "Her Danish is better than yours or mine!"

I smiled. "Listen carefully," I whispered back, "do you recognize any of the words?" Emmy did it so cleverly that although she did not actually pronounce one syllable of the language, Nansen, sitting in the same room, took it for Danish.

He refused to visit a single museum, and very reluctantly went with Genia to see her school. He would stay, he said, for "half an hour." Yet he did not leave until the school day was ended. The children sang and danced for him, they took him all around and carried on serious discussions, and he fell in love with dozens of them.

Everyone in Vienna, it seemed, wanted to meet Nansen. Our house was crowded at every meal. There never was, however, anything to drink. Genia and Hemme both liked wine, but they abstained for the sake of setting an example. I knew Nansen could not exist without his whisky, so I kept a bottle in the closet of my room. Almost every evening not only Nansen, but Scavenius, then our minister to Austria, and several others found their way to my hoard, and by midnight the bottle was empty.

One evening a party of us went to Ronacher, the Viennese variety theater. I sat in the front of the first box, Nansen behind me. Between singing and dancing acts, newsreels were flashed on a screen. Suddenly I saw the words, "La Paz, Bolivia." Charlie was in Bolivia! The camera took us inside the cathedral to see a slowly moving procession coming up the aisle toward the altar. First came the bishop in full panoply and then – Charlie! He looked incredibly handsome. Involuntarily I stretched out my hand to touch him. Then he was gone. I felt dazed. Charlie had not been as much in my mind since Nansen had arrived. Now I had to admit to myself that the mere sight of him was enough to make me tremble. I turned around to Nansen. He was not there. Nor did he return.

On our way out Genia said, "Nansen is not quite well, Karin. He has left. No, you must not go to him. He must have quiet."

The next day I learned that he had had a minor stroke. Three doctors took care of him. His first conscious words had been to Genia: "Don't tell Karin. I'm all right. Don't tell Karin, she will be frightened."

"I wish you might have seen his expression," Genia said. "I've never seen such tenderness in a man's face."

"I cannot endure this separation any longer," Charlie wrote. "What kind of a marriage is this? Please go to Washington and do everything you can to get me transferred."

I am absolutely no good at such things, but I went anyway, sailing just after Christmas. I sat between the ship's captain and the retiring American ambassador to France. Scavenius had given me a letter to him, but I could not summon the courage to present it until the very last day. The ambassador suggested that I try to go straight to the new president, Woodrow Wilson. If I failed, I was to see Secretary of State Bryan, with his greetings.

In Washington I stayed with the family of the nice young girl I had met at Huntington Wilson's dinner the year before. This visit to the capital was as happy and interesting as the former one had been unhappy. I was received everywhere with that American openheartedness that so astonishes most Europeans.

I knew people from Baltimore, old friends of President Wilson's, who were in Washington as his private guests for the inauguration. They promised to ask him to see me. For three days I kept to the house, hoping for word from the White House. Then a letter came from my Baltimore friends. They deeply regretted that they could do nothing. At the inauguration dinner Mr. Wilson had made it plain that he could not grant any special favors. Now he was in office, he must be quite impartial.

I was urged by others to see a congressman named Jones. He was unusually energetic and generous, they said, and would surely help all he could. I telephoned his office and was given an appointment for eight o'clock the next morning at his house.

Mr. Jones received me in pajamas and bathrobe. He seemed deeply interested and asked a great many questions. I hopefully poured out the whole story to him, my confidence rising every minute. At the end of an hour he rose, shook my hand with the warmest friendliness, and thanked me for coming to him with my problem. Unfortunately, he said, he could do nothing. Further, he felt sure that it was the other congressman named Jones whom I had wanted to see.

"Where can I find this other Mr. Jones?" I asked faintly.

"Well, he's not in town now," the wrong Mr. Jones said. "But he may be back in a few months, anyway for the next session."

I left hurriedly, while I could still smile.

The Secretary of State, William Jennings Bryan, was my last hope. He received me, as had everyone else, with the greatest courtesy. After a few minutes' conversation he called for his secretary to take down my story. This, he explained, would enable him to go over the matter at his leisure. He hoped to clear up the whole thing in a few weeks.

I never heard from him again.

My mother and father had dreamed all their lives of making the trip to America to see Alma and Harriet. Now, late in the spring, they arrived in New York.

They were both very good-looking and sociable, and played a good game of whist, so they had been spoiled by everyone on board. On the roughest days, when most passengers kept to their cabins, Mother walked the deck with the captain. One day Father happened to see the captain put his arm around Mother to steady her against a sudden roll of the ship. He was so jealous that he did not speak to her for two days. At that time he was seventy-six, and Mother was two years younger. But she still had decided beauty, and a flashing, mischievous smile.

My youngest brother, Allen, came from South Africa to see them. So, for the first time in years, four of us children were together again with our parents. But we could hardly keep up with them. They explored New York with an energy that exhausted the rest of us. They took the boat up the Hudson, they went to all the harbor islands. After a full day of sight-seeing in the city with one of us, they would return to Alma's house in New Rochelle with barely enough time to go out to whatever party had been planned.

Just before they were to return to Denmark, Charlie came up from Bolivia. He had had more frequently recurring bouts of malaria. Finally he had simply notified the State Department that he could not stand the climate any longer, and without waiting for permission, had packed up and left.

After all our agonies and ecstasies, what a miserable reunion that was!

Charlie would not let me come to the pier to meet him. I waited restlessly for hours in a hotel room. But nothing he had written about the searing, tropical heat of the days and the arctic cold of the nights in La Paz had prepared me for the sight of him. Charlie had become only the wreck of a man.

He had lost weight until he seemed actually to have shrunk. His handsome dark eyes alternately burned feverishly, or filled with sudden tears. His radiant, beguiling smile had vanished. He seemed to stand upright only by a great effort of will.

He remained just inside the doorway, watching with bitter satisfaction as I tried to hide my dismay. "Look. Yes, go on, look," he said, "this is what you have made of me."

The next moment, with a cry of remorse, he took me into his arms.

I would nurse him back to health, I thought, bring him back to joy in life. At least he is here, close to me.

He asked me to order a drink. Before it could be brought he nervously took a bottle from his dressing case. Under the influence of the whisky he became a little more like himself. Merrily he began to pull out of his bags and trunks all sorts of gifts – a dozen vicuna rugs, peasant costumes, a little bag filled with gold coins, and enough chinchilla skins for a coat.

I could not take my eyes from him. Underneath his excessive gaiety, there was such bottomless sadness that suddenly I knew, with dreadful certainty, that something vital in this man had died. The pain of being separated from the woman he loved combined with the unholy torturing of his jealousy had been too much for his spirit.

Even when we lay in each other's arms, it was not as it had been. It was a sick man I embraced. I felt some contravening of nature here, a sort of emotional incest. And he had hardly fed his love hunger before he began his old accusations of infidelity.

Only when he was drinking did Charlie's mind reach out peacefully for mine. Then we had a few hours of companionship. I had brought some marvelous old *Chateau Yquem* with me. In the middle of a troubled and quarrelsome night we would empty the icebox of food, open the wine, and sit at the table for hours talking of everything that had happened to us since we parted.

My mother and father liked their handsome, elegant son-in-law. I knew, however, that the slightest sign of friction between us would make them miserable. So we moved to a boardinghouse in near-by Tarrytown.

Mother was not deceived. "Karin," she said, "a love like Charlie's comes to few women. You must guard it, and not sadden his heart. This man is one in millions, a man who can give himself to one woman for his whole life. But he is terribly demanding. If you have not enough to give in return, you will be very unhappy. And – so will he."

Harriet and Alma and Joost all liked Charlie, too. But one evening he and Harriet had a quarrel. I left him in Tarrytown and went to New York with my sister.

At her apartment, surrounded by the serene beauty of good paintings and fine old furniture, we dressed in our best evening clothes. We dined at an excellent restaurant and drank champagne. Then we got seats in the Diamond Horseshoe at the Metropolitan Opera House. Sitting in the darkened auditorium hand in hand, Harriet whispered, "Is it possible that any other sisters in the world are as close friends as you and Alma and I?" I squeezed her hand and smiled.

It was true. We could not have been more different. But always we had a royal time together.

After the opera Harriet and I had exactly twenty cents left of all the money with which we had started out. “You choose,” Harriet said. “Shall we walk up to Grand Central Station and have a cup of chocolate? Or shall we ride home on the Fifth Avenue bus?”

We walked to Grand Central, and then all the way uptown to her apartment.

That night we lay awake as we always did, recalling our childhood in Randers; we played again with the chickens in Grandmother’s tiled kitchen; we lay in the sun on the brown pungent bark of the garden path. We fell asleep and dreamed of Denmark.

I returned to Tarrytown feeling stronger and calmer.

Charlie and I took long walks around Sleepy Hollow and the great estates, with their trees heavy with red and yellow fruit. One day we crossed the Hudson, intending to climb the Palisades.

Charlie loved to climb. I was truly terrified. Every step was too high for my short legs. Every moment I saw myself falling down the cliff, lying on the rocks below with all my bones broken. I began to shake and begged Charlie to take me back. He made light of my fear. “I will take care of you; don’t worry,” he said.

“How can you take care of me when you rush ahead so fast?”

“Here is a ladder. Surely you can climb that.” Above me he reassuringly patted a flimsy arrangement of pine branches. All I could see was that nearly half the rungs had rotted away. Somehow I scrambled up. Then I fainted.

The rest of the day was a nightmare. Charlie laughed and urged me on. I tried to control my fear. How I got to the top, or down the long steep banks again, I do not know.

I could not forgive Charlie quickly, although I was sure he had not been cruel deliberately. A week or so later, I asked him, “What would you have done if I had really fallen down the cliff?”

He looked straight at me. “I would have followed you, of course.” Then he added somberly, “Perhaps it would have been the best thing for both of us.”

20

Wartime in Vienna

Once more to Europe. It was the spring of 1914, when many hearts were heavy with fear of war. Since Charlie was primarily an economist, however, and I had no understanding of politics, the idea of war did not enter our minds.

The ebb and pull of tension in our private life blinded us to the outside world. During the next few years we were separated in countries at war with each other; at different times I lived in Austria, in England, and in neutral Denmark. Always we were drawn together again by our obsession with each other.

In Vienna Genia warmly kissed Charlie on sight. The very next day they had a stormy argument about my books. Charlie and I left the house that was my second home and took rooms in the Hotel Panhans, overlooking the Semmering mountains.

It was here, in the sharp sunlight of a mountain spring day that Genia brought Alma’s cable telling of Harriet’s suicide and asking me to inform our parents. Harriet, my youngest and most gifted sister, had left a note addressed to me. “Do not be angry, or too

unhappy," it said. "I have Bright's disease, and would not in any case have much more time. It is better this way. My love to you and to all."

Somehow I found the strength to cable Mother and Father, first that Harriet had had a serious heart attack, then that she had passed away. Other cables to friends in Denmark kept out of the newspapers the fact that it had been a suicide.

Charlie tried his best to comfort me. But every word was the wrong one. Memories of my sweet little sister cut agonizingly into my heart. Only Genia, with her warm, uncomplicated love, eased the pain. Only Genia – and the new book I had just begun. While I worked I could, at least for those few hours, forget everything else.

Fortunately I had to start almost at once on a lecture tour. Rather than risk the scenes that had become a normal abnormality of our life, I persuaded Charlie to go to Thurø and wait for me.

The tour over, I went straight to Copenhagen on my way home.

Nansen had had another, more serious attack, and had spent weeks in the hospital without being allowed to see anyone. His message said, "The doctor will allow you five minutes this afternoon. Will you come?"

The five minutes lasted for two hours. Every time I started to leave, Nansen begged me to stay just a little longer. In the next morning's mail there was a card: "I feel better today than I have for many months. Only seeing you and talking with you could have helped me so much."

These words were like a seed which, dropping to the ground, grows to a mighty forest.

I put the card carefully away with his letters. For he had been writing me now for some years. He would begin by saying that he wanted to send me just a line. Before he ended he had covered ten or twelve pages. To read his letters was like being with him.

My delight in returning to my small house on Thurø suffered a rude shock. It was my own fault. I had forgotten that every inch of the place spoke mutely of Tao. I had to answer endless questions from Charlie and also to tell a few lies.

"Are these *his* books?"

"No, all the books here are mine."

"And even the beds, I suppose! Are these the same beds in which you slept with the husband who betrayed you so shamefully?"

"No, no. Our beds I sold long ago …"

Charlie found a pair of old shoes which Tao had worn for gardening. His anger frightened me, not for myself, but for the violence his feelings worked in him. At the same time he was much too sensitive to beauty not to love every treasure which we had collected there. And, I reflected, I had kept no secrets from Charlie. He knew, before he went there, that Tao and I had planned and built the house on Thurø.

In the midst of all this, Austria declared war on Serbia, and the World War began.

How often as a child I had daydreamed in school of red-coated soldiers galloping through the too-quiet streets of Randers, brandishing sabers, shooting into the air and urging on their horses with wild war cries. At first, secluded on my remote and peaceful island, this war had as little reality for me as those old fantasies.

Charlie was in a fever of uncertainty. Since he had left his post in Bolivia without permission, he felt himself a sort of diplomatic orphan. He received his salary, but no instructions. He did not know what to do. He could not forget, either, his morbid fear that whatever he did, my "pornographic" books would ruin his reputation. At the same time he insisted that I drop the name of Michaelis. I signed two books with his name. But it was unwise. Karin Michaelis was known all over Europe – and who was Karin Stangeland?

One morning – it was the first of October – I awoke with a buzzing in my head, as though it were full of angry bees. "For once, Charlie, you must leave me in peace for a time," I said. "I have an idea for a play. But my head is bursting with it, and if I don't have some quiet I shall go crazy!"

He promised, and this time he kept his word. He saw that I got food and sleep, and he did not make a sound. He told me later that when he came into the room where I sat already working in the early morning, he felt that every chair was occupied by some invisible being. He hardly dared breathe for fear of disturbing them.

On the twenty-first of October I finished the play. It was the story of a blind woman in Denmark whose children had emigrated to America. They sent glowing reports of their success. They wanted her to visit them, but it was, of course, impossible, they said, because of her blindness. Without telling them, she had an operation and regained her sight. Then she sailed for New York. On landing she kept on her dark glasses. Then she saw that her son and daughter waiting on the pier were incredibly ragged. Their successes had been fairy tales to keep her from worrying. The mother decided to sell her property in Denmark and gave the money to her children. She died without ever telling them that she could see.

I called the play *Mother's Eyes*, and sent off copies to Copenhagen, to Hamburg, and to Vienna. I knew nothing about playwriting and had no idea whether it was good or bad. Nor did I care. As with almost everything else I have ever written, my interest ceased as soon as the words were down on paper.

Incredibly, on the same day Charlie was appointed second secretary of the American embassy in London.

A few days later I had three cables – from Copenhagen, Hamburg, and Vienna. The play was going into rehearsal in all three cities. I was asked to go to Vienna at once.

We closed the house. Somehow it did not seem strange for us to be leaving for the capitals of nations on opposite sides in a war. We were both absorbed in what lay immediately before us. And I suspect that Charlie rather welcomed the chance to establish himself in London without me. For the first time we parted without tears and recriminations.

Before I could leave for Vienna, I had to see Nansen.

By this time, whenever I was in Denmark I knew I could see him whenever I wanted to. Whether I was coming from abroad or merely from Thurø I always wrote him the date of my arrival. Invariably he kept himself free for my first evening. I spent the whole day in anticipation. It was a high holiday. I could almost hear church bells pealing.

Through Genia's influence, clothes had become extremely important to me. One evening gown from any of the great Viennese establishments cost more than I had ever spent on clothing in a year. But I earned much more money than I needed. So I let myself

be dressed by the best couturieres in Vienna. The days on which I was to see Nansen, I tried on one after another, in an agony to decide which he would like best.

With all my heart I wanted his admiration. Yet once he said, "Little Karin, what has happened? You look like a very elegant lady! I can't believe my eyes!" And I felt hurt. I would have wanted him to think I looked wonderful even in a ragged apron.

Nansen's house was spacious. The rooms wore white paneling; the prisms of the chandeliers sparkled in the light, and underfoot thick Persian rugs covered the floors. I entered the house with a beating heart. Slowly up the broad and winding staircase I went, my ears ringing with excitement. He would be standing at the apartment door waiting for me.

The table in the dining room always – summer and winter – bore the orchids I loved so much. By my place stood a bottle of my favorite champagne; next to his a bottle of whisky, which he drank straight. By the end of the evening the bottle would be empty.

When the maids had served the meal and cleared away, they left. And we were alone. We walked, arm in arm, up and down through his three magnificent drawing rooms. Sometimes I laced my fingers in his, or he put his arm around my shoulders. We talked, and talked, and talked.

From time to time he would leave me for a few minutes. On his return he would be elated, in higher spirits. What was this secret that he kept from me so long? Was there really any secret at all? Finally I knew. He took morphine.

I asked him straight out. He looked neither surprised nor uneasy. "Do you believe it?" he asked. He saw by my eyes that I did. We never brought up the subject again.

Except for the slight added exhilaration, Nansen showed no effects of either the morphine or the whisky. I realized that if Charlie had consumed half that much whisky I would have been disgusted. And it was no use justifying myself by saying that Charlie drank badly, all his bad temper coming out like a rash, whereas Nansen did not change in the least. I knew that if he had drunk himself senseless, Nansen would still have been perfect in my eyes.

After hours of walking and talking we would stand in the embrasure of the big window looking out over the park. The red stone castle there, four centuries old, was black in the night. We would take to kissing each other, endlessly. His kisses came from his great and wonderful tenderness – with perhaps a shade more of feeling because we were, after all, of different sexes. I kissed and was kissed with gratitude and humility.

"It is so good to be with you!" he said.

It only did not mean "because I love you."

In one year of war Vienna had changed from a gay and beautiful place to a poverty-ridden city, dirty and neglected. The massive horses pulling brewers' drays looked like skeletons. Many horses fell in the street, and died where they fell.

On a windy morning I went to the first rehearsal. The play had been renamed *A Holy Lie*. The actors sat about in their street clothes, and read their lines without expression. The words sounded completely idiotic. I was ashamed of such trash, and pitied the people who had to learn it by heart. I had loved the play while I was creating it; now I felt I had given birth to a monster.

The theater was sold out for the premiere just as inevitably as Mother had always worn her best black dress to church on Sunday. The Viennese were at war, but they could

not give up their entertainment. Genia insisted that I go. Adolf Loos, the Wiesenthals, Karl Blau, Emmy Heim, Egon Friedell, the art historian, and the ugly but gifted French writer, Marcel Ray, and his bewitching wife, and many more of us set off in several cars for the theater. Once there, we were separated. A man took me by the arm, guided me up some steps, opened a door, kissed my hand and left.

I found myself in a tiny cell with an iron grille to keep me from falling into the laps of the audience below. I remembered vaguely hearing of the author's "grilled box." I peered down to where all my friends were sitting. They were talking and laughing and looked very gay. I felt forlorn and forsaken.

The curtain rose. There was a burst of applause. I looked at the stage but failed to see anything new or interesting there. If only I had had a glass of soapy water and a clay pipe, what wonderful soap bubbles I could have floated out into the darkened auditorium! Surely the audience would welcome some diversion from the boredom on the stage. Every minute seemed an hour. I twiddled my thumbs. I counted to three hundred. The longest poem I knew by heart was *The Prisoner of Chilton*. Halfway through it I fell asleep.

Someone roughly shook my shoulder. There was a roaring sound as of a thousand hungry lions. "Wake up! Wake up! They're tearing the house down!" somebody cried excitedly. "Come this way to the stage. They're shouting for you!"

What did an author do on a first night? Make a speech? Bow? Yes, by all means, a bow. But what kind of a bow – a deep curtsy? No, that was only for royalty, and every time I had tried it I fell flat on my face. I was embarrassed, still enough of a lady not to put my finger into my mouth, but not enough of one to be able to speak a word. I simply stood there and grinned like a simpleton. Someone pointed to the mass of flowers that made the stage floor look like a high-class funeral. I bent down, grasped as many baskets and bouquets as possible and fled to the safety of the wings.

The play was a great success everywhere. Audiences seemed to have no trouble staying awake; they came again and again and brought their friends. They even laughed and cried in the right places.

From London Charlie sent the best possible news. He adored his ambassador, Walter Hines Page, and he shared a house with a countess who traced her ancestry back to the Norman invasion or something equally impressive. He had arranged for a courier to take me safely from Berlin to London.

Charlie met me with an armful of roses; the countess welcomed me warmly. But we did not stay long in her house. It was discreetly hinted to Charlie that while she lived at, say, Number 250 on the street, it was not proper for anyone in the diplomatic corps to live beyond 130.

We took a house of our own on Hereford Square. With it went a large garden, a key to the park, and two servants. But altogether, nothing memorable happened during the months I spent in London.

Mr. Page was very cordial. Everyone was, and we went to countless dinners, luncheons and teas. But since I was, so to speak, incognito, I did not meet a single one of the many interesting British writers. I had one or two friends, Grevenkop Castenskjold, the Danish minister, and the wife of a young Norwegian diplomat. She was a German, and at that time I still believed in Germany. But one day, talking about the war, I said

what a shame it was that no Jewish officer, no matter how brilliant, could enter a German officers' club.

"Oh, that is not so," she said indignantly. "My own brother is an officer, and he speaks of the Jews coming to his club." Then she added righteously, "Of course, they don't stay long."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, naturally nobody will speak to them. So they leave in a few minutes."

That was the end of that friendship.

The one impression of London in wartime that stayed with me most vividly was the change that had come over the many gray-faced, idle spinsters. They were idle no longer; they had become porters, bus conductors, they managed restaurants, they drove taxis. And they seemed to have gained happiness, health and youth. Everyone spoke of their enormous diligence, their good nature and their efficiency.

Quite suddenly one day in the fall of 1915, Charlie was dismissed from his post. Mr. Page, who liked him very much, did not know why, nor was any reason given. Charlie alternated between indignation and despair. He took to drinking more heavily, and I could not blame him. I urged him to protest, to make a scandal. Whatever his faults, his work and his loyalty were beyond question. He decided only to go to Washington, and to seek an explanation there.

After he sailed, I took our two dogs and went to Denmark..

My first evening in Copenhagen was, of course, dedicated to Nansen.

Those hours are burned into my memory. For Nansen behaved quite differently.

And I was the one who withdrew. Not that I was unwilling. I would have yielded as a mortal to a god. But I knew he did not love me.

"I cannot lie to you," I said. "I would give my last drop of blood to be completely one with you – just once. But – I love you so ardently, so completely, that if you changed toward me – I could not bear it …"

Nansen had put the width of the room between us. He stood for a long time without speaking. Then he drew a deep breath. "I care too deeply for you to say pretty things that would not be true. You would know that they were not true. And that would be bad. Yes, little Karin, you are right." He stopped. Then he spoke again, with difficulty. "No one in the world possesses me in the way that you do. And – well, what you do not possess, I can give to a streetgirl. Thank you, Karin, for being wiser than I."

On another evening we talked about what a marriage between us would be like. Nansen was free, but I was still bound, even in unhappiness, to Charlie.

I think that if he had said he wanted me I would have fallen dead from joy. Just as there is a limit to the pain a person can feel, so there must be a limit for human endurance of happiness.

But he was once more in perfect command of himself. "I cannot conceal from you, Karin, anything in my heart that concerns you." Nansen spoke slowly and very softly. "I have thought about marrying you. But I have often told you that not even your imagination could reveal to you my secret life, dark as night shadows. You did cross the border some time ago. I must not take you any further into my other world. For all your experience you are a naïve child – that is only one more reason for my attachment to you."

He stopped speaking and sat silent for a long time. Then he took my hand, raised his head and looked me full in the eyes. “For me to marry you would be a crime,” he said clearly. “You mean more to me than you realize. But very soon I would have to go my own way – into my other world, my nightshadow world. It would hurt you. And, my dear, I could not endure that.”

His kisses fell softly on my lips. We did not ask anything of one another. We only gave, both of us, each to the other.

From my first meeting with Genia I went to her home as eagerly as to my own. I soon left Denmark for Vienna.

Even during the war, with Genia and Hemme, the days were an unbroken chain of festivals. If a stranger had come in and heard our noisy discussions, he might have thought us quarreling. But we were only excited. And we were friends in a comradeship I never knew anywhere else. We talked and criticized and defended and shared. What belonged to one of us belonged to all.

Once I had just bought an evening wrap, not elaborate, but the finest I had ever owned. Emmy Heim, of the angel’s voice, was leaving for a concert tour. She and Genia and I were going over Genia’s wardrobe to see what Emmy could use on the trip. Genia said, “What about an evening wrap?”

Emmy shrugged. “The old one will have to do,” she said.

Genia laughed. “That rag?” she said. “No, indeed! Karin has a new one. It will be wonderfully becoming to you.”

I did not see my cherished wrap for many weeks.

Genia never had a dress or a coat that was not worn by many people, even mere acquaintances. She never knew what she possessed and what had been lent or given away. She had no pleasure in private ownership.

Nor could she bear to eat the most modest food knowing that someone else was hungry. On the train from Berlin I had met a young brother and sister going to Vienna to care for their destitute mother. I could not help worrying about them.

Genia said sadly, “Believe me, Karin, thousands of well-bred people in Vienna seldom get a good meal now.”

I always thought of Genia as a person who could perform miracles. “Isn’t there something you can do?”

She left the room without answering. In a little while she came back. “Two weeks – give me two weeks,” she said. She would not explain.

In just ten days she came to me. “Now, Karin, the time has come. You must write an article for the *Neue Freie Presse*. Tell all old people, married and single, who would like to live in the country to come to see me at the school. Promise them nice rooms, good food and gay entertainment – for nothing!”

She had advertised for vacant country houses, and for very small sums she had rented a number of them.

Two days later we found dozens of nice old couples shyly sitting together in the school reception room. Many of them had started from home before daylight so as not to miss this excursion into fairyland. They did not quite dare believe it was true. They looked at us with embarrassment and gentle defiance, as though to say, “At our age, what have we to lose?”

Genia saw that they were comfortable and made them laugh with little jokes. She jotted down all their preferences: who liked to be near water, who preferred the mountains; this one liked gardening, that one collected stamps.

At home she said to me, "Now, Karin, will you write to Castellone and ask him for some money for our old people?"

"Castellone? I've only met him once!"

"Write him and see."

To my amazement I received in answer an enormous box of flowers and a huge check. His note thanked me profusely for remembering him and offered to help whenever we needed money.

Having tasted first blood, I found it easy to send little notes to millionaires in Austria and abroad. I had once dined at the home of Glückstadt, the largest banker of Copenhagen, and had eaten with real gold knives and forks. He, too, sent me a tremendous check.

Who knows how many hotels and estates Genia eventually rented, or how many hundreds of old people she sheltered, of all religions and walks of life! There are no words for her consideration, her boundless understanding of the small, important things of daily life. Any guest could stay for the rest of his life, or could leave when he wished. Each had a task that made him feel his communal value, setting the tables, arranging the flowers, taking care of the libraries, keeping track of the cards, the games, the music boxes. Genia would put everything aside to straighten out a misunderstanding. She went into toy stores and asked for the best games. "For children of what age?" the clerk would ask.

"Between sixty and ninety!" she would answer. She always came away with a special gift from the proprietor.

Then there were her real children.

Harthof was a manor house at the foot of the Semmering Mountains. When about fourteen of Genia's pupils became orphans because their parents were diplomats elsewhere, or could not get back from other countries, she turned part of the house into a boarding school.

The young teachers had complete freedom to conduct classes as they liked. Genia's only precept was, "Do not teach a child at seven anything he will not remember with profit and joy at seventy!"

The children sat everywhere in the room, lying on couches, flat on their stomachs on the floor, squatting in front of the fire. They listened to stories from Roman history with the same enchanted eagerness with which I had drunk in my Aunt Sophy's tales of the eleven wild swans. They had French or Italian conversation, with much laughter. Suddenly a child would begin to sing one of the beautiful Schubert *lieder* and the whole group would join in. Or one would fling open a window, breathe in the clean icy air and look at the teacher. At her nod the entire class would be outside in the surrounding park, climbing to the tops of the straight tall trees, rolling about in the snow. Then, voluntarily, they would return to class and at once be absorbed in the lesson.

When I was living in town, in Genia's house, I often walked the four miles out to the glorious park around Schönbrunn Castle, where Franz Josef spent his last days. I sat on a bench in the pale sunlight and watched the thin, ragged children. Most of their games

centered around food. Grown people passed, too, in threadbare dignity, their heads high, their eyes blank, like sleepwalkers. The zoo was empty, the greenhouses barren, the little wooden, two-room pavilions empty.

I wrote to the caretaker, asking if I might rent one of these deserted buildings to write in. Instead he gave me three lovely high-ceilinged rooms in Schönbrunn Castle itself! Inside I had rare antique furniture, magnificent fireplaces and a tiled porcelain stove to look upon – outside, centuries-old trees and the incomparable ornamental Glorietta. I worked happily in my solitary splendor. At mealtime Genia sometimes sent one of the young girls of the household with a basket, but usually I dined at her house. Down the winding flights of marble stairs I went. The vast palace was chill and drafty. But the feeling of having had a book grow a little under my fingers that day warmed me through. The long walk back to Genia's went quickly with anticipation of the evening ahead. Philosophers, educators, dancers, writers and statesmen all gathered there. Perhaps Michael Hainisch, later president of Austria, would drop in, or Hugo Breitner, the mayor.

One day, walking back with Genia, a shabby girl in her teens ran up to us, curtsied and kissed Genia's hand. "Frau Doktor!" she exclaimed. "I am so grateful to you! I have gotten work, thanks to you. Now I can pay my own room rent and even buy some clothes, so I won't have to rob your wardrobe any more! Thank you again and again!"

When she had gone Genia said, "That lovely child is the great-granddaughter of the old emperor. She has literally almost starved to put herself through school and college. She was too modest to let me know how hard up she was. I only found out because one day she fainted in class. Her only ambition in life is to learn all she can and to support herself." Genia turned to me and smiled. "You know her mother, don't you?"

I knew the smile referred to one of my typical gaucheries. Some years before, I had gone to a party at Fürstin Lubomirska's huge and ugly palace, and for a long time talked with an interesting woman in a black spangled evening dress, a Countess Seefried. Several times I was distracted by hearing "Her Imperial Highness," "Your Imperial Highness." Finally I demanded loudly, "What on earth does this mean? Is there an Imperial Highness here?"

There was a silence. Then Fürstin Lubomirska said with a smile, "She is right next to you, Karin. Countess Seefried is the grandchild of Franz Josef." And in the most lovely and natural way, the Imperial Highness leaned over and patted my hand.

One day Hugo Breitner took me in his official car up into the woods around Vienna. Before the war there had been many gay resorts in the forest where families sat under the stars drinking coffee with whipped cream. Now we saw dozens of people, their feet wrapped in rags, shuffling for miles through the icy-cold, windy city to get some sort of firewood to keep from freezing to death. Old and young, men and women, some women big with child, and shivering youngsters, all carrying some tool and either leather straps or heavy cord. All their faces wore the same expression of absolute, hopeless exhaustion.

At this time suicide was still common. But now people jumped off bridges into the ice-caked river. Few committed the extravagance of turning on the gas. Besides, how many still had gas?

As the car began to climb we heard the sweet singing of woodsaws and the thwack of axes; now and then came a sound of cracking, and the slow crash of a big trunk fell.

Breitner let the Viennese citizens cut as many trees as they liked, only asking them to spare the saplings. Older people obeyed their beloved mayor. But during those desperate

years the children, anxious to be useful, could not manage full-sized trees and nearly stripped the forest.

But twigs or logs, the wood had to be taken to the city. And these emaciated men and women, trembling from hunger and cold, had to carry it strapped on their backs. The load adjusted, the person tried to stand. Everyone stood watching tensely to see if he could rise to his feet. Often enough he fell back and broke a brittle leg. But in most cases he moved forward slowly, slowly, his body bent like a triangle. The sweat wet his hair and ran down his cheeks. When he came to a house he would lean against it for a while.

This was not all, nor even the worst. As soon as these wretched victims of the war reached the residential sections, a janitor would run out from each house and tempt the wood carrier to sell his burden. Even the rich had a hard time finding wood to buy. And the poor frequently gave in and sold their precious load to the highest bidder.

Breitner said, "Close your eyes. It is not good for you to see human beings toiling like the slaves at the Pyramids."

But how could I close my eyes, or stop feeling a bitter guilt,

sitting in a comfortable car when so many suffered such agonies just to keep alive?

I had need that evening of all the warmth that flowed from Genia's big heart. It was difficult to join in the talking and music. I wanted to be alone. Genia came to me smiling. "I have a gift for you!" she exclaimed. "One of your wishes has come true."

The "wish" was a man, a famous graphologist, Rafael Sherman. I disliked him at first sight. Seated next him at dinner, I resented the sexy stories with which he tried to entertain me. Reluctantly after dinner I was left alone with him in the music room. As soon as the door closed Sherman underwent a complete change. Nothing was left of his cheap anecdotes, his too-smooth, too-intimate way of speaking. In a matter-of-fact, serious voice he asked for some envelopes addressed to me. I handed him one.

He turned it between his fingers. "What a feminine hand! Although it is certainly written by a man," he said. He peered closely at it. "This man must be very, very unhappy. He is exceedingly famous. Yet he suffers because of something that happened long ago, something that shadows his entire existence. His mind seems poisoned by his memories …"

It was Knut Hamsun's handwriting. Knut Hamsun, who wrote *Hunger*, who had in his youth very nearly starved to death.

I handed Sherman another envelope. "Wonderful! Lovely!" he cried. "Of course, it is your mother. I can see her sitting under a giant tree with branches extending in every direction. She herself is like that tree and its sheltering arms."

I gave him a third envelope. "The man who wrote this was ill, and it affected his eyes," Sherman said.

"Oh, no!" I said. "He was sick, yes. But his eyes are perfect!"

"Your memory may have played you a trick," Sherman replied. "I have the proof here in my hands." He smiled. "This man is tremendously liked by men as well as by women. Many people believe themselves his closest confidant. He is kind to his friends, but he thinks of himself first of all. He is evidently a writer, so perhaps to him fame is paramount."

I laughed. "I'm surprised that you could be so wrong," I said. "He is most unselfish. He even gave up writing for years to further the career of his wife, who is an actress. Believe me, you are quite wrong."

Sherman looked at me. “This man means a great deal to you. How can you judge him clearly? I have told you the truth.”

Suddenly I remembered that the last time I saw Nansen he had been unable to read for more than a few minutes before the letters blurred. But egotistical? Nansen? I brushed the thought away.

Sherman stood looking at the last envelope for a long while. Then he smoothed it out with his hand. “This man understands what real love means,” he said slowly. “I cannot see him, or tell you much about him. But his soul is filled with one being, the woman he loves. Nothing else counts. Now – wait – I see him sitting at a window, staring out, not at the street or the sky, but seeing her face. People try to drag him away, but he is stubborn. He sits by the window for hours seeing her face in the night …”

I thought I would faint. In my purse was a letter from an American friend with whom Charlie had stayed for some months. She and her husband adored him, but his desperate unhappiness made them miserable. She described him sitting without moving by the window, staring into the dark. “Can you come to the United States and stay with us? If you cannot, my husband and I fear Charlie will fade away, like a plant without water …”

21

Wassermann and Rilke

Genia’s beautiful home always seemed warm even when there was no coal to heat it. The very walls must have been so impregnated with the tenderness and affection that spilled over from Genia and Hemme that they in turn radiated a sense of well-being to the most casual visitors. Naturally, friends thronged the place, coming to warm themselves as at a glowing hearth.

Often when I came back from Schönbrunn Castle I found Jacob Wassermann there, sitting quietly in the dusk. If Genia and Hemme had not yet come in, I would immediately ask one of the young girls of the house to bring him some hot coffee. He would gulp it down noisily and wolf the dry bread as if he had not seen food for days. Always shabby and untidy, his trousers splashed with mud, his shoes worn paper-thin and cracked, Wassermann still managed to be a rather imposing figure.

He had a big house of his own in one of the fashionable suburbs, but like everyone else, he could not get fuel to heat it, or enough food for his staff of servants.

Outside the winter shadows deepened. Inside the friendly paneled room we sat before the fire and talked endlessly. Soon the Schwarzwalds would arrive, the lamps would be switched on, and the house would fill with a pleasant bustle.

At the dinner table Wassermann devoted his entire attention to emptying his plate as quickly as possible. That done, he would abruptly push his chair back, spread his legs and look as though he were going to take a nap, there and then. We knew, however, that in a little while he would be himself again, talking brilliantly and asking searching questions to draw other people out. One had the feeling that he drilled into one’s mind, that he sought to read the secrets of one’s innermost heart, for along with his burning imagination, he possessed an insatiable curiosity about human beings. He filled the huge gallery of his mind with the lives of the people he met. I have seen him find material for

his writing in a newspaper. Again and again I have recognized in his works anecdotes and details I had told him. They had been twisted and turned to fit his purposes, but they were unmistakably the same.

I had admired Wassermann as a writer ever since I had read his two early novels, *Melusine*, and *Die Juden von Zirndorf*. At this time he was working on the book which was to bring him international renown, *Christian Wahnschaffe*, which appeared in the United States as *The World's Illusion*.

Of his private life I knew then only what everyone else knew. He had fallen deeply in love with a young, good-looking and adroit woman who left her wealthy husband for him. They could not marry because Wassermann's wife refused to give him a divorce. Finally he was free, and remarried. He became another man, beautifully groomed, with the manners of a prince. Occasionally, when we had one of our long talks, I found to my relief that the change was merely external.

Then, after a year had passed during which I had not seen Wassermann, we met. I was speechless with shock. He had become a shadow of himself, devoured by some dreadful personal knowledge. He had opened his heart to Genia, as everyone did who knew her. Now he let me see something of what was wrong. Although I had only a glimpse into his tragedy, it was enough to reveal a soul purified by suffering, a love without limit, incapable of criticism or resentment.

I had never expected to see Rainer Maria Rilke in a soldier's uniform. I had known him for many years, ever since he and his young wife had stayed with Tao and me in Copenhagen shortly after their marriage. They were completely unlike most of the gay and unburdened people I knew. One felt that tragedy waited for them.

Rilke, of course, would laugh like other young men. But behind his laughter was a sadness of soul. Despite my inveterate curiosity about the inner lives of my friends, I had never felt free to ask him too-personal questions. His reserve was thin as a film, but it was there. He and his wife seemed more like brother and sister than lovers.

For years we had seen each other occasionally. Rilke was not a person with whom one became "best friends" in a hurry. Every time we met there had to be a new beginning while he overcame his inborn shyness. Sometimes I received a book, a card, or a short note from him.

In Vienna I had news of him from two wonderful friends, the Prince and Princess Turn and Taxis. Rilke had frequently stayed with them at the Schloss Duino, near the Italian border. There he wrote his "Duino" sonnets. They told me that Rilke was coming to Vienna – as a soldier. "Dear Rilke, I could not love him more if he were my own son," Maria Turn and Taxis said.

Rilke wrote me at Genia's that he would come to see me. One evening he was announced.

After we had greeted each other, we sat in an embarrassed silence. In some places his uniform was too large, in others too small. It painfully accentuated his shyness and awkwardness. The short sleeves let his slender but red and swollen hands dangle strangely at his sides. His hair, always rumpled, had been brushed back as with a wet currycomb. His whole body exuded the odor of barracks, of horses, sweat, poor food and foul air.

The room where we sat was cozy, its ranks of bookshelves broken only by the fireplace. The house, shut off from the noise of the street, was absolutely still. Slowly Rilke seemed to lose a little of his tension.

I was too sad at the sight of him to say the simplest thing. I could only take his hands in mine and rub them, as one does with little children. A small happy smile flickered over his face. The smile, like the face, was that of a boy.

Gradually we drifted into talking, of common friends, of art, literature, music. No one came in to disturb us. After a while, the sound of a clock chiming came to us from a distant room. Abruptly he jumped up, looked at the wrist watch on his meager wrist and hurried away, scarcely saying good-by.

In the next months he came again, as often as he could get away. I always had the same feeling – as though he had come from terrible cold and must be thawed out in front of the fire before he could find himself again. After half an hour, when he either did not answer or murmured something hardly audible, he seemed to waken from a trancelike silence. Suddenly he would begin to talk in his sonorous voice, and could not be stopped. The words flowed from him. I doubt that he knew anyone was there. His eyes, the only really handsome feature of his irregular face, looked far away into a world without war, without hatred. His world – already gone to pieces.

He talked of his beloved Duino. He made us hear the sea surging around the smoldering cliffs, he let us smell the moss on marble fountains. We saw ancient statues shadowed by hoary trees. We heard the light tapping of feet hastening through the countless vaulted rooms, veiled in a quiet broken only when some old instrument hanging on the wall suddenly sighed and sang in the wind.

Rilke's voice would grow richer and fuller as he spoke of moonlit evenings at Duino with Eleonora Duse and Gabriele d'Annunzio. He knew, naturally, all the rumors about d'Annunzio, but he had neither hate nor contempt for the man. To Rilke d'Annunzio was not only a genuine poet, he was a genius. He told us of the beauty in the poet's voice – "like silver bells," a voice that made one smell "dark red roses." Rilke's own voice took on the same silvery tone as he spoke.

On another evening we were again alone. Rilke was so melancholy that I felt only death could bring him peace. The cold wind outside lashed the house, and for once the blazing fire could not warm him. It was the first and only time he spoke openly of his shattered marriage. He had nothing but kind and understanding words for his wife.

Here was a loneliness out of the reach of friends or fame.

Abruptly he clasped my hands, and in a hoarse voice told me brokenly of the disaster that had come to him in Paris, the city he loved and felt his home. He had always paid his rent promptly, and when because of the war he had had to leave Paris, had left his few belongings in a couple of tiny rooms. He felt sure his landlord would wait for his money until the war was over or send word so that Rilke could ask friends in Paris to advance it. Instead, the landlord had put Rilke's things on the street and sold them. In the lot were the manuscripts of three books.

Some writers remember every word they have written. Rilke was not like this. For him this loss was irreparable.

After that evening we never spoke again of his sorrows. But sometimes we went to spend a few hours with Princess Turn and Taxis in her venerable palace in Viktorgasse. It was far from Genia's house and one had to walk or take the streetcar, often so crowded

that half the passengers stood pressed close together. We rode outside on the open platform, in the cold or the rain, hardly able to hear our own voices, torn by the wind. We were thrown back and forth, for the rails and the cars were old and worn. But at least we had fresh air.

When Rilke was at Viktorgasse, he slipped a little away from me. Indeed, a little away from himself. He loved and admired both of our friends very much, but, incredibly, it seemed that their title awed him. His devotion had a touch of humility. He never addressed them with the familiar "*Dich*," but always used the formal "*Durchlaught*" (Highness).

Once the princess asked us to meet some young count or prince, a distant relative of hers who was much interested in spiritualism. Rilke hated such things. But, of course, we had to be polite. On our way to Viktorgasse Rilke, standing close to me, began to recite a sonnet over the roar of the storm. It was a poem which had come to him at that moment. Since he could not write it down, he spoke it aloud to help him remember it.

The evening is hazy in my memory. We sat at a table, each with a pencil and paper. We were supposed to ask questions, and the tappings of a table leg were our answers. Our hosts did not indicate whether they believed in this mumbo jumbo, or were merely amused. To me it seemed almost as though the young man had some ulterior motive in what he did. The evening dragged. Not even the wine from Prince Turn's own vineyards could keep us from a feeling of uneasiness.

When Rilke and I left the house we breathed freely at last. We let the streetcar pass by and walked the long way through muddy, winding, narrow streets, ill-lighted, ill-paved and desolate. We plodded on without speaking. Suddenly Rilke stopped and mopped his forehead. "For the first time in my life I felt like a murderer!" he said. "I wanted to wring that fellow's neck."

When at last we reached the house, still silent, I said, "Will you do me a favor? *Please!* Say the sonnet once more before you go!"

He looked at me with eyes of an unearthly despair and shook his head. "I would not do it. And if I could – after this evening – ! Please forgive me. I cannot."

He went off into the dreary night, his clumsy soldier boots ringing hollowly on the pavement.

A few days later Rilke sent me a volume of his poems. On the first page he had written a little verse about our walk through the darkened city of Vienna.

22

Three Hungarian Statesmen

Hemme Schwarzwald said that if I were going to write a book about wartime conditions in various countries, I must go to Hungary.

"Yes," I said meekly, "but whom shall I see there?"

"It doesn't make any difference. You won't be able to ask a single intelligent question." He laughed and patted my hand. "Nor could you understand an important answer to even an unintelligent question. But go anyway, Karin, and at least get a personal impression of Apponyi, Andrassy and Tisza."

Through my young and beautiful friend, Countess Ella Descheffy in Budapest, I easily made contact with my three victims. Count Albert Apponyi happened to be Ella's uncle, so I was asked to dine at his house. Ella was not invited, because there was simply not enough food. I found Apponyi a very tall man with a beak of a nose and flaring nostrils. He was one of the most brilliantly educated men I had ever met. His knowledge seemed to reach out in every direction. When we talked about Denmark he had every detail of our artistic and social progress, our history, and our financial situation at his command. But, alas, I was unable to return the compliment. What he told me about Hungary was no help at all. I tried valiantly to hold up my end. Both my questions and my answers, however, seemed merely to disconcert him. He just could not believe that anyone could be so stupendously ignorant.

The palace of Count Julius Andrassy, one of the richest men in Hungary, was the greatest of contrasts to Apponyi's modest home. Gold-threaded brocades of rose and pale green covered the walls, subtly setting off the Rembrandts, Vermeers, Rubens', El Grecos. Andrassy, a small boneless man with little flesh, did his best to entertain me with Hungary's glorious past. I listened dutifully. But at the end I was no wiser. For I could not take my eyes from his white silk socks, which curled down on his spindly legs and threatened to fall over his patent leather shoes onto the floor. When we began to talk art, however, the tired old eyes sparkled and he took me around proudly, as happy as a mother at a ball with a marriageable daughter. Most of his family had come to meet me. They all began asking questions about *The Dangerous Age*, and instead of interviewing Count Andrassy, I found myself giving interviews right and left.

Count Stephen Tisza had enormous black eyes, piercing even behind dark glasses. No one would have known that he was nearly blind. He spoke sadly and with resignation of his desperate efforts to keep his country out of the war. He asked me a few questions and, of course, immediately found me out. But by then we were good friends and he only seemed amused. He proposed an expedition to one of Hungary's famous breeding farms, at Mezehagy.

Our party, including the Minister of Agriculture, spent two days at Mezehagy. Long before we left I had revealed that the vast realm of my ignorance also included anything to do with horses.

We went also to a sugar factory near by, and there I heard a touching story. It seems that many women whose husbands were at the front had been tempted by the proximity of the Russian war prisoners working in the refinery. In due time these friendships had results not attributable to the long-absent husbands. An old general told me of a woman who heard that her husband was coming back. What was she to do about her half-Russian baby, two months old? The general promised to tell the husband himself, and to reason with him.

The husband heard the general to the end. Then he went into the next room to the baby's cradle, lifted the child in his arms and said, "Welcome, little man! You shall not suffer for what the war has done to your mother!"

Back in Vienna I asked the Minister of Interior for a permit to visit some refugee and some prisoner of war camps. He promised that if I would let him know a week ahead, he would make all travel arrangements. I was fool enough to do that – once. I found the place freshly whitewashed, the food perfect, and the prisoners dressed in their best

clothes, like children ready for Sunday school. After that I went on my own, without warning.

Why the minister should have been wary of what I might write, I don't know. In most of the camps I found that while the Austrian citizen could have only one hundred and twenty-five grams of bread a day, the prisoners received two hundred and fifty, and those who did hard manual labor as much as one thousand. I spent a couple of days in a camp for tubercular Russians, some two thousand of them, row after row in a giant hall. After the noonday dinner they were all taken outside into the sunlight and the hall was washed with disinfectant from ceiling to floor.

The dying patients were given some privacy in little wooden cells containing a narrow cot and a chair. I went from one to another, speaking the few phrases of Russian I knew. One gaunt man with yellowish-gray skin and blazing eyes thought in his delirium that I was his sweetheart. With great strength he pulled me down until my face touched his. He murmured words of love and kissed me. Then he fell back, exhausted.

The Red Cross, at the beginning of the war, was found to be woefully unprepared. There was a great dearth of nurses. A friend of mine, Countess Marshall, a physician and a humanitarian, helped to weed out applicants for army nursing. Many of the women who applied had been kept women and prostitutes who had lost their clientele and wanted to do something that would bring them into contact with men. Countess Marshall made certain that each girl received a physical examination. Then she asked her whether she preferred to nurse common soldiers or officers. If the girl said officers, she was shown the door.

The accepted applicants had, of course, to be trained. That was Maria Marshall's responsibility. During the first year it was a day-and-night job. The girls were not used to being punctual, or to working carefully and exactly. But they proved to have good hearts and deft hands. Indeed, most of them seemed to forget their original occupations.

In the meantime, the Red Cross had pulled itself together and assembled from the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie its own nursing staff. They insisted that the streetgirls must go. Maria Marshall said indignantly that if they were dismissed, she would resign.

But widely known as she was for her accomplishments and integrity, it was a hopeless fight. Maria Marshall made one last journey with her nurses from the front in charge of a trainload of dysentery patients. They had been supplied with only two bedpans. They had to tear their uniforms and those of the soldiers into strips to improvise bandages. They brought their patients into Vienna, nearly naked and covered with blood and excrement, but still alive. The Red Cross politely ignored what these heroic women had done. Not long afterward, Maria Marshall died, an embittered and broken woman.

During the summer of 1916 I went home to Denmark to meet Charlie, who was returning from the United States. In Randers I found my mother ill from a stroke which had paralyzed one side of her face and made it difficult for her to speak. She was getting better, however, and seemed very glad to see me.

She could understand me well enough. But she became impatient when I did not at once understand her. I could imagine her thinking, as she had so often said, "Heavens, darling, how stupid you are!"

Now she kept repeating, “Down! Down! Large – square – black. Little young wife! Little young wife!” At last, to my own surprise, I puzzled out the meaning of these cryptic words. She had become word-blind, and said just the opposite of what she meant. “Down” meant “up” to the storeroom, “large, square, black,” meant “small, round, white”; “little young wife” meant “Father” – “Go to the storeroom and get Father some eggs!”

Mother got well rapidly, and soon was entirely recovered. But in the meantime Father had had a great adventure – he had made a pot of coffee. It tasted very strange. “How did you make it, Father?” I asked.

“It was very simple,” he said. “I just put water, sugar, cream and coffee in a pot and boiled it for fifteen minutes. Then I put it through a strainer. Very simple.”

All the time I stayed with my parents, Father kept calling me out of Mother’s room on various pretexts. Finally he gave up all pretense, took hold of my arm and pushed me out of the room. “You cannot monopolize Mother like this!” he said. “I’m the one who is married to her!”

Charlie came to Thurø in a dreadful mood. After all his months in Washington he had found out nothing about his dismissal except that it had not been connected with his character. He took refuge from despair in excessive drinking. I had no idea how hard it is to break such a habit. Optimistically I asked him how much liquor he required a day. He told me. I took a bottle of our Danish *Brantwin*, or aqua vitae, and marked it off in thirds. He agreed that it was to last for three days.

The second day one-third was missing. After that the bottle stayed three-quarters full for some time, yet every day Charlie was intoxicated. Then I found a heap of empty bottles abandoned under the trailing branches of a spruce tree. I made an ugly scene, angrily calling him names. He defended himself by accusing me of having constantly betrayed him with Nansen. Truthfully I denied this. Nansen had never been my lover.

“I wish to God he had,” Charlie said bitterly. “If he had, you would have been cured of your infatuation long ago! Then you could be a real wife to me!”

He was completely right. But I did not, could not admit it. The whole unpleasant mess was my fault. Instead of trying to restore his self-esteem, I had simply made a blind frontal attack, head-on.

Each day we stayed together was worse than the preceding one. At last I suggested that he return to the United States and resume his university work.

We both wept miserably before he left. Our last hours were wonderful. We parted like two tragic lovers of history.

Three letters came from him. The first, from Copenhagen, spoke only of his love, of his readiness to give his life to make my life sweet and good. The second, a long letter from Oslo, was filled with accusations. He wrote at length of my infidelity, my vanity, my dirty writings. The third was the worst I had ever had. It was short, and said bluntly that I was not fit to be the wife of a decent man and that he would never again let me know where he was or what he was doing. I could write, if I wished, to his Washington club and the letters would be forwarded.

My heart was heavy. I went to Copenhagen to see Herdis and – to see Nansen.

Herdis Bergstrøm and I had been intimate friends for many years. In a quite different way, she is as unique a personality as Genia. The most generous of people, she could make money go three times as far as anyone else. When her husband had wanted to

become a writer but hesitated to give up his teaching post, she said to him, “Do you think you can make a hundred kroner a month by writing?”

He smiled. “A hundred kroner? Of course.”

“Then go ahead. I will manage.” She managed so miraculously that they traveled all over Europe and stayed where he wanted as long as he liked. Once they went to Norway, only to find it much too cold. But they had spent the money, and what could they do? Somehow they left the next day for the south of France.

Herdis, with her honesty and her charm, could persuade the owner of an elaborate mansion to rent them a room simply because her husband liked the view of the garden and felt he could write well there. Once she rented a room in Rome. But there was no kitchen. Under the broad stone stairs outside the house Herdis found a big hollow and a slab of stone. There she made an outdoor kitchen, hanging her pots and pans from nails driven into a big tree.

With all her warmth, Herdis never shrank from saying something unpleasant if it was necessary. She has been of inestimable help to me as a critic of my work. She has always frankly blamed me for the failure of my marriage to Charlie. “You should never have remarried,” she said. “As it is, you have allowed a love affair based on a man’s good looks to ruin his life.”

It was to this good friend that I went. She tried in every way to solace me. I broke my long habit of telephoning Nansen on my first day in town, knowing that a short time with Herdis would make me better company.

When I did reach him and asked if he could be free in the evening, I was amazed to notice a hesitation. Finally he said slowly, “I’m sorry. I cannot see you today. I have an engagement.”

“Well, tell me, what evening will you be free?”

“Karin, I beg you – do not try to see me this time. It is impossible. I have my reasons. And – Karin – don’t write me. I cannot see you and I cannot write you.” He finished in a rush. “Don’t ask questions. Please, please don’t!” He hung up.

I felt as though every drop of blood had left my heart. The outlines of the room became foggy, as if wrapped in a thick gray mist.

Herdis said, “What is it?”

I turned to her. “He won’t see me.”

There was a silence. “It could be almost anything,” she said. “Trouble with the publishing house, or with his former wife …”

“No, it is something I have done.”

Herdis laughed. “No,” I repeated, “it is something I have done. He said not to write. But I am going to.”

The answer came the next day: “I asked you not to write. Please do not expect letters for the time being. Believe me, it is best for both of us. That is all I can say. Try not to be unhappy. All good wishes.”

Herdis said, “There’s only one place for you now. Go to Vienna, to Genia.” I went.

I was, of course, immediately caught up in the activities of the Schwarzwald home. But I was hardly conscious of what I did. Nansen was before my eyes, waking or sleeping. I vaguely remember getting a little baby rabbit who was so tame that he let me lie beside him on the floor, rubbing noses. I went out to dig up the frozen ground for a few blades of grass for him, and an hour’s walk away saw a half-starved dog chained in a

yard. Every day I carried the dog a pail I had filled with scraps from the kitchen. I had to stand on the bitter cold platform of a trolley because the pail smelled. But it was worth it to see the animal eat until his belly became round and hard and he went to sleep.

The summer passed slowly. Food became so scarce that a piece of bread was a luxury. Still, Genia managed to feed us at Harthof, as well as all the old people at the various homes she had set up for them. The next spring I went back to Denmark, to Herdis, hoping that I might see Nansen.

"Nansen is ill. Perhaps you ought not disturb him," Herdis said. After a period of sleepless nights, however, she gave in. "I cannot stand it, Karin," she said. "Telephone him again."

Nansen himself answered. When I spoke, I thought for a second there was great joy in his voice. "Karin – ! Is that you?" Then a long, long pause. "Karin … ask Herdis to come to me at once." The connection was broken.

Even now, so very many years later, my heart contracts at the memory of the suffering I endured in the next hour. Then Herdis was back. "Now I can tell you everything," she said. "No, let me speak. First, Nansen is expecting you. You may go as soon as you like."

"Wait a minute. That is enough for a little minute," I said. "All right. Go on."

"We guessed at every reason but the right one. It was your own beloved Charlie. Yes, Karin, when Charlie left you he wrote to Nansen, asking him to promise on his honor never to see you or write you again."

"Charlie – !"

"Yes, Charlie. He threatened that otherwise something would happen to all three of you. And Nansen, being a mere man, is not more courageous than the rest of them. He thought perhaps Charlie would shoot you both and commit suicide. So he promised. But he asked Charlie on his part to promise to write you and explain."

"But Charlie didn't!"

"I know. I told Nansen. So now he feels free of his promise."

Dear, patient Herdis sat up most of the night repeating to me over and over what she had said to Nansen, what he had said to her, how he had looked – everything she could squeeze from her memory.

I waited two days. Then once more I walked up those broad, familiar stairs, my legs trembling under me. In the doorway stood Nansen. I saw his beloved face.

But this was a sick man, unbelievably changed. He still smiled, he was very talkative. The change lay in what he said. He had but one topic – himself, his writing. Nansen, who never mentioned his own work, who always seemed more interested in hearing about what others had done, this Nansen did not inquire about Genia, did not ask a single question about me. His only reference to the agony of the past months was to say when I entered, "What a pity this misunderstanding has kept us apart so long. But, of course, it was not my fault."

Thereafter he spoke solely about how much he had earned by his work, the price of this article, that short story. He talked as if the world, then at war, was concerned entirely with getting manuscripts from him.

At first it was incredible to me. I did not remember what the graphologist, Sherman, had said of Nansen's real preoccupation with himself. He stayed for a long time standing

in the same spot, discussing prices of the Austrian, Hungarian, and German publishers. This is not happening, I thought numbly. I have gone mad and this is a horrible fantasy. Yet it was happening.

It was over between Nansen and me as though it had never been.

I kept his emaciated hand in mine, I filled my eyes with the sight of his face. I kissed his cold, unresponsive lips, and knew I had lost everything I had been so proud to possess.

Then I went away.

23

A Feast and a Death

I seldom think of Genia without remembering our white oxen. Surrounded by war and starvation, all who knew her were nourished by the magical warmth of Genia's love.

Although she was a doctor and Hemme was Undersecretary of Finance, Genia's household was no better off than any other. Yet the privation all around us made her so unhappy that her abundant, unruly hair came out until there was little left. We persuaded her to cut it off short, like a man's.

Genia, the childless woman with the great motherly heart, suffered at the sight of the pale and haggard Viennese children who had forgotten how to laugh. This gravity of theirs was a curious thing. Again and again we gathered a group of youngsters from the street, took them to a candy shop and bought, at exorbitant prices, whatever they wanted and as much as they could hold. They thanked us soberly and in the end left us without a suggestion of a smile.

Hotels and inns stood closed for lack of food, fuel and servants. Some of the magnificent estates were even for rent.

This gave Genia an idea. She began making trips all over the country. When nobody else could possibly get a railroad ticket, there was always one for the Frau Doktor. One day she returned from a journey triumphant. She had rented an entire mountain resort at Topolschidtz, with several hotel buildings, hot springs, open-air cabins, and every sort of sports facility.

Promptly she assembled some three hundred people, teachers, scientists, writers, painters and businessmen, their wives and children. Those who had money paid enough to take care of those who had not. When Genia ran any enterprise there were no differences, whether of race, religion, or station in life.

I stayed behind the others to finish a book. Then, the day before I was to follow the exodus to the mountains, I came down with influenza. The doctor ordered me to stay in bed.

But I had my ticket for Topolschidtz. My luggage had already gone ahead, and I was determined to follow it. The fever went so high that I did not feel ill. My brain teemed with dreams of the mountains red with cyclamen, fragrant cyclamen – unknown in Denmark.

The next morning I forced myself out of bed, first burning up and then shaking with cold. I called one of the many young girls who lived in Genia's home as friends and

guests and who took care of the housework. The doctor had given me permission to leave, I said. Would she take me to the station? She believed me, and I was on my way.

Once in the train I realized that I was actually very sick. The landscape whirled past, the faces of the people around me blurred into one and then became multiple. My head exploded with pain. The journey was an eternity.

Finally I caught a hint of cyclamen in the air. It soothed the fever. Then there was cyclamen everywhere, covering every mountain slope. Butterflies, millions of them, danced on the perfumed breeze.

We arrived at Topolschidtz. The platform swarmed with hilarious, scantily clad children with garlands in their flowing hair. Some of them, instead of flowers, had made their wreaths of butterflies, that waved their wings and nestled in their soft beds.

Genia came up quickly and embraced me. She was tanned and well. Her iron-gray hair had grown thick again and curled around her face. She looked like one of the Roman emperors. We were standing with the children in the little square of the town when suddenly two large white oxen paced majestically toward us, their horns, necks and tails decked with flowers like two holy Apis. Two children drove them; behind more children came, like worshipers.

I stared and decided that it was delirium. I was carried all the way from the little town to my open-air cabin by the lake and put to bed. The children's voices rose in song to the sky, the air breathed a sweet fragrance, the fireflies blinked beneath the glittering stars.

After some days the fever passed and I was in Elysium. But I went to the common breakfast table only once. The scene was beautiful enough. Long trestles set under huge sheltering trees were covered with paper cloths and set with silver. I was used to wartime food, it was not that; we even had condensed milk, sent to Genia by friends in the United States. But instead of butter or sugar, each of us had a tiny dish covered with some gluey stuff. As I sat down I saw that the bottom of the dish was alive. Ten or twelve bees had been trapped there, and buzzed and struggled to escape. I could not understand how anyone could eat even that frugal meal without liberating the helpless insects. I hurriedly left the table, followed by laughter and teasing.

Genia had to work unceasingly to get food for our colony. She had written to friends all over the world. Where things could still be bought, she ordered them at her own expense. From Switzerland we had chocolate in bars and in powder form. Sometimes we could buy a few chickens from the poor mountaineers, or pigeons, and always vegetables, although they were very high. But we could get no meat. Genia had begged most of the butchers in Vienna for meat, but they could give us at most a few pounds at a time – hardly enough for our family of three hundred.

Once again she went traveling, and found a town where the butcher succumbed to her charm. He finally gave her a written promise to send a well-fattened ox to Topolschidtz twice a month. For weeks before my arrival the first ox had been expected. Genia wrote the butcher, then telegraphed him – no ox. She wrote him practically a love letter – no ox. Then, just as they started out to meet my train, not one ox came but two. Genia had them slaughtered in the town.

We had an orgy of meat. Yet, eventually even two oxen come to an end. No more arrived. We waited a week, two weeks. Genia wrote and telegraphed.

In the meantime we were all very much taken up with our production of Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream, to be played by the children in a natural amphitheater on the mountainside. Their costumes were of flowers and leaves and rushes, and the curtain was the fitful mountain fog. We were so busy that we forgot a little of our hunger for meat.

Sometimes, too, we had big concerts, to which we invited the rich aristocrats from neighboring estates, hoping they would give us milk for our undernourished children.

One day I was passing the great concert hall when I heard the piano inside being played with one finger, apparently by an amateur. Yet the music was not amateur's music, but one of Beethoven's most difficult sonatas. I stopped to listen, remembering that the last time I had heard that sonata Rudolf Serkin, then scarcely sixteen, had taken the Musikvereinsaal by storm. Silently I pushed the door open. There, king flat on his back on the floor, his long brown bare legs in the air, his slender toes moving from key to key in the complicated melody, was my own beloved Rudolf Serkin.

We talked for a little. Then he went back to his Beethoven, working hard and patiently, repeating measures over and over. He even tried to play with several toes at the same time, to achieve entire chords.

Our first Shakespeare rehearsal had hardly got under way when a jubilant cry went up, "The ox is coming!" How could Shakespeare compete with living steaks on their way to us? The children instantly scrambled up the mountainside in search of cyclamen; some of the more daring vowed not to come back until they could bring bunches of the famous edelweiss. Nothing, we all felt, was too good for the friend who was to give his life for us.

Genia alone seemed to have reservations. "But we are to get only one ox," she said, looking puzzled, "and the telegram says 'oxen on the wav.' "

Sure enough, there were two. One we had slaughtered, the other we persuaded the baker to board for us.

Two days later the telegraph messenger came pedaling up the drive, dismounted, and delivered a message. Genia turned pale and stood for a while, speechless. Then she said, "Oh, this must be a mistake. It says 'Oxen on the way.' " Nobody broke the silence. " 'Oxen on the way,' " she repeated dazedly.

In no time at all the telephone rang. It was the stationmaster. "Two oxen are here for you," he said. "Please, Dr. Schwarzwald, send for them without delay!"

Our two best-oiled tongues, a Viennese bank director, and an eminent mathematician, were appointed to make the rounds of the country people and sell our extra oxen. They were to garner a profit, if possible. If not, we would frankly be glad to take a loss just to get rid of the beasts. We waited all day for our emissaries to return, our nostrils fluttering like butterflies at the beautiful smells coming from the kitchen. We gorged ourselves at dinner, still waiting for our envoys and their sack of gold. But when they straggled in, they were dog-tired, annoyed and empty-handed. Not one person had offered a bid on our valuable oxen. It was as though that scarce and indispensable animal had suddenly begun to grow by the wayside.

So now the baker had three oxen to feed. And to judge by his bill, they must have eaten their weight in fodder every day.

We soothed and fed our emissaries and settled down for the evening and to the digestion of our feast. A messenger arrived, looking very guilty. “I fear I bring bad news,” he stammered miserably. He handed Genia a wire: “Oxen on the way.”

Genia had secretaries as most people have fingers on both hands. Now she gave the wire to Mariedl, who was not only her chief secretary but our family beauty, adored alike by every man and woman who saw her. Mariedl left for the village, and in one hour accomplished what the banker and the mathematician had failed to do – she sold the oxen. She got very little for them, but still she sold them.

Our troubles were over. We dedicated the rest of the evening to dancing. Rudolf Serkin took over the piano, twelve-year-old Max Rostal, just returned from a world tour, sat on his right knee and played the violin, jumping up and down and beating time with his bow. A group of Hungarian girls wearing high red boots did a fiery czardas, a Russian boy on his way to becoming a new Nijinski leaped over their heads and came down again as gently as a falling leaf. Then we swung into a wild fandango. In the middle of it Mariedl entered, pale and trembling. “Frau Doktor,” she said. She stretched out her hand to Genia. In it she held an open telegram : “Oxen on the way.”

Half an hour later we were still debating what on earth to do with this invasion of oxen. The summer was over. Genia was all packed and ready to leave the next morning to take the children back to school. We heard a noise at the door, and a uniformed policeman strode in.

“Excuse me, Frau Doktor, for coming at this hour of the night,” he said. “But I must warn you not to come to town tomorrow. The place is full of soldiers come to arrest you.”

Genia only smiled. “And why, may I ask?”

“I have not the faintest idea. But it must be something very serious,” he said importantly. “The railway station is entirely surrounded. The stationmaster phoned the chief of police, and sent me to tell you that if you insist on coming into town anyway, he cannot help you.”

We begged Genia not to try to go to Vienna the next day. There must be some misunderstanding, we said, and she must wait with us until it was straightened out. But Genia would not listen. “I have to take the children back to school,” she said. “And besides I want to stop off in that town and have a word with my friend the butcher!”

Naturally, we felt that if she was going to be shot we must all go with her.

The next morning a long, sad procession took the road into town. After a while Genia called out in her musical voice, “Children, this is no funeral. Come on, sing!” She began one of Schubert’s most lovely melodies. So the whole party arrived at the town gate singing and in a gay mood. There we met a group of townspeople, weeping and wringing their hands. The village was seething with fear. Soldiers were everywhere, they said, armed to the teeth.

We went on anyway; Genia had given us courage and none of us wanted to miss the excitement.

It was the old story of the one little feather becoming five chickens. The town was not filled with ferocious soldiers, the railroad station was not surrounded. On the platform, one extremely young soldier paced up and down. He looked very grim, but also very sad.

Genia immediately went up to him. “Well, my friend, what are you doing here?”

He looked at her. “I am waiting for this woman, this Frau Doktor. I shall arrest her.”

"Arrest her? For what?"

"She has been smuggling chocolate and goods from abroad." Genia did what only she would do. She opened her bag, the bag containing everything in the world except perhaps a summerhouse, took out a small bar of chocolate and popped it into the young officer's mouth. "Don't look so sad," she said. "I shall arrange everything for you. Come with me."

They sat down on a bench. Once more she delved into her bag. This time she showed him a letter from the Swiss government, promising her as much chocolate as she needed for the children in her summer colony at Topolschidtz.

We who were watching saw the young officer rise, click his heels smartly, and apologize.

The train came in. Genia leaned over and kissed the young man. He blushed like a cherry. The children started up a song.

Just then the door of the telegraph office burst open and a young lad rushed out waving a telegram and shouting: "Frau Doktor! Frau Doktor!" The telegram said, "Oxen on the way."

Maria Lazar belonged to the younger group at Topolschidtz. I had known her for a long time as a pupil in Genia's school and as a visitor to the house. She was an astonishing linguist and an extraordinarily gifted writer whose very first poems, written when she was twelve, revealed her value. I felt afraid for her. She was too unlike everyone else in expression, manner, and work, to have an easy life. In many ways she was more grown-up at fourteen than I was at forty.

Maria and I became friends. Early one morning she came to my room, as she often did, with a bundle of newspapers and magazines. "Karin, isn't this one your *Politiken?*" she asked. "Someone seems to have died; someone important … by the black border around the whole first page!"

Without looking, I knew. My heart seemed to lurch painfully in my chest. I dared not admit to myself what it was I knew. But it could only be Nansen. And it was …

Slowly my heart returned to its normal unobtrusive beating. I did not even feel stunned. I was only hollow, as empty as the castoff, brittle skin of a snake. The world would go on about its business as usual. Only to me it would not be the same.

Had he been alone? I wondered. Would I have wished that someone dear and kind had kept her cool hand on his forehead, had talked to him, sung for him, made it less difficult for him to leave the life he loved so much?

Yes, with all my heart.

Once, years before, Nansen had spent the evening with a group of people at my house. He left with one of my closest women friends.

"But what if Karin finds out?" she asked.

"There is no joy that Karin would begrudge me," he answered.

The next day she told me. It made no difference in my feeling for either of them.

Now, as I sat and looked at that broad black border and at the columns of print about Nansen, Maria Lazar watched me. She knew me well enough to sense something of the truth. And what she did then was like an injection, a merciful, perceptive thing that saved me many sleepless nights.

"Will you do me a favor?" she said. "You have so often promised to teach me your language. This is a wonderful chance for me to learn it. I would love to know what Denmark is saying about Nansen. I liked him so much. Karin, let us read *Politiken* together!"

We sat down and began. The entire edition was a memorial to Nansen. We read one column after another. As here and there I explained a word to Maria, another part of my mind followed the hearse, draped in black. Then, in my imagination, the procession seemed to move, not through Copenhagen, but through the streets of my own little native town of Randers, where I knew all the families of all the dead, down to the churchyard where every grave was known to me.

One moment of sharp regret – why had I not been able once more to press his hand, to thank him for making my life overwhelmingly rich, for letting me lavish my love upon him?

Without leaving the room, Maria and I sat quietly throughout the day. Only when the dinner gong sounded did we realize that we were famished. As soon as I had eaten I lay down, and was instantly asleep.

A knock at the door awakened me. It was morning. Maria came in, carrying a tray with our breakfast. She set it down beside me. "This morning we will begin in *Politiken* where we left off yesterday," she said.

24

Writers and Revolutionists

My bitter controversy with Gabriele d'Annunzio had a background. It came about through my friendship with a young Danish violinist named Hertha, who had refused to marry Siegfried Wagner.

Hertha met the Wagners when she substituted without notice at a Wagner concert for someone who was ill. Cosima Wagner became fond of her, gave her many presents, and constantly invited her to the house when Siegfried was to be there. The young man fell in love with her and asked the sweet and learned Henry Thode, his sister's husband, to propose for him. Henry, then separated from his wife, also loved Hertha. He proposed – but for himself, and was accepted. They married and went to live at his marvelous Villa Carnacco on Lake Garda, where he had what was almost a museum of art treasures. His books on art, and his collections of paintings, especially of Hans Thoma, were known all over Europe.

At the outbreak of the war, Thode, who was a German, had to leave Italy and put Carnacco in charge of a caretaker. He and Hertha went to Denmark, where Henry later died. As soon as the war ended, Hertha heard that the estate had been taken over by d'Annunzio. She made a hurried trip there, and found him comfortably installed. He suavely explained that he would not stay, and would guard her treasures as though they were his own. She never got him out again. He sold the Hans Thoma paintings, saying he had put them in storage. He went to Rome, pretending to persuade the government to restore the villa to Hertha – and came back its legal owner.

Sophus Michaelis, through the Danish Writers' League, wrote d'Annunzio several times, asking that he return at least Hertha's personal belongings and the manuscript of a book on Italian art on which Thode had worked for thirty years. There was no answer.

I decided to take a hand. I got from Hertha all details of the theft of Carnacco and copies of her many letters to d'Annunzio. Then I wrote an article strongly denouncing him. It was published all over Europe.

D'Annunzio made no reply except to state that "this lady from the north" would never conquer him. And I did not. Article after article left him unmoved. But I did prevent him from being awarded the Nobel Prize. It was given, instead, to Della Grazzia, a writer who did not reach to d'Annunzio's shoulder. Thousands of letters poured in from artists, workers, teachers and statesmen in all corners of the world, approving what I had done.

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Hertha went to Carnacco to try once more to persuade d'Annunzio. He offered her a cocktail. She refused. He insisted, saying that he would be offended. Why she should have bothered to be polite to him, I cannot imagine. But she drank the mixture and left soon after. At her hotel she became seriously ill. For days she regained consciousness only to faint again. She was kept in bed for weeks and returned to Denmark a complete wreck.

Hertha did not believe that d'Annunzio had tried to poison her, but that he had given her some sort of potion he believed to have magic properties, like a love drink. Perhaps she is right.

On the other hand, an artist who could steal from another artist would do anything.

Suddenly – for in spite of the time it had taken me to get there, it seemed disconcertingly sudden – I was observing my fiftieth birthday. Genia had come from Vienna and Herdis from Copenhagen to be with me on Thurø. We decided to ask only a few other intimate friends to join us.

When I entered the banquet room, I stopped short. There was the table, shining with silver, laden with flowers and all the things I liked best to eat; there was my favorite champagne cooling in buckets, there was the small circle of glowing faces. And behind my chair stood an enormous lilac bush in full bloom. From every flowering branch hung a flat rectangular parcel. Sophus Michaelis, my dear Tao, had chosen this charming manner of presenting me with the volumes of poems and plays he had written since our divorce eleven years before.

Charlie was away somewhere in Norway, and quite forgot to send me greetings.

Not long after my birthday, Gerhart Hauptmann invited Charlie and me to visit him in Silesia, with many apologies for the meager hospitality he could offer us. He lived in Agnetendorf, in the mountains near where he had been born the son of a poverty-stricken weaver.

We were surprised to find that Hauptmann's house was a veritable palace with the most luxurious appointments. The place was simply stuffed with gifts from his recent sixtieth-birthday celebration. The only other guests were George Sylvester Viereck and his wife. I had met Viereck in the United States as a promising young poet. I remembered his telling me then about a twelve-year-old girl whom he intended to marry when she

grew up. Now it seemed that they had indeed married. As far as I know they were quite happy together until he went to pieces.

Viereck told us quite openly that not only was he a grandson of the late Emperor Frederick, but that he had just come from a "family" visit with the former Kaiser at Doom.

I had loved Hauptmann's *The Weavers*, which showed such deep compassion for the poor and oppressed. I had no chance to discuss this work with him, however, because of Viereck's incessant conversation. He talked so steadily that none of the rest of us could get in a word.

Our whole stay was an odd and uneasy one. Where was the simplicity of heart or of living that goes with greatness?

At dinner I sat on Hauptmann's right. But between us stood a marble bust of his much-loved son. "I had it placed there," Hauptmann said to me, "so that your eyes might feast on his divine beauty." Hauptmann was himself proudly self-conscious of his own resemblance to Goethe. And clearly he felt a morbid adoration for his son.

As for his "meager hospitality," the dining room was ornate, the table set with heavy silver and wonderful glass and china. The meal was sumptuous, and the old white-haired servant brought one bottle after another of fine French champagne. There seemed to be no limit to the number of glasses Hauptmann could drink.

Despite the barrage of conversation from our "imperial" guest, I received two rather touching confidences. Mrs. Hauptmann, who was about half her husband's age, whispered to me that they were going to Italy for the winter. "We cannot get enough fuel to heat this house," she said. "For myself, I would prefer to stay here and freeze. But I cannot let my husband suffer the cold winter in these mountains."

Later, as I stood looking through the hundreds of birthday telegrams, Hauptmann said to me, "You know, we are going soon to the south of Italy. It's against my inclination. I was born in this climate, but I dare not expose my wife to a winter in these mountains!"

When Charlie and I went to bed toward morning, the old manservant was just coming in with a fresh bottle of champagne in each hand.

We could not know then that their very noticeable egomania would later lead both Hauptmann and Viereck to seek power and favor by working actively with the Nazis. But I wondered, as I closed my eyes, how Hauptmann could bear to live in such luxury almost on the doorstep of the desperately poor weavers from whom he came. The money he had paid for that fine French champagne, consumed in one evening, would have fed a weaver's family for a year.

Always I have cherished the gift of making friends. Sometimes, as the years passed, I felt a little like the lilac tree at my birthday table – every branch laden with the gift of a new friend. Sometimes, too, it seemed that I must put forth new shoots, that there could be no more room. Yet, so expansible is the human heart that always new friends entered, found a place, and settled down comfortably with the old.

Agnes Smedley was one of these. We met in Berlin, and, like love at first glance, this was friendship before any words had been said. She was married to a leader of the Indian freedom movement in Europe, the brother of the poet, Madame Naidu. When Agnes' marriage went to pieces, she came to Thurø to stay with me.

Agnes was a born warrior. If she had had no cause for which to fight, she would have invented one. She had been imprisoned for working with her husband to free India during the war, but she had not broken down. No one could forget her beautiful laugh, or her warmth and gaiety, as radiant as the sun, her idealism, or her willingness to sacrifice herself for her ideals.

While she was on Thurø, Agnes wrote her first book, an autobiography, *Daughter of the Earth*. Also during that time, Madame Naidu's son came to visit her. He was a brilliant young man, with degrees from Oxford, Berlin and Paris. The days we spent together were unforgettable. Agnes and he were in love; they decided to marry and to go to India to continue the fight for liberation. But then Agnes found that although she could book a stateroom and travel to India, she would not be allowed to land.

She could have persuaded her lover to remain abroad with her, or she could have made a pleasant life as a novelist. The course she chose was the only one possible for her: she sent her beloved on his way, and instead of India, she went to live among and work for the starving masses of China. For years she gave of her strength and courage; she marched for weeks at a time with the rebellious, ill-equipped Chinese voluntary troops, hungry, thirsty, often cold and as often scorched by the sun. Still, she found time to write three or four books, such as the great *Battle Hymn of China*, to spread knowledge and love of the too-patient Chinese poor.

For four years I had neither seen nor heard from Charlie. I did not even know where he was.

When at last he arrived once more on the island of Thurø I could not tell whether he had come out of a genuine longing for me or because he had not found a satisfactory position in the United States. I only knew that he was eternally shuttling back and forth between Denmark and Germany, where he was trying to get an appointment at the University of Berlin.

No matter where he was, our personal relationship was no better. Nothing I did was right; nothing I had done or had failed to do was forgotten. The complaints did not cease when Charlie went away; they were now put in writing and thus became more tangible. We no longer had even a few fugitive hours of happiness to delude me into hoping that with a little more patience, a little more effort, we could make the marriage work. I asked Charlie for a divorce.

"Is nothing holy to you?" he said furiously. "You can marry one week and get a divorce the next, and think nothing of it! I have married only once – but for life. You will never get a divorce from me!"

I went away from time to time, usually to Genia. Sometimes I went to friends in Berlin. But although Charlie had succeeded in getting an appointment as professor of economics at the university there and was often in the city at the same time, we did not stay together.

Eventually Charlie had to recognize the fact that our marriage was no marriage at all and that there was no hope for it. I undertook the tedious and painful formalities necessary to sever that most beautiful and most tenuous of human ties.

And at once, with the final granting of the decree, Charlie became the best and closest of friends. He wrote to me every Christmas. From having told everyone what an unspeakable vixen I was, he now praised me as nothing less than an angel. I wished ruefully that he had changed his mind a little sooner.

Not long afterward, he drifted into another marriage, one, I was told, of convenience. That union was for life. But in order to make it so, Charlie had to live, and finally to die, in Nazi Germany.

In my youth and during much of my adult life, I had had friends among the revolutionists in Czarist Russia as well as in other countries. But I was an ignoramus about politics, and these friendships were purely personal. When on one of my many trips to Berlin I met Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, I knew only what the world knew of their stormy lives. Immediately, however, I realized what a privilege it was to be close to them both.

They came to Thurø and we had a blessed time together. From Berkman, whom we called Sasha, there emanated a peace of heart and a kindliness toward all humanity that I had not known in anyone since my beloved Aunt Sophy died. Emma was a Niagara of power, a fascinating, irresistible public speaker; hard as steel – with a soft and sentimental heart. There had been men in her life, but from the moment they met until she died, Emma loved only Sasha.

Berkman had gone to the United States from Russia while still in his teens. An idealistic boy, he had dreamed of helping all the underprivileged people in the world. Because of youthful naïveté and exaggeration, he spent many years in American prisons. For instance, he had shot an industrialist named Frick who had brought in the brutal Pinkerton operatives to terrorize his striking employees. The man did not die, so Sasha only received a sentence of twenty years. But, characteristically, he was astounded that his fellow-anarchists did not hail him as a hero, but rather condemned him. Finally, in 1919, with some one hundred and fifty other anarchists, both Sasha and Emma were deported from the United States.

They were met at the Russo-Finnish border and officially escorted in triumph to Moscow, where they were lodged in the Kremlin, along with Zinoviev and other men close to Lenin. They were given the important task of reorganizing the entire educational system of the new Russia. However, their two years in their native land turned out badly, in part because they were not communists, but anarchists, and partly because the movement was so young that great mistakes were unavoidable – mistakes subsequently admitted by both Lenin and Stalin. Emma and Sasha were bitterly disappointed and left the country. Then they wrote denunciations of the new regime. I thought this a very foolish thing for such fine and intelligent people to do. Yet our friendship did not suffer. I have never lost or dropped a real friend, but as Genia used to say, would still love him "if he cooked small children for dinner!"

His long years in prison deeply affected Sasha's nature. His boundless love for humanity came from having learned to live for his fellow-prisoners. But I often found Emma weeping in despair because Berkman no longer loved her as a woman, but only as a cherished friend. It seemed that a love so universal had lost the power to be personal.

One night in 1925 at a dinner at the Russian embassy in Vienna, I sat next to a man I did not know. He said his name was Kugel. Later on he asked me why I had not lectured for so many years, not in fact since I had toured Europe in defense of *The Dangerous Age*.

I had never taken myself seriously as a lecturer, and by that time had drunk several glasses of champagne. I said as a joke, "The trouble is, you see, that I cannot find a hall big enough for my audience."

He smiled. "What about the great Musikvereinsaal?"

"Yes, perhaps that one would do," I said, and forgot about it.

The next day he telephoned and asked permission to call – to make arrangements for my lecture! He proved to be the man who handled all the important concerts in Vienna. I grew panicky, remembering the angry booing with which my female audiences had received my *Dangerous Age* lectures. The more I tried to back out, the more insistent Mr. Kugel became.

Genia said, "For Heaven's sake, Karin, don't do such a stupid thing! That hall holds more than twenty-five hundred people. It was built for the great orchestras, and you are not really a speaker. You would just get confused and embarrassed. And, worst of all, you'd lose a vast amount of money!"

But Kugel believed in me so much that he proposed making the arrangements for his own pleasure, and turning the total receipts over to me intact.

I was terrified. A week before my lecture, I sat in the huge auditorium listening to Casals' unearthly cello and saw myself standing idiotically on that wide stage speaking to an empty house. My subject was "Love, Marriage, and Divorce." Naturally, I had plenty of material. I made a lot of rather vague notes. But Genia insisted that I write a proper lecture, learn it by heart and rehearse it for her. I began, laughed pitifully, began again, and became hopelessly entangled in the sentences. Then I stopped. Genia smiled and said, "If you can do it that way, you will win the heart of everyone in the audience." I was too much engrossed in my own misery to understand.

Two days before my date Genia telephoned the box office and asked how the sale was going. She was told it was nothing to brag about.

On the appointed night, we entered the Musikvereinsaal, which is actually a complex structure made up of large and small halls. The entrance was crowded. Still, there were usually at least two concerts a night in one hall or another, so I thought nothing of it. In the artist's room, I found Mr. Kugel awaiting me, surrounded by baskets full of flowers or fruit.

"Who is giving a concert here tonight?" I asked.

"Nobody," he said, and smiled. "These are all for you. The house is sold out, and we have already turned away several hundred people."

I felt drunk with excitement. I was glad I had worn what I considered my most original costume, a long black frock and red slippers with extravagantly high heels.

The stage was as crowded with people as was the auditorium. I had to push my way through to the center. I planted my feet firmly and looked out on the row on row of faces extending way to the back of the hall and filling several balconies. I felt such a warm friendliness reach up to me that I completely forgot my carefully memorized lecture, and spoke simply of what I had seen, heard, and experienced of love, marriage and divorce. There was, of course, no microphone, and my voice is low, husky, and not strong. But the people sat without making a sound.

Once they laughed aloud with delight. I had told them of a custom prevalent in certain parts of Denmark in the olden times. A husband and wife, who had quarreled and wanted a divorce, were marched into the local jail and locked up in the same cell for a

week. They had no books, nothing, in fact, but their own conversation for amusement. They were given only soup or porridge and had to take turns with a wooden spoon which had a bowl at either end. The story goes that after exhausting their entire vocabulary of abuse, they usually got tired and agreed on a little peace. At the end of the week the cell door was opened and they went free. Most couples emerged arm in arm, with no further thought of divorce.

At the end of two hours when at last I had finished, the audience shouted, "More! More!" Then, while the news photographers darted about with their flashlights, like so many lightning bugs, I was ceremoniously decorated with a long garland of laurel.

The success of the evening made me very happy. It also made me fairly rich. Offers poured in for me to lecture in Germany, Austria, Poland, the Baltic countries, Hungary, Switzerland, Italy, even Yugoslavia, Rumania and Czechoslovakia. Wherever I went, the house was sold out long before. I simply shoveled money in. I loved to travel and I loved to talk to people. Now I could do both to my heart's content – at a profit.

But I could never persuade that dear Mr. Kugel, who was responsible for the whole business, to take a cent of what was surely due him.

25

Two Remarkable Old Ladies

Late in the following spring a letter from Karoline Bjørnson, which had just missed me at one town after another, finally reached me on my travels: "Remember, my darling, before many months have passed I shall be ninety years old. I long for you. I have so much to tell you – things I can tell only you. Please come to Aulestad."

I had last been with Karoline and Bjørnstjeme in 1909. The next year he died in France and was brought home to Norway in state, like the true king among writers that he was. A few years later I had visited Karoline at her daughter Dagny's house in Paris. But for twelve long years I had not seen her. So as soon as I could arrange to be free for a few weeks, I went to Aulestad. To my astonishment, Karoline had not changed at all. Her hair had been snow-white and she had been deaf ever since I had known her. Now she had not lost an iota of her charm, her gaiety, her grace. She had the same infectious laugh.

One evening we sat talking together while she undressed for bed. Something that was said made her laugh, and she sprang up and began to dance about the room as merrily as a young girl.

There were, as always, many guests at Aulestad. The days went pleasantly by, and I began to wonder what it was that Karoline had so wanted to talk with me about. One evening she gave me a large drawerful of photographs. "Take as many of them as you like," she said. "Take them all if you want them." For hours I sat and selected pictures of the Bjørnson family. Slowly, perhaps falling a little under the spell of the photographs, Karoline began to talk of her married life, her happiness, her difficulties. "You know, Little Troll, there are women who are greedy enough to want every man. And Bjørnson was always rather naïve and innocent of mind." Suddenly she laughed aloud. "Once I really had to take action. We had a young girl staying with us for some months. She tried very hard to have her way with Bjørnson. One night I actually found her in his bed,

simply waiting for him. She pretended that she had had a fainting spell and had not known where she was. But I know my *Pappenheimer*, and I got her up and out of the room." Karoline laughed again. "Well, a week or so later, Bjørnson left to give a lecture. I waited until I was sure he had reached the bottom of the hill. Then I went to her room. 'Now, young lady, you pack your things. The car will be here to take you to the train in half an hour. And you will not come back to Aulestad again. Do you understand?'

"So she left. And, come here, darling Troll, I will show you something." Karoline led me into the great living room and over to a painting by our famous Kroger [*Krøyer*] of the Bjørnson family and whatever guests happened to be there at the time. One of the figures had a black smear instead of a face.

Karoline giggled. "That's the girl! I scraped out her face with a knife and covered the spot with ink. And, if you'll believe it, when Bjørnson returned, he did not once ask where the girl was or how her face had disappeared from the painting! Ah me – ! Men are not heroes in daily life." She sighed. "Still, I would not have traded Bjørnson for any other man in this glorious world."

A week later, just before I was to leave, we two were sitting on the broad porch looking down over the hills around Aulestad. Karoline's great-grandchild, who was also Henrik Ibsen's great-grandchild, was visiting in the house. He was a charming little boy of two, named Tancred. All day we had heard him talking and laughing about the house and the grounds. It was very quiet. The sun was low in the west, and the homing cattle had begun to crowd the roads down from the mountain plateaus.

All at once Karoline cried out, and, jumping up from her chair, ran swiftly down the side of the hill. I was too startled to move. Far below, I saw what she had seen. Little Tancred was staggering along on his short baby legs, straight for the narrow fork in the road where two streams of cattle converged in a headlong rush.

Incredibly, in a matter of seconds, Karoline was beside him and had snatched him up in her arms. Hand in hand the ninety-year-old woman and the two-year-old boy walked back up the steeply slanting hill. On the porch once more, Karoline turned to me with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes and executed a graceful little pirouette. Then, only slightly out of breath, she sat down again. "You see," she said, "I'm still a little useful; I'm not quite ready to be thrown out with the trash!"

Mother and Father had retired at the beginning of the war. Mother had given up her flower wreaths, and Father was no longer at the telegraph office. His pension provided them with more money to spend on themselves than they had ever had before. Father gave Mother the magnificent sum of ten kroner a month for pocket money. How she did it, nobody knows, but only a few years later she had saved enough to give my sister-in-law five hundred kroner with which to buy garden furniture.

My brother Hans had begun to send them five pounds a month from South Africa "for carriage rides." They took this literally. Every Sunday morning a phaeton pulled up at the door. They got in, and sat back luxuriously. They drove along the main street and through the two principal parks of the town on their way to the country. They bowed graciously to their friends on the right and the left, obviously feeling like millionaires. When I was at home, I went with them. We always took a slightly different route, so as to see as many people as possible. Whichever way we went, however, we were always in sight of the fiord and the green meadows.

One carriage ride a week naturally did not cost anything like five pounds a month. Father secretly put the rest into the bank. He did not tell Mother about it, or that my sister and I also sent money – "for candy, cakes and wine."

Every week Father wrote to each of his children, the writing remaining to the last clear and well formed. Near the end of his life it took him from early morning until the evening to finish the letter. But, as Mother said, it was a nice way for Little Jack to spend his time. He tried to keep up his daily walks. But sometimes he would be found lying beside the road and brought home. He always knew how he had fallen. He would begin by walking slowly and carefully, but, without realizing it, put on more and more speed until he lost control of his legs. Then he would fall.

Finally, he could hardly walk across the bedroom. Mother had to dress and undress him, and to feed him like a child. One day he did not get up. Mother telegraphed to me to come.

Father was in great pain. I turned down the sheet and found that one leg was black to the hip.

The doctor said it was hopeless, he could do nothing. He refused to administer morphine because he did not know how Father would react. "If you'll give me the morphine," I said, "I'll give it to him on my own responsibility."

The pain eased a little and Father slept. Later he opened one of his large, sky-blue eyes. It had the jolliest, most entrancing smile in it, as though it were saying, "We fooled them, didn't we?" Then it closed again. Father sighed gently, and died.

I called Mother. And this was strange – from the moment she knew her Little Jack was dead she was afraid of him. She barely touched his hand, much less dared to kiss his forehead.

The funeral was set for eleven o'clock two days later. We had, of course, to provide a large dinner afterward for all the relatives and friends. I was very nervous. I know how passionately my mother had loved my father. I feared that she would collapse at the burial and perhaps be bedridden the rest of her life.

On the day of the funeral she seemed quite calm. I tried to seem just as calm.

A large crowd gathered in the cemetery. Processions bearing banners arrived from every direction. Father had been an officer in the war of '64, and a ranking Mason. Officers in uniform came, and the Masons formed a guard of honor around the grave. All during the minister's speech Mother looked around proudly. It was plain that she was thinking, "If only Little Jack could see all this. How proud he would be!"

She watched the coffin being lowered into the ground with tears standing in her eyes, but serenely and in complete control of herself. I grew more nervous. Would she collapse at the dinner? I tried to get her away quickly. But nobody could make Mother do anything against her will. And her will was to go visiting. "Let us go and see my mother's grave," she said.

Grandmother and Aunt Sophy lay under a modest marble stone that we children had bought long ago with our savings. "Now let us go to Olga's grave," Mother said. Olga was my brother's deceased wife. Then we went to the grave of Mother's best childhood friend; then to the grave of Espen Møller and his wife, from whom Mother had learned housekeeping. From grave to grave we went, and all the people seemed to come alive as we stood there talking about them. Mother's eyes grew animated. Her dimples played around her mouth.

When we got home, Mother changed to her black satin dress. She was still calm. When was she going to collapse?

At the dinner, there were many short speeches about Father. The guests laughed and talked; it was as gay as a wedding party. Mother had a very good time. Afterward she said to me, "It was very pleasant and cozy, wasn't it? If only Little Jack could have been here. He would have loved those hunting stories!"

The next day I took Mother into the living room and drew out from under the couch the old mahogany box in which all our family valuables were kept. "Father made me promise not to tell you about this until he was gone," I said. "But here are two savings-bank books showing a balance of several thousand kroner. Father saved it all for you."

Mother began to cry softly, like spring rain. "I was afraid I would have to sell the furniture to pay for the funeral," she said. She smiled admiringly. "Wasn't Little Jack smart to do that!" It never occurred to her that I could have easily paid for several funerals. She took it for granted that I was too improvident ever to own "salt enough for an egg," as we Danes say.

"There's another thing," I said. "I've always intended that when one of you went, the other would come and live with me on Thurø." Mother began to shake her head obstinately. "Besides, it would be a help to me," I went on craftily. "You might pay a small share of the household expenses."

That settled it. Naturally, her spendthrift daughter needed help, and she was willing to make the "sacrifice."

Now she had to sell the furniture anyway, but only because she could have two rooms in my small house and no more, and there was no space for it. But the bargain hunters went away with their tails between their legs. Mother sold Father's decrepit old desk, for instance, for twice what it had cost. On the other hand, after she had beaten down a buyer's spirit and gotten an exorbitant price for something like an old, unreliable kerosene lamp, she would throw in a good wicker chair or a set of china.

I had had central heating installed in the house on Thurø, for Mother's sake. As soon as she and I arrived there with the van loaded with the thousands of things she "simply could not do without," we settled her comfortably in her own two rooms.

It looked like an ideal arrangement. Unfortunately, neither of us realized that Mother would, after eighty-two years of living in Randers, miss the town and her friends unspeakably. And she would not have been herself if she had admitted frankly what the matter was. She had the disposition of a cherub, but now she began to find fault with everything – the size of the house, the neighbors, the way I tended or did not tend the garden, my long absences abroad.

I had always loved to travel. I also could not live happily without writing. Of course, one paid for the other. When my young heroine, Bibi, first came to live in my mind, I loved her for herself alone. Then the first book about her turned out to be a great success, and I knew I must write another.

I thought to myself, why should Bibi have all her adventures in Denmark? Why shouldn't she have them in countries I have always longed to see, or places I have already loved and want to revisit?

And so with Hedwig Collin, my lovely illustrator, I journeyed abroad, through three, four, five books. I myself lost count and I cannot expect Bibi to remember. We went to Carlsbad and suffered at the sight of the emaciated dogs that hauled milk into town for

the poor peasants to sell. We went to Rumania and talked with the beautiful Queen Marie and saw the castle where she entertained her lovers.

Now I decided not to go away any more. But then I could not go to the village to do the shopping without meeting reproaches on my return. Mother's sweet face was easily drenched with tears. I had lured her from the town where she was known and loved, she said, and brought her to this "desert" island.

I was often miserable. In between there were days of Mother's sparkling gaiety. But when she was not gay, I debated whether to go on as we were or to take her back to Randers, find an apartment, and buy her new furniture.

Before I could make up my mind, Herdis Bergstrøm arrived for a visit. Herdis, I thought, would surely cheer Mother up. She was so vigorous, buoyant, and irrepressibly gay that if she said, "It's fine weather today!" and it was pouring, one felt that the sun indeed shone warmly and the sky was clear.

But still nothing went right. If I played the piano, Mother complained of the noise. If I wanted to play the victrola, she had "no peace, not for a moment." The only record she liked was "Nearer My God to Thee." She used to say, "That is very pretty." She even allowed me to play it more than once.

When we had guests in for the evening some of her old spirit showed itself. There was an attractive young doctor, under forty, who used to come in occasionally for a game of whist. One night Mother got started on one of her favorite topics – what a wonderful self-sacrificing wife she had been. What she said was true, but it sounded odd coming from her. To tease her I said, "You know, Mother, since you made so many sacrifices for Father, I think you should marry again, and this time pick out a man who can take good care of you."

The doctor jumped up and bowed. "If Mrs. Brøndum should decide to make a change in her life, I should consider it an honor to be thought worthy of her!"

Mother turned up her nose and looked him over from head to toe. Then she said scornfully, "If I should be so foolish as to remarry, I should consider only a younger man!"

The head of the local hospital, Dr. Reinsholm, however, was an exception. He was the only man besides my father in whom Mother was ever "interested." When he called on us she beamed. But if he took me out somewhere, Mother's sunny face clouded with unmistakable jealousy.

Meanwhile, Herdis could not help knowing that Mother and I were both unhappy. If we went out for a walk, especially if we stopped in the village for a cup of coffee, or visited friends, Mother would be disconsolate when we got back. "Here you leave your poor old mother alone all day," she would say. "You go out and have a good time from morning till night!"

One day she went from scolding into an attack of hysterics. She cried and cried. First she would sob, "I want to go back to Randers!" Then she would wail, "I wish I were dead." Then again, "I want to go back to Randers." A little later it was, "I wish I were dead!"

Suddenly Herdis went over to Mother in her armchair by the window and grasped her arm firmly. "All right, Mrs. Brøndum," she said in a serious, deep voice. "Make up your mind and quickly. What is it you want? To go back to Randers, or to die? You can have what you want. If you want to go back to Randers, we will take you there tomorrow.

If you want to die, there is the water right beside your window. You have only to jump in, and that matter is settled. But you cannot have your cake and eat it. You're old enough to know your own mind. The way you act, you'll kill your daughter. That's one thing I don't think you want to do. So now take your choice. Will you go back to Randers, or die right here?"

For a long moment Mother stared at her in amazement. Then she burst out laughing. Every time we thought she had stopped, she would start laughing again. From that day until she died eleven years later, we lived together in harmony. Like the hardy perennial she was, Mother not only survived her late fall transplanting, she flourished.

26

A Danish Burglar and a Czech President

In prewar Denmark we used to have many petty thieves, but few real criminals. So there was great excitement when Hans Petersen came to public notice as Denmark's "most dangerous burglar."

This formidable person was actually not quite as frightening as he sounded. Our "dangerous" burglar had never committed an act of violence against a fellow human being. In fact, later, as I came to know him, I realized that his pride in his craft was too great to allow him to dabble in more vulgar forms of crime.

About 1925 Hans Petersen was released from prison on completing a seven-year term. A few months afterward his transgressions suddenly became bolder and more imaginative. He seemed to delight in flouting the police by the most foolhardy thefts. He would loot a house. Then the next day he would send a detailed report in duplicate to the newspapers and to the police, telling them exactly what he had taken and what it was worth. If he had spent the night in the home of a person with bad taste, he described how he had improved the arrangement of the furniture; he exposed prized antiques to be fakes; he criticized the dust on the bookshelves.

If, however, he had slept in a beautiful house, he would leave it undespoiled and in perfect order, taking with him only some small souvenir which he then sent to the police as proof that he had been there. Once the "souvenir" was a braid of false hair; again it was a set of artificial teeth.

Everybody thought his most uproarious exploit was spending the entire week end in the home of the chief of police, while the man and his family were in the country. Hans Petersen's report remarked that it was a very nice house, but that the bedsprings sagged and the china was chipped.

The Danes have a great sense of humor. They will forgive almost anything if it makes them laugh. So the whole country keenly enjoyed the "dangerous" burglar's adventures. Nobody wanted H.P. caught, for then what fun would they have had from their morning papers?

We all felt slyly that the police pursued him simply for the sake of their prestige, and that they relished the joke as much as the rest of us. In addition, although H.P. had never made a friend among other prisoners, he invariably displayed the most courtly manners to

the authorities. Naturally, they could not let him outdo them in politeness. They returned courtesy for courtesy.

After a year or so, he was caught. At the trial he told the court that during his last imprisonment, someone had promised to help him if he would go straight. But on leaving the penitentiary, the only help he got was a pair of old trousers. There was no doubting the man's sincerity, or that in his bitter disappointment he had reacted violently against society.

H.P. confessed that he had committed so many burglaries that at last he did not know what to do with his loot. So he had opened an antique shop in London! He engaged a reliable man to manage it for him, without letting him know how the stock was acquired. For some time he had traveled to and from London with large trunks, occasionally using a false passport.

Naturally, when H.P. was arrested the shop was closed. But now an interesting question arose: since he had undeniably increased his "capital" by his diligence and business ability, how much of the goods could he rightly claim as his own?

With a generosity which was surely both charming and rare, the Danish police allowed him to decide for himself what he could keep and what he had to give back.

While the trial was still on, I decided to offer H.P. the moral support he obviously needed so badly. But to avoid publicity, I waited until he had been sentenced and shipped off to prison. Then I wrote, telling him that if he wished I would help him build up a new life.

His answer came, in a small, perfect hand. But the letter revealed the man to be bombastic and extremely egocentric.

I was dismayed. Then I realized that a man who had spent so many years in prison could not be expected to have developed normally. I made some inquiries. As a child in a small town, he had stolen a few books from his father's shop and sold them to a second-hand dealer. Then, without knowing it was valuable, he had taken a stamp album and given the stamps to school friends. For this he was publicly whipped. His mother was already dead, and when his father let him be sent to a reformatory, he felt that his father, too, had deserted him. As soon as he got out of the reformatory, he became a professional thief.

I went on writing to H.P. although my letters could not have brought him much happiness, for there was no road connecting us. His boastful, empty phrases seemed to betray an empty soul, as barren as the sandy shore. Yet I determined not to let him down.

After a time I saw that he not only longed for the sweet taste of freedom, but that he dreamed of leading a settled life. I went to the warden and asked whether he would back me up if I asked the king to pardon the man. "With all my heart," the warden answered.

I went to the king, planning to preface my plea with a reminder that we had danced together. Instead His Majesty himself opened the conversation with a compliment on my dancing and then went on to ask why I wanted the burglar pardoned. Did I not realize, he said, that there was risk involved?

"Your Majesty," I answered, "I am not at all afraid. I will take this man into my own home during his first months out of prison. He can stay there until he has shown us how he will behave."

His Majesty promised nothing. But I was not surprised when, on the king's birthday some weeks later, my friend the burglar received a pardon.

Then I broke the news to my mother.

Finally our guest arrived. Mother saw him get out of the car, well dressed, all in gray, very slender, slightly stooping, a little nearsighted. She could not believe her eyes. "That man a burglar?" she exclaimed. "He looks like a professor!"

After lunch I took Hans Petersen to one of the guesthouses I had had built in my large garden. It was a tiny place, but sunny and attractive, with glassed-in porch, living and sleeping rooms and kitchen. He looked around and smiled. "Why, it looks quite homelike!" he said. He began to unpack the numerous elegant suitcases of alligator and morocco leather that he had brought, explaining that his big trunks would come later. They had, apparently, been stored in the prison.

We had for supper, like most Danes, tea and open sandwiches. We ate the sandwiches with our fingers. But H.P. did not touch his food. "Aren't you hungry?" I asked.

He smiled with a wonderful show of embarrassment, but also with forgiveness. "May I trouble you for a knife and fork?" he said. "You see, I – I am not accustomed to eating with fingers."

Such an elegant man naturally used irreproachable language. I never heard him employ a slang expression, much less profanity. And when I did, he looked at me sternly. He even disapproved of my being divorced.

H.P. never mentioned either the prison or his former associates. He did not seem to hate them, but simply to feel infinitely superior.

One day I remembered that the kerosene in his lamps must be very low, and took a container over. I knocked. He answered. But he let me wait some time before the closed door. There was a great thumping and banging, as if all the furniture were being dragged about. Finally he opened the door and stood there, dripping with perspiration and surrounded by tables, chairs and large boxes.

"What in the world … ?"

"Why, nothing," he said, in a matter-of-fact voice. "I had only barricaded the door."

"Barricaded? But why?"

He made a little impatient sound with his tongue. "Really, you are too naïve! You seem to trust everybody!" he said. "You don't know those men – in there. As soon as my burglary-insurance papers come I won't have to be so careful. But now – anyone of them might sneak in and steal my first editions. Every man there was dying to know where I was going; not a single one found out. Still – some day – one of them might just happen to pay me a visit. So I barricade the door."

Hans Petersen's trunks, when they came, took my breath away. Large enough to house a great Dane, they disgorged the finest of oriental rugs, paintings, vases and lamps. Our guest unpacked just enough of these treasures to transform the simple cottage, and not enough to detract from the beauty of each piece.

When H.P. first arrived in Thurø, the other inhabitants had fearfully put new locks on their doors. Fathers of households slept with revolvers under their pillows, and children who did not behave were threatened with the "bad man."

But the children were curious. And the "bad man" had a way with people. He gave each child a fountain pen. He even offered me one. I refused. "Please take it," he said. "I have at least fifty more."

"But – " I began.

"Oh, yes," he said hastily. "I concede that they were not acquired quite honestly." He looked at me with the most innocent expression. "But you'll admit that the laborer is worthy of his hire," he said. "And I put a great deal of work into my London business!"

Soon our friend the burglar was invited everywhere on the island. He was godfather at the christening of a child. At parties he told marvelous stories of his more daring burglaries. He demonstrated how he could open the strongest lock with nothing more than a hairpin. He never tired of showing how he could wriggle his whole body through an opening only big enough for his head. It really looked as though he smoothed and elongated his body, making it round like an eel, and completely eliminating shoulders and hips.

On quiet summer evenings he could be seen sitting and chatting with some woman doing her knitting, or lying on the beach listening to the fishermen tell their yarns and watching them mend their nets. He played double solitaire with Mother for hours on end, and went to Sunday-afternoon coffee at the parsonage.

On weekdays H.P. usually stayed in his cottage and worked at his memoirs. Unfortunately, his writing was so pompous and his vocabulary so limited that the book made very dull reading. I once offered to help him improve his style. He said, with his incomparable self-assurance, "Dear lady, don't misunderstand. I know that you mean well. But you have your style, which I would not dare to correct, even if I would like to. And I have mine!"

Often he spoke authoritatively about things of which he evidently knew very little. Once I said jokingly, "You don't suffer from false modesty, do you!"

"Nur die Lumpen sind bescheiden!" (Only beggars are modest), he retorted instantly.

"That's Goethe," I said as quickly.

He made a grimace, as though he had tasted something unpleasant. "Goethe!" he said. "You don't think I feel inferior to that woman-chaser, do you?"

My guest seemed completely insensible to the beauties of nature. Sunrise, sunset, the unfolding of the leaves in springtime, the flowers in the garden, the changing loveliness of the islands around us – all these existed for him only as facts. He was thorough, neat and methodical, and also extremely slow. He thought the slowness came from having done only mechanical labor in prison, at the looms or other machines. Some time before I had given him a typewriter, but after three years of practice, he could type only one page an hour.

Six or eight months from the time that H.P. became my houseguest, he realized a long-cherished ambition – he opened a shop for old and rare books in Copenhagen. The money he had earned in prison, added to what I had sent him, was not enough capital. But several people – lawyers, police officials and judges, who were interested in him – had taken up a collection. However he had acquired his very fine library, H.P. was genuinely fond of books.

He made his new shop attractive and charming. He was exquisitely courteous to his customers. But, characteristically, he could not refrain from educating people. If someone asked for a light novel, he gave a long lecture on the crime of "wasting time with such trash." He frankly despised me for reading detective stories. Some books were so repulsive to him that he simply refused to handle them. "My conscience," he said, "will not permit me to sell books that vulgarize or brutalize people."

Then he had his memoirs published, at his own expense. He began to close the shop for hours every day while he went from house to house trying to sell the volumes. Thus he found himself in the apartment of a very pretty young woman who bought a copy of his memoirs, served him coffee, and talked a long time with him. She was a fine person who worked for one of the large law firms in Copenhagen. In a daze, he left her, and after two miserable days of self-doubt – perhaps the first in his life – wrote and asked if she had the courage to marry him.

The young woman read and reread the letter. Suddenly she felt that she wanted nothing so much as to make him a home. She put her decision into a modest note and, taking it herself to the other end of town, placed it in his mailbox.

Their wedding was an event. It was held in the home of a Supreme Court attorney, who invited many of his colleagues. H.P. closed his bookshop and brought his thousands of books to line the walls of the bride's apartment. The marriage turned out very well, although, like many men, H.P. felt himself superior to a mere woman. His wife, submissive and lovely, gave in. But quietly and without his realizing it, she managed him wisely. Every year he sent me a small gift and a note on the anniversary of his pardon.

Eventually the wife lost her position and the couple went through a bad time. But now we all saw that our ex-burglar had really changed. No work was beneath him. His slowness handicapped him, but he was patient and diligent.

Sometimes in the summer they came to my little island and spent a month in the little guesthouse. H.P. took his pretty young wife everywhere to meet the neighbors. I noticed that he had grown fond of long walks. He came back from them full of excitement about the birds and animals he had seen. He sat for hours listening to the soft lapping of the waves; he loved to watch the flowers raise their heads after a rain. His unreasonable self-assurance disappeared. He had become a quiet, pleasant man who enjoyed his small place in life.

And so the ex-burglar and his devoted wife lived happily in obscurity.

I had loved Czechoslovakia from the time of its birth. I had loved it even before. I had been translated into Czech, I had spoken in Prague many times and had several close friends there. They never came to my lectures, however, because I did not know the Czech language and had to speak in German.

After the war I went to Prague once more, this time as a guest of the government, to meet Thomas Masaryk.

As the car carried me from my train to the graceful Hradčany hill, a maze of gardens, crooked streets and imposing palais gave way to a huge square fronting the magnificent Hradčany Castle. Nearly every building had been erected or enlarged in a different period of Bohemian history by the ruler of the time. So that one beheld a pageant of the national architecture, past and present.

As soon as the car stopped I was taken to Masaryk. In my eagerness to meet him, I forgot to leave my little suitcase in the anteroom, and made my entrance like a traveling salesman.

I was seated at a table opposite Masaryk, the slender, mild-featured man whose white hair, mustache, and slightly rounded beard made him look more like a professor than an intrepid political leader. I had not bothered to prepare questions for the interview, trusting to luck when we should be face to face. And it was easy. The conversation spouted up

like a fountain and flowed like a brook. Our beloved Queen Dagmar, who on her deathbed confessed as her greatest sin that she had laced her silken sleeves on a Sunday morning, had come from Bohemia. Our Danish astronomer, Tycho Brahe, had lived in Bohemia, and is buried in a silver casket in Prague. Masaryk's wife was an American of Danish descent.

While we were talking, one question suddenly popped up in my mind. "Why is it, Mr. Masaryk, that although one whole section of your country is populated by Germans, you have forbidden them to receive any German instruction in the schools?" I asked. "You have a deep sense of justice. Does that seem just to you?"

Masaryk looked at me with his quiet, searching gaze, and shrugged his shoulders. "No one prevents German parents from teaching their children anything they wish within the home."

"That answer does not seem worthy of you, Mr. Masaryk." I could see that I had made him angry. He answered sharply.

I replied in kind. We actually began to wrangle. In the middle of a furious sentence, he struck the table a tremendous blow. I promptly hammered on the table with my equally ready fist. Suddenly we looked at each other and burst out laughing. He stretched out his hand. I took it warmly, and we parted in the friendliest way.

I decided, however, not to go to see him again.

After that, whenever I was in Prague, my friends suggested that I call on the president. I refused. Once I even blurted out, "If the president wants to see me, he can send for me!"

To my utter astonishment, he did. A message came, asking me to come to his summer residence. He even sent his own car for me. I was speechless with shame.

On a wonderful sunny spring day I drove over rugged mountains, by woods and cool streams, to see once more the first man of the country.

Masaryk received me so warmly that I felt even more ashamed of myself. But besides being a linguist, a statesman and a crusader, he also had a big heart, and soon put me at my ease. Again we were opposite each other across a table, but this time we sat in a bay window opening out on a green park. The song of birds and the fragrance of flowers and foliage drifted in on the soft air. We talked and talked and laughed. Still, I felt a faint shadow between us, the memory of that distant day when I had departed so abruptly with my little suitcase. I could not help saying, "Do you remember last time, when we – ?"

Masaryk laughed and banged on the table with his fist. "Yes, believe me, I do remember it!" he said.

Then he spoke so simply that my already great admiration for the man soared. "And I'm afraid that you were partly right. It would have been better if I had been less strict at the beginning about the teaching of German. I have made changes now. For one thing, the language of the majority is official in each district. But some unnecessary difficulties arose from our early policy." He smiled. "You see, we politicians often think that we direct politics, whereas actually politics directs us, make us its slaves."

All through our long afternoon together, I could feel the indescribable peace that radiated from Masaryk. He was at the same time tender and inflexible, gentle and stubborn. After a lifetime of devotion to a cause, he had won out. He had worked for the growth of his country, for the prosperity of his people; he had seen that the Czechoslovak youth were trained for life both physically and intellectually, he had developed a national

army and defenses strong enough to protect the nation in war. He had reason to feel at peace.

I am glad that he did not live to see his beloved country invaded and his proud people enslaved.

During a long lifetime, I have celebrated many times the passing of one decade or the beginning of another. Somehow my sixtieth birthday had a deeper meaning for me than any other anniversary. On that day I became, at least technically, a lady – an old lady. Yet the crossing of that imperceptible boundary line at midnight of a day on a calendar made me feel no different from the day before, any more than it had when I became sixteen instead of fifteen. I had received a great deal from life. Still, I was greedy enough to want more – much more.

On my sixtieth birthday I was at Genia's. The festivities started in the morning. All the household came gaily and promptly to breakfast. Before my plate rose a small mound of parcels. After breakfast the house staff – the two parlor maids, the cook and her kitchen helpers, the laundress, the houseman-gardener, and the chauffeur – filed past me in a procession proudly carrying their gifts. They had each spent part of their modest salaries to mark the day – that is, all but the chauffeur. He had forgotten. But as he crossed the music room he snatched up a beautiful potted rose tree that had been sent to Genia the day before. With great formality he presented it to me.

I did not recognize it. But everyone else did. Genia led the shouts of laughter.

Throughout the long day until well after midnight I went around in an amiable daze, receiving flowers, gifts and delegations. More than five hundred telegrams arrived. The letters were delivered tied together in thick bundles. Three governments awarded me decorations: the Czechoslovak one was the highest a foreigner could have. Masaryk himself sent a huge bouquet of red and white roses, the colors of both Czechoslovakia and Denmark. But from an early hour in the morning the house had been in the wildest confusion, and the accompanying message was lost. I first read it three years later in a newspaper clipping my sister had saved. By that time Masaryk had bowed his tired head in death.

"Everyone knows what you, as a writer, have meant to the world," he had written. "But what you, as a human being, have meant to Czechoslovakia we Czechs know better than anyone else. We count you among our nearest and dearest friends."

That same week I was the center of another gala reception. Only this time it was not I who was the guest of honor, but a creation of mine.

The Vienna Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals asked me to their headquarters to autograph some of my Bibi books. They hoped that the publicity would attract some new members.

I made one concession to my new venerability, I put on a lavender dress. I do not like lavender, and Genia said the dress was hideously unbecoming, but I set off anyway for the society's office in the heart of Vienna. The trouble was that I could not get through the streets. I tried one street after another, making my short legs go as fast as possible. Every one was packed with youngsters of all ages. Had I, as usual, lost my way and blundered into a children's festival? I asked a policeman what on earth had

happened. “It’s just that Michaelis woman,” he said. “She’s going to autograph some books.”

I was amazed. The Bibi books were written primarily for adults. Did children really like them so much?

Into the office they marched, hundreds of them, with a Bibi book, sometimes several of them, under their arms. They all wanted not only my autograph but something written especially to them. Hours passed. My fingers could hardly hold the pen and I had a cramp in my arm. But I was much too happy to stop. I would have written with my toes if I had known how and if it would not have shocked them. Children are so conventional.

When at last I had finished the whole lot, the youngsters lined up in rows, holding out all sorts of packages in their arms. Frankly they let me know that although it had been nice of me to write in their books, they were really not much interested in me. Where was Bibi? They demanded that she appear at once and accept their offerings.

When I could not materialize Bibi out of thin air, they filled my arms and two huge dog baskets with dolls, toys, books and photographs. Hedwig Collin had illustrated the Bibi books with rich and amusing drawings. Many of the children, however, had felt that they knew better than any grownup how Bibi had looked during her many adventures. Importantly they presented their illustrations to me with strict instructions to deliver them to Bibi.

I tried to convince the children that there was no real Bibi, that she existed solely in my brain. They only looked at me skeptically, as if to say, “You’re just like all the other grown people. You tell lies.”

I felt guilty. Was there actually some way that these children, with their honest eyes, could tell that I had once been a champion liar? I was tempted, and I fell. After all, I thought, having told so many, one more lie won’t do any harm. They want to believe that there is a real Bibi.

I smiled a sly conspirator’s smile. I solemnly promised that in whatever distant country Bibi journeyed now, I would find her and pour their gifts into her arms.

27

Coeducation in Russia

Almost as soon as I became a writer, my books were translated and widely read in Russia. During the years I was asked, directly or indirectly, to go there. Always I hesitated. I remembered how disillusioned Emma and Sasha had been with the progress of the great new social experiment. Others told me wisely that I would be allowed to see only the favorable side of things. Yet I was not without some contact with Russia. I knew the Russian ambassadors in Berlin and Vienna; I knew Alexander Arosev, the envoy to Prague; Madame Alexandra Kollontay was my friend, and I had often met Lunarcharsky.

When Hitler came into power, many of my friends from Germany came to me in Denmark to escape imprisonment. Bert Brecht, the poet, and his wife, Helene Weyl, the actress, lived for a while in my small house on the beach at Thurø. When they bought a place on the neighboring island of Funen, Brecht’s house became a center for literary refugees. In 1934 I met there a Russian who urged me to go to Russia. I asked him for a

guarantee that I could see what I wanted, talk with anyone I wished, and write what I pleased.

"I can guarantee you nothing," he said. "But I am convinced that nobody will put any obstacles in your way."

Before long I received a formal invitation from the Soviet government and accepted it. I had only promised not to take any pictures. Since I had never owned a camera, this did not worry me.

On a rainy day in February, my illustrator, Hedwig Collin, and I arrived at the old-fashioned railway station in Leningrad. No one was there to meet us. We took a taxi to the best hotel. As soon as I gave my name we were shown to our rooms and given an excellent dinner. Soon the widow of my Russian translator called, and a pretty and intelligent young lady introduced herself as our interpreter.

We set off at once for what I most wanted to see in Leningrad, the Hermitage. To my surprise and joy I found that the famous art collection, which I knew well from copies, was almost complete again after the depredations of the revolution. I saw groups of twenty or thirty young workers in the galleries studying the paintings. They regularly spent their one free day a week getting acquainted with art.

When we reached Moscow, my friend Alexander Arosev took charge of us. As head of VOKS, the society for entertainment of visiting personages, he had use of a luxurious car, and a palatial building in which he gave elaborate Russian banquets. As with all the other officials I met, Arosev's private life was completely divorced from his public activities. He and his family lived in a very modest apartment, and his wife could not use the car even for the most necessary errands.

I had always liked Arosev, and in Moscow I grew very fond of him. Childishly naïve and endowed with great charm, he was a glowing patriot and an ardent communist. I told him what sections of Russia I wished to visit, and he made the travel arrangements. No request was refused, and no suggestion of any sort was made about what I should see, or when or with whom. Meantime I explored Moscow.

Like everyone else, I had heard many accusations against the Soviet government – among them that religious observances were forbidden, that religious persons were persecuted, that the churches had been destroyed or used for sports; that the beautiful kindergartens shown to foreigners were shams, and that Russian children lived in dirt and misery.

One morning I told my chauffeur simply to drive ahead. My interpreter, a Hungarian writer, had no idea what I intended to do. We passed several churches. Suddenly I said, "Stop at the first church where there is a service!"

We pulled up at a church, but the congregation had just left and the door was locked. We drove on until I saw another church. A crowd was beginning to come out. I hurried inside. There were still about fifty people there, candles burned in various places, and a sharp odor of incense came to my nose. The priest, a gentle-looking man in threadbare robes, stood at one side talking to some parishioners.

Fortunately he spoke German, so I needed no interpreter. He willingly answered my questions. "Do you know how many churches are open now in Moscow?" I asked.

He thought a moment. "About eighty-four or eighty-five," he said.

"How does one go about opening a church that was closed during the revolution?"

"A certain number of grown men must sign a petition, and declare themselves willing to pay taxes on the church property, and to keep the church in decent condition."

"That's all?"

"Why, yes," he said in surprise. "That is all."

"But who provides the money for the priest?"

He pointed to some small boxes tacked to the walls. "The congregation put contributions there, besides paying a little for weddings, christenings and funerals. And," he added with a smile, "it does not cost much to live if one's wants are simple."

I started to put some money into a box. "No, please," the priest remonstrated, "don't be offended, but we like to furnish our entire financial support ourselves."

I left him, and we went on without any particular destination. I knew what I wanted to see, but not where to find it. Finally we reached the city suburbs. Sooty factory buildings loomed up in unpaved streets of low, tumble-down houses. Stray dogs and cats roamed about, and there was an unmistakable smell of rats. I said to my interpreter, "Please try to find a kindergarten here."

He was unpleasantly surprised. "Why not go to one of the splendid kindergartens in the center of the city?"

"I don't want to see a splendid kindergarten," I insisted. "I want to see one right here."

"But suppose there aren't any?" he said.

I laughed. "In Soviet Russia, no kindergartens near the factories?"

That settled it. We drove around until the chauffeur stopped outside a small, unattractive two-story wooden building, no different from the other dingy houses except that its windows were brightly polished.

I rang the bell. A white-gowned nurse opened the door, looking rather astonished. "Come in," she said. "You are the very first visitors from abroad we have had in all the years we have been here."

Her face flushed with pride and pleasure, she took us to the rooms where eighty children, between three and five years old, spent their days while their mothers worked in the neighboring factories. Each child wore very plain clothes, each one was immaculate. We watched them set the tables for lunch. They carefully carried delicate china which had undoubtedly been confiscated from some rich aristocrat's home. "How do you dare trust such small youngsters with eggshell china like that?" I asked.

The teacher smiled. "We do have a cup or soup plate broken sometimes, but only in the kitchen, never from being handled by the children."

In the basement workshops we saw boys working with hammer, plane, gimlet and saw. We also watched children creating little works of art with pencil and brush, as children all over the world will do if left alone with the necessary materials.

A Russian university professor whom I had met in Germany invited me to visit a monastery on the outskirts of Moscow which had been converted into a home where some five thousand students of both sexes lived and studied. A group of the students had asked especially to meet me.

From the center section of the huge building hospitably stretched two wide wings pierced by high, vaulted corridors. The rooms on the right of the corridor were for girls, on the left, for boys. We went first to the male students. The light, spacious rooms

contained eight beds, with brightly curtained clothes closets between. Each student had a work table with bookshelf, writing pad and lamp. Many held vases filled with spring flowers or budding branches. Most of the young men were lying on their beds, smoking and reading, too engrossed in their own work to pay much attention to us. A few came up and said something pleasant about my books.

The girls proved very little interested in my books, but as soon as we entered they jumped up, surrounded me and began talking in German, English, French and Russian, all at the same time, so that I understood very little. Girls poured in from the other dormitories, pulling me this way and that in a cordial and charming way. They were delighted to have greetings direct from a country "that has not yet received its share of the blessings of Soviet Russia." There was no doubt that they believed they had found their Eldorado and were digging gold out of the mountains of knowledge and ability.

As we went along, the crowd following me grew larger. I felt like the Pied Piper of Hamelin. Never had I received so many proofs of friendliness, so many kisses and caresses. Of all the peoples I have known, the Russians are the most ready to give and to receive affection.

Many of these young girls were not really girls, if one uses the word to connote virginity. Several proudly asked me to go upstairs with them and see their babies. These infants had been born out of wedlock, but not because of licentiousness or promiscuity. The parents were devoted to their children. Here, as everywhere I went in Russia, I was impressed by the strong family feeling I saw. In this students' home it would have been unnatural if some of the thousands of young, healthy and intelligent men and women living there for years had not been attracted to each other. But it was a serious feeling that joined the couples, and as soon as a child was born, the parents considered themselves bound by very much stronger bonds than those of the usual marriage.

I wondered why they did not marry and have a normal family life. The answer was simply that while they were students they could live in the monastery without paying rent. Granted that they had to share a room with seven persons of the same age and sex – a married couple would have needed at least two rooms. And where would they get the money? The gigantic home for married students was overcrowded and had a long waiting list.

The kindergarten, the delivery room on the top floor, and the rooms where the young mothers stayed immediately after the birth of their babies were like greenhouses, flooded with sunlight. And many young men who were not fathers visited the infants. In fact, the nurses had a lot of trouble getting rid of the non-fathers. If one of them was allowed to help bathe or dress a baby, he strutted like a rooster.

The library quite took my breath away. To the enormous number of the first editions, rare volumes, and fine bindings collected by the monks, the students had added hundreds of modern French, English, Italian and other foreign books. The building contained concert halls, dance halls, and a theater. In the basement I saw kitchens and dining rooms where the students ate cheap and abundant meals.

My friends in Russia chartered a steamer to take me on a two-day trip down the Volga. It was not nearly as romantic as my dream of floating all the way to the Black Sea on a raft. But it was more practical. At Nizhni Novgorod twenty of us went on board,

including a stocky, undersized man who looked like a Danish peasant, and was administrator of a province about the size of France.

"*Volga, Volga, Matj rodnajo!*" The words sang in my heart as we glided past an endless procession of ships and boats plying the broad river. We passed a great bay filled with hundreds of thousands of logs from the vast forests in the far north. Farther down the river we saw a fair in a village and went to explore it. The fair proved disappointing. The school, however, did not. Classes were over for the day. But the children now sat at the teachers' desks and taught the magic of reading and writing to their parents and grandparents. They had made bets with each other as to whose grandmother would first read a line of print without a mistake.

The next day being "rest day," we saw dozens of small picnic parties on both banks of the river. Most of the young people had slung lunch boxes over their shoulders, and carried long, supple willow branches to plant during the day. This was not something they had been asked to do, and no one knows how the custom began. But in this way millions of trees are voluntarily planted every year.

On the whole, the Volga trip did not live up to my expectations. My visit to the giant Gorki automobile factory, however, more than made up for it. I saw the house where Lenin had died a decade before; I saw peasants turned into skilled mechanics. Not only did my mind learn a lot, but when I left, my heart was a little richer.

The workers in Gorki had their own printing press to get out a newspaper and the many proclamations and posters that seem to be needed for all workers in the new Russia. It happened that the factory library contained a number of my books. The workers dedicated one whole issue of their newspaper to me, filled with contributions from men and women of all ages.

One man's letter in particular, I shall never be able to forget. "I am thirty-five," it said. "I came here from far away, from the large woods. My feet were bloody and wrapped in rags. I could read little and hardly write my name. Here I have learned to read and write. I read a whole book each week, and I can write down all I think. I have been here for four years, and am married. It is good to be here. My comrades always help me when I do something wrong or am ignorant of something. They do not laugh at me. We all have to begin at the bottom. I have read two of your books, and like parts of them, but I do not understand all. I think you might learn something here, too, that you may not know. Good-by! I am your friend."

Back in Moscow I got to talking one day in a library with a young girl employee. She invited me to go to her family's summer home outside the city.

We drove through cool, odorous woods and reached a colony of a hundred or so families, of professors, teachers, and library workers. Each family's *datsja* was so far removed from its neighbors' that they rarely saw those neighbors except by previous arrangement. Since the ground in Russia is free save for very small taxes, an eight-room frame cottage like my host's cost no more than a good automobile, or between four and five thousand rubles. There were many private flower beds, but the fruits and vegetables were all grown in a communal plot of several acres. Each family had to furnish one person to work there one day a week – man, woman, child or friend. The money for any extra produce that was sold went for new tools, fertilizer, and the wages paid to the directing gardener.

My hosts took me to see what was surely the strangest garden in the world. The ground around a *datsja* had been neatly divided into many small beds with paths in between. Each bed was filled with carefully tended and cultivated weeds, growing to unusual size with luxuriant blossoms.

The tenant came to meet us. He was a middle-aged man, gray-haired and stooping. He took us about with great pride, removing here and there a spider web, a dry stem, a caterpillar, a rusty leaf, as he walked. "You are surprised at my plants?" he asked me in a soft, musical voice. "I like them best. Ever since I retired from my work in Moscow, I have cultivated them rather than any others. Everyone, you see, despises them and kills them. Perhaps you will doubt me, but I feel with all my heart that my plants are grateful to me." He smiled, but without apology.

I told him about my garden in Denmark, and invited him and his wife to visit me.

His expression changed suddenly. Was it fear, anger, or mistrust? "I travel? Out of the country?" he burst out. "Never! Never!"

When we left, my young friend from the library explained that this gentle, quiet man had been one of the important members of the notorious GPU.

All travelers in Russia visit the famous recreation parks. Yet few have mentioned the large shady areas called the "silent parks." Here, under great trees with low, leafy branches, are long benches. No children are allowed and no one is permitted to talk. People whose nerves demand quiet can sit here as long as they please. Except for the song of birds, the wind in the branches, and the buzzing and whirring of insects, there is the silence of utter solitude.

In addition to the "silent parks," I saw rest homes unique in my experience.

An overworked housewife or factory woman, or one on the verge of a breakdown from domestic discord, can go at any time to one of these homes. She is not examined by any doctor, she is asked no questions; she can take a comfortable bath, go to bed and have her meals in private, for days or weeks. A woman can work at factory or office during the day and come back to the home in the evening, thus having a rest without loss of earnings.

The home even has a staff of experts who go to the house during the wife's absence, take care of the children, the cooking and cleaning – and make the husband understand that the short separation is good for both partners.

It was astonishing to me that a country which showed itself so understanding and considerate of harassed individuals did not provide comfortable homes for old people. The Danes respect old age; they had pensions and homes for the aged before they were to be found in other countries.

But in Russia, where superhuman efforts are made to give the young a golden childhood, I saw old people do work beyond their strength or unsuitable to their age. All that generation who were grown-up during the revolution, and who for some reason had not adapted themselves to the new order, were treated with a coolness and indifference that were painful to me.

I hope that on my next visit to Russia I shall see that the government which has accomplished so incredibly much has also long since taken the aged to its heart.

28

The Crimea

Lush, beautiful, and peaceful, the Crimea is for all Russian children a fairyland, a land to dream about.

During the first turbulent years after the revolution, when hordes of ragged and starving homeless Russian children roamed the country, most of them tried to get to the Crimea. They lied or stole or even committed murder to get money to take them south to the sunny peninsula. The government did its best not only to catch these countless small beggars, give them shelter and security, but to rouse in them an ambition to be happy, law-abiding citizens. But they were like the fox that prefers to gnaw off its leg rather than remain in a trap; they had known freedom, and would do anything to regain it.

On my way to the Crimea, I went to Bolsjewo, a large colony for such children about forty miles from Moscow. Located in a wooded region, Bolsjewo has no cells, no guards, no walls. In the beginning the warmest-hearted teachers there must have had a bad time, for many of the children were carried in screaming, kicking and biting. But by the time I saw the place, it seemed just like an ordinary middle-class boarding school, and the incorrigibles had turned into fathers of families, teachers, physicians, artists and businessmen. The most brilliant Russian university professors went to Bolsjewo to teach the sciences, and the children went to Moscow to study under the best violinists, painters, or sculptors.

And now I, too, reached the Crimea. From my hotel in Yalta I could see the Black Sea, and in the street, the never-ending procession of pedestrians and vehicles. Many gypsy-like youngsters, almost stark naked, darted in and out in the crowd. It was easy to see that they had run away from distant homes months before, living on the way by pilfering. One little boy with a crooked stick sneaked up behind a man with a new panama hat. In an instant the boy had the hat and had disappeared in the throng, to turn his loot into money.

The streets were lined with bathing resorts, and they were always full. The custom was first to have one's swim, then to sun-bathe in a vast roofless hall. Every three minutes a young lady blew a whistle and every sun bather solemnly turned over. Just as solemnly another young lady showered them with a watering can, so they would tan a uniform golden brown.

Everywhere in the fertile Crimea one saw sanitariums, children's homes, recreation centers for soldiers, magnificent old palaces transformed into vacation spots for miners and other workers.

I had long been anxious to make the short drive from Yalta to Artec to see the five hundred children sent by the government every year for a month or so. The lucky ones were not necessarily highly talented or brilliant. They were chosen out of the millions of candidates because of their character.

The road to Artec was beautiful, mounting the rocky coastal mountains, skirting deep ravines, following the shore of the sea, past prolific orchards, through villages filled with gardens. Often the villagers walked about in the benign sunlight in nothing but a pair of shoes.

The children in Artec looked quite like ordinary children, neither especially pretty nor intelligent. Yet their naturalness, combined with a kindness and a joy of life, would have made them outstanding in any school. They flocked around me like playful kittens. They all spoke one or more foreign languages, and when I tried a few words in Russian they shouted with delight. I was pulled along to see the children's chemical laboratory, their herbariums, their collections of shells and of coins. I had to see them dance, wrestle, dive, administer first aid; to listen to their choir, and their orchestra conducted by a twelve-year-old boy. Everyone was enthusiastically preparing for a great celebration, to which Molotov himself was to fly from Moscow.

A few days later, back in Yalta, I was sitting before my balcony door at the hotel, working. The Black Sea lay before me, smooth and shining and dark blue. A ship in full sail, decked with flags, came slowly into the harbor. I thought I heard singing over the water, but was too engrossed in my work to pay much attention. An hour passed. I heard a rhythmical tramping of feet on the street. It stopped and the air was filled with clear high voices, musically chanting. I thought the voices called my name, but realized that that was impossible. The drums sounded again, the singers marched on. They stopped again, and again they sang. This time I was not mistaken. "Karin Michaelis, Kar-in Michae-lis, come to Artec – !" They repeated the words to an impromptu melody. I wept with happiness.

A deputation of two boys and two girls came to my balcony with a formal invitation to lunch in the neighboring park. There we found the other children perched everywhere, in the high trees, on the edge of the fountain, on the grassy slopes, each with his paper plate of raw and cooked vegetables, hard-boiled eggs, fruit and bread.

I was only one of many guests at Artec that afternoon. And there was – Molotov. At his side at the frugal supper I felt very small and insignificant. Suddenly I remembered, to my horror, that I had thoughtlessly agreed to speak. Just two speakers – the second-greatest man in Russia, and myself. I felt as panicky as though I had never spoken in public. I could not go back on my promise, even if I uttered only, as Genia used to say, "a few badly chosen words." Yet to speak at all was impossible. Why could I not have a good old-fashioned fainting spell, or even a slight stroke? I would gladly have contracted measles, chicken pox, or whooping cough on the spot. I tried to dig up something, some gay little incident out of the glory hole that is my memory. It was as barren as though a hurricane had just passed through.

Dimly I was aware of the beauty of the scene. We were in an amphitheater on a point of land exploring the Black Sea. A full moon made the water sparkle like liquid silver. Fireflies glimmered among the fluttering flags; thousands of colored lanterns glowed in the trees. I heard Molotov speaking to a complete, absorbed silence. But I could not listen. All my thoughts were scurrying about like hungry mice in my mind, searching desperately for a crumb of a speech.

There was a deafening roar of applause. A new silence, a frighteningly expectant one. I was firmly escorted to the middle of the stage. I could not have suffered much greater agony if I had been on the way to a guillotine. I jumped nearly out of my skin as lightning struck me – half a dozen blazing searchlights had found me. I was blind and deaf and full of terror.

But I had to speak. I began. But neither then nor later had I any consciousness of what I said; and I did not dare ask anyone. I only knew that when I had finished the

children seemed happy. The minute the function ended I bolted, not even waiting to say good-by to Molotov. Not until I arrived again at my hotel did I know what I wanted to say to the children of Artec.

By then it was, of course, too late.

Once more, while I was in the Crimea, I lost my way. But with a quite different result. Hedwig Collin and I had gone to a neglected, overgrown botanical garden and could not find our way out again through the thick high foliage. A friendly, pleasant man guided us back to our car and offered, as being of special interest to a writer, to show us a library.

A library sounded nice and restful after being lost in a jungle, so we set off at once. A gate in a high railing was opened by a giant Cossack. He turned and slowly pulled up a heavy iron trap door in the cobbled courtyard. Timidly we descended into the earth. I said a silent prayer that our guide would be as nice as he seemed. Both Hedwig and I were a little mature for the white-slave trade, but he might be going to rob us and bash out our brains in this subterranean retreat. However, we were too proud to back out.

We groped our way down, passing several landings. The air grew heavier with strange odors, not altogether unpleasant. At last we stood before a huge door with impressive locks. Our guide knocked. We heard the sound of bolts being drawn.

The door swung wide and we found ourselves in one of the famous wine cellars of the Crimea.

In a somber, vaulted hall a dozen men sat around a table. Candles in massive candelabra burned before them. Each man faced a row of bottles and glasses. In the flickering light, all outlines wavered. Red walls cast a ruddy reflection, making the vaults seem bigger and higher than they were.

We were introduced and seated like members of a secret brotherhood. I thought of Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. Waiters in leather aprons cleared the table and brought new bottles of wine. Before each person they placed six glasses of different shapes. Then they ranged six different grades of the same wine alongside. We were to taste these and arrange the glasses according to the quality of the wine.

I took only a sip from each glass, forgetting that enough drops can go to one's head. Soon the world became bathed in rose-colored light; all the inhabitants of the earth were my intimate friends. Some of the men commissioned Hedwig Collin to paint life-sized pictures of everyone present, telling her, with true Russian nonchalance, to set her own price. She decided to remain in Soviet Russia and paint the whole revolution. But being a Dane, she wanted to begin with the czar because his mother had been a Danish princess.

I was no longer a writer. I had found my real vocation. I was a born winetaster. I was proud to be able several times to place the glasses in the right order. But I couldn't understand why I had such trouble making them stand in a straight line.

The company demanded that I make a speech. I told them that I found mankind wonderful, almost as intelligent as the animals. No doubt, I said, the very best of our two-legged fellow creatures were to be found here in the Crimea. I intended to settle down here for the rest of my life, except perhaps for short visits to Denmark.

I invited everyone at the table to stay with me in Thurø for as long as they liked. Some of them mentioned wives and children. I gestured magnificently. "That is a trifle," I said. "Of course, you must bring them all!"

The men promised to bring me to Denmark a hogshead of the best wine ever produced in the Crimea. In return I vowed to dedicate a book to each member of the company. And if I should be appointed Danish imperial winetaster, I could, naturally, decide what wines would be served at weddings, christenings and funerals. We drifted into politics. I promised to make Denmark a communistic republic, on condition that the Soviet Union was to be governed by the king of Denmark. We did not quite agree on that.

From there on it is as if my memory had been enveloped in a dense fog. I recalled the word "library." My host had promised to show me a unique library, hadn't he? Well, I demanded to see it. We reeled through narrow corridors, wide and vaulted corridors, all permeated with a strong odor of mice, dust, and dampness, mixed with the tart smell of alcohol. At last we stopped before a wall covered from floor to ceiling with enormous spider webs filled with dead flies.

This was the library. What I had thought spider webs were wire nets, and the flies were sealed bottle necks sticking through the mesh. The labels showed dates from the times of Frederick the Great, Madame Pompadour, Catherine of Russia, Robespierre, Napoleon, and even Cesare Borgia.

Gazing at the bottles, tears came into my eyes. My heart nearly broke with pity. The bottles held a precious substance, but what joy did they have out of life?

Three weeks later I boarded the small steamer headed for the Caucasus, the country of oil, red soil, and mountains. I walked into a perfect Noah's Ark, packed with people and animals, talking, neighing, howling, shrieking, all in the wildest confusion of sacks, bundles, trunks, boxes and baskets. The Russians have always loved to travel with all their possessions; the only difference was that after the first World War they had fewer possessions. Here and there one could espy a jumble of human bodies, kerchiefed heads, and babies at their mothers' breasts.

The characteristically sudden twilight soon lulled people and animals to sleep. The boat glided silently over the still, star-studded water.

In the night I awoke with a strange pain in my upper lip. I turned on the light and looked in the glass. My lip had a bump the size of an almond and half my face was swollen out of shape, my eyes were glassy with fever. My pulse was hammering.

There was no physician on board. I had to be patient until we reached Batum. The pain increased and the night passed slowly.

In Batum the doctor said, "Hurry on to Tiflis where there are many good doctors. I hope you reach there in time for an operation."

Miserable as I was, what I saw of Tiflis from the train was enough to whet my appetite for more: earth almost blood-red, great green palms of fabulous age, mansions and huts side by side; buildings springing up next to enormous fissures in the ground.

The Tiflis doctor looked at me even more seriously than his colleague in Batum. I was put to bed. That evening my lip was lanced. It was also lanced the following morning and evening. A Red Cross nurse settled down with me for the night. At times during the following days three doctors argued by my bed, unfortunately in a language strange to me. Later I learned they had wired to Moscow to find out whether they dared to keep me in Tiflis, or should send me on there by air for a trepanation. I took no interest as long as the fever dulled the pain.

My nurse always slept soundly for a while during the long night hours. I was in the habit of getting to the window as well as I could on legs that seemed suddenly to have lost their bones. I would sit by the balcony and look out into the huge courtyard. My eyes gradually focused on the houses set down haphazardly on its edge as if by the hands of a child. Usually everything was silent and dark. But one night, when my head threatened to split wide-open, I heard the tramping of horses, shouting and laughter. Under the full moon a crowd of Cossacks dismounted and disappeared into one brilliantly lighted building. Soon I heard the sounds of music and dancing, and an occasional snatch of song.

From time to time a gaily dressed girl was escorted or carried out by a Cossack glittering with ornaments, guns and knives. Her caresses seemed to inspire him to fire his revolver toward the sky. Other girls came out and dived into a cellar, returning with their arms full of bottles. Once a couple of Cossacks began a wild fight outside the door, probably over one of the girls. Their comrades tore them apart, and they went back to the dance with their heads swathed in bandages.

Trembling with fever, I stayed glued to the window. I had been lying in that one room with no one to talk to except the nurse. The doctors seemed to do nothing but lance my lip and shake their heads. I was lonely. I thirsted for life.

Just as a faint strip of pink began to spread across the sky a violent battle broke out in the dance hall. An arsenal of guns roared in the still dawn air; the women sounded as if they were trying to see who could scream the loudest and longest. I stole a look at my nurse. She slept on, oblivious to the uproar.

The yard below suddenly swarmed with fighting Cossacks, ignoring the blood that flowed freely from their wounds. Everybody was fighting everybody else. All at once the struggle mysteriously ceased. The women brought out tables and benches, platters of food, bottles and glasses. The men who were still on their feet, and had been trying to kill each other a moment before, sat down peacefully together and started eating and drinking. Their fellows were carried inside to sleep off their debauch or to have their wounds dressed. The food looked good. I had had nothing to eat since leaving the ship. I decided to make my way somehow down into the courtyard and join the party.

But now the spirited Cossack horses were brought in, pawing the hard earth. One of the Cossacks, in an especially brilliant uniform, dashed into the house and carried out a thickly veiled woman in his arms. He threw her on the horse, jumped up behind her, and galloped out of the yard. The other men had risen from the table, ranged themselves in a long line, and at a given signal emptied their guns toward the dawn. They sprang upon their horses and raced away. Nothing was left of their passing but the slowly settling dust.

I stumbled to my bed, my head a mass of pain.

Hours later I was awakened by my own groans. The three doctors sat at my bedside, pointing at me and gesticulating. So – my last hour had come. My brain seemed to be slowly consuming itself in flame. I lifted my head, convinced that my skull was crushed. A sudden impulse from I know not where made me whisper, “Phenacetin!”

One of the doctors dug a tiny brown wrapping-paper parcel out of his pocket. With a little water he gave me the powder it contained. Fifteen minutes later the pain diminished, and the fever broke. I had passed the crisis.

As soon as I was well again, the Caucasian writers gave me a luncheon in a magnificent villa set aside for them as a place where they could work in peace whenever

they wanted. The carpets were thick, the paintings, silver and furniture were luxurious, the scent of exotic flowers from the garden almost intoxicating.

The meal, like all Russian repasts, lasted a long time. When the speeches were over, local instrumentalists, singers and dancers entertained us with exquisite art. By the end of the festivities, I had firmly declared that I intended to settle down in Tiflis for the rest of my days.

And I did regret leaving Tiflis. Yet I was to speak on the Moscow radio for an hour, on an intercontinental hookup that included both western Europe and the United States.

I arrived at my hotel in Moscow at ten o'clock in the evening. I was exhausted. I had only one thought – a warm bath and a long sleep. The telephone rang. The radio station manager welcomed me to Moscow. At the end of the conversation he said casually, "Then you'll be ready in about an hour? We're sending a car for you."

I stammered in bewilderment.

"You go on the air at midnight, you know," he went on, "so you had better be here a half-hour ahead."

"But it is tomorrow!" I shouted hoarsely.

"It is this evening," he answered quietly and definitely. "Don't you remember? You suggested the date yourself."

"It's impossible. I can't do it," I groaned. "I'm tired to death. I'm not prepared …"

"I'm sure it will be fine." The manager laughed reassuringly. "Take a cocktail to stimulate you and forget about being tired. What's the difference, whether you're prepared or not? It will be fine."

I bathed, ate a sandwich, drank a glass of vodka, and jotted down some notes. At midnight I stood before the microphone, swaying with fatigue. I remember waking from a few seconds' sleep once or twice, but apparently I found enough to talk about, even though the notes were completely illegible.

My mother always said, when I disturbed her, "You certainly cannot keep quiet for a moment. What a chatterbox!"

For once, being a chatterbox was my salvation.

29

Krupskaya

Krupskaya, Lenin's widow, had an office in one of the Moscow government buildings. I had, however, great difficulty in finding her. Everyone knew vaguely that she was there, but not exactly where. In Soviet Russia no one can gain renown or position by marriage. This woman, whose husband organized and led the Revolution, had never had a prominent place in the development of the country. Even after a long and useful life, she was virtually unknown to the general public.

Finally I stood face to face with a homely little woman with grayish-white straggling hair, bulging eyes and sagging cheeks, wearing a faded cotton dress fastened with a safety pin. The poorest cleaning woman scrubbing public toilets would not have been a more pitiable sight. The shock took my breath away.

Yet immediately I forgot everything but the radiance of her lucid soul. It seemed to shine from her whole being and to form a halo around her head. I knew that she had suffered for years from Basedow's disease. Since she had never paid the slightest attention to her health, she had little earthly time left to her.

I knew, too, that when she met Lenin, Krupskaya had been a teacher; that in her way she had as powerful a nature as he; that she shared his extreme modesty, and his indifference to material things. I remembered that when Lenin was exiled to Siberia in 1897, Krupskaya went with him; that only in direst necessity did he accept small loans from the Communist Party, sums he paid back as soon as possible; that without complaint they had half starved at various times in Moscow, Paris, London, Copenhagen, Zurich. There was the story of their return to Russia in 1917 from Switzerland, when they sold the few pieces of furniture they owned to the man taking their apartment. The man asked Lenin the prices of beef and geese in that locality. Lenin could not tell him. Such delicacies had never appeared on their table. And the new tenant did not care about the price of horse meat.

These fragmentary thoughts went through my mind as I looked at Krupskaya. She did not seem particularly interested in seeing me. But during our conversation she opened up like a flower unfolding in the sun. As she spoke humor played on her face, and her smile made her beautiful.

Her principal activity consisted in reading and personally answering every one of the hundreds of letters that streamed in to her from factory workers, miners, housewives; from the huge forests, from the plains, from the marshes, and from mountain huts, in all parts of the country. She smiled apologetically at the pile of mail on her desk and said, "That is why I must be stingy with my time. However, I am an early riser – I got into the habit during Lenin's illness – and I find I can accomplish a great deal in the early morning hours."

Krupskaya showed me a letter from one of the many children with whom she corresponded. An eleven-year-old boy wrote asking advice about a quarrel in his family. She opened a drawer of her desk and brought out a petition signed by all the wives in a distant mining town beyond the Urals. It was dated some months before. In it the wives begged Krupskaya to help them divorce their husbands and perhaps marry better ones. "We have slaved for years, cooked and mended, washed and scrubbed, borne children and brought them up," the letter said, "and what thanks do we get? Our husbands come home from the mine, and they are cross. They complain of the food, of the children, of the home, of us. Now we have had enough. We hear that in the new Russia no wife has to be the slave of her husband. We hear that a woman can obtain a divorce when she has a just grievance. We implore you to help us in this matter."

Krupskaya had been unutterably distressed by this petition.

She had shared every adversity with her husband. She felt that a marriage founded on close harmony could be dissolved only by death. Now she was being asked to break up every marriage in a community.

"That night, I did not sleep," she said, with a faint smile. "In the morning my plan was made. I wrote to the women that of course I would be happy to help them divorce their cruel and inhuman husbands. It was a wonder, I said, that they had put up with such abuse for so long. Especially as they had undoubtedly spent every moment trying to please their menfolk, had kept the house and the children clean and neat, cooked as well

as they knew how, and had the dinner ready the moment their husbands came home from the mine. And, naturally, working in the mine was nothing compared to the unceasing drudgery of housework." Her smile broadened, and the faded eyes twinkled. "I promised that I would personally look after the matter. I asked only one thing: that each wife send a letter setting forth her complaints and her request for a divorce."

Weeks passed before the answers began to come in. Everyone reflected the different temperaments of their writers, yet in one thing they were the same. No woman wanted a divorce.

"The general theme was that their husbands were not without faults, but then who was?" Krupskaya said. "Once in a while, they wrote, the men were ill tempered when they came home from the mine. But evidently I had no idea how hard they worked. The men had every right to be cross now and then. The wives were no angels, either. Sometimes they wasted time gossiping so that the dinner was not ready at mealtime, or they neglected the fire and burned the food: often the children were noisy or saucy. Really, their husbands had been miracles of patience. All the wives," Krupskaya beamed, "said that they did not want a divorce under any circumstances, and that I had misunderstood the whole thing!"

"Now here is another letter." Her smile was more tender as she picked up a short scrawled note. "This is from a remote village where not long ago people sat around the family stewpot and ate with their fingers. In recent years the villagers have begun to receive some education. And this woman's desire for a better life is expressed in her letter. She asks for 'some plates with red flowers at the bottom.' " She sighed. "Oh, how I wish I were young and could do more about all this!"

We talked about the equality of women in the new Russia: equal pay, equal status before the law, equal freedom and equal duties. In the old days a Russian peasant or worker, when drunk, often beat his wife until he was exhausted. "But," I asked, "if he gets drunk now and does not dare beat his wife, doesn't he turn upon the children?"

"Oh no! Never!" Krupskaya looked at me in amazement. "Even under the old regime men did not beat their children. Russian fathers love their children, and always have. And Russian children are so gentle that the slightest rap from their parents would make them scream." Her face darkened. "You have no idea," she said slowly, "how Lenin and I suffered in Zurich seeing parents beat their children. We could not understand it."

I knew how extraordinarily devoted a couple they had been. I had hoped, without asking questions, to hear something of their life. Krupskaya began to speak of it herself. "People did not think of me in connection with my husband," she said. "Very few knew we were married. I remember once when Lenin had promised to address a woman's congress in Moscow, but couldn't go at the last minute. He asked me to take his place. The chairman of the meeting announced that Lenin had unfortunately been prevented from coming, but that his wife would speak instead." She smiled. "The whole audience began to chant, "We do not want Lenin's wife! If Lenin cannot come, we want Krupskaya! She understands us! Give us Krupskaya!' "

I was silent, hoping she would continue. "We were poor," she said after a pause, "very poor. Stalin heard how hard pressed we were and sent us half his fee for his first article. Lenin returned it, asking that it be given to somebody who needed it more."

But there was a time when Lenin's poverty made him desperate. He had gone abroad, and for political reasons Krupskaya had remained in Russia. She supported

herself by sewing. But her eyes began to fail, and she had no money for an oculist. She did not mention her condition when she wrote to her husband, but he heard of it from others.

"Lenin was beside himself," she said softly. "He went through the few things he owned to find something to pawn. He decided he could get along without his watch, and took it to a pawnbroker. But no pawnbroker would take it. They all said it was absolutely worthless." Here Krupskaya laughed for the first time. "How rich life is!" she said. "I am old, half-blind, half-deaf, almost ready for the trash heap. But here," she said, pointing to her heart, "here – I am able to do my share a little longer!"

I thought of Karoline Bjørnson. She had used almost the same words. I looked at the unopened letters on the desk. "I've taken a great deal of your time," I said reluctantly, and offered my hand in farewell. Krupskaya had shown no interest in me or my country, and I felt sure that the moment I had left she would forget having met me.

Suddenly she embraced me warmly. Her poor tired eyes looked intently at my face as if she wanted to impress it on her memory. We stood silently for a moment. Then I left.

The next day I received a short note with the two volumes of memoirs she had written of Lenin's life up to the revolution. She said that she intended to complete the biography.

One year later she was dead.

30

New York

When, in 1936, I returned to the United States after an absence of twenty-three years, Herdis Bergstrøm came with me. That was a joy. Adored by crew, captain and passengers, Herdis transformed the journey into one long entertainment. I set my ears like sails so as not to miss one of her unique stories. She and Genia were, among my close friends, the only ones with whom I was content to sit silently rather than to do most of the talking myself. It was not a question of modesty. It was as natural for me to prefer their conversation to my own as it was not to compare my performance of Beethoven to that of Rudolf Serkin.

Herdis could stay in the United States only a couple of months. But we crowded an enormous amount of enjoyment into that brief period. I could not forget the loss of my sister Harriet, or cease to anticipate her voice every time the telephone rang. But that was my private sorrow, and I locked it in my heart. Herdis and I saw everything and everyone, at all hours, until hardly any difference remained between night and day.

Best of all, we stayed with my sister Alma and her husband, Joost, in their lovely home in New Rochelle. The happiness of these two was contagious.

For a long time Joost had devoted all his creative energies to research for a giant work on those Danes who through the centuries have contributed to the growth of the United States. An impressive committee had just been formed in Denmark under government auspices to carry through the publication of his volumes. One day, while Herdis was still with us, Joost went to New York to look up some material in the library.

On the way to the train he discovered that he had left his wallet at home and had no money. He simply walked the twenty-five or thirty miles into the city, worked at the library, and walked back again, without thinking anything of it. He had had no lunch, and had hardly noticed the lack of it.

Of course, we teased him unmercifully about being an absent-minded professor. Yet he came by it honestly enough. Old Admiral Dahlerup mentioned several times in his autobiography that neither he nor his father felt heat or cold; they were never hungry and could work for incredible periods without feeling fatigue. And it had long been remarked in the family that Joost's son and daughter possessed these same enviable capacities.

Inevitably many stories grow up around such a remarkable person as Joost. But Herdis' favorite and mine concerned something that had happened long before. As a little boy, Joost lived with his widowed mother in a house near one of our beautiful Danish forests. He often saw a stranger who had moved into the house next door stride off into the woods for a walk. One day this man asked little Joost if he would like to go along. The boy got his mother's permission, took the stranger by the hand, and they set off. For some two hours they walked through the forest and along the shores of small lakes, the whole time in complete silence. The man did not speak, and Joost was too polite to start a conversation.

When they returned, the man thanked the boy's mother for his companionship, and added, "We entertained ourselves marvelously!"

Again and again he took the lad walking, always in silence. Then he went away. And Joost found out his name. He was August Strindberg.

I myself could not linger with my sister very long after Herdis left. All my little garden cottages on Thurø, and the big house as well, were filled with refugees. I wanted to get back home to be sure they were all right. In February, then, I took a humble little cargo steamer back to Denmark.

The news from Germany had become so horrible that one could hardly credit it. Many of the people I sheltered had been through many forms of Nazi persecution. Their stories made my spine freeze. I wrote to Genia in Vienna, pleading with her to bring Hemme and live with me. But, as usual, although she wrought small miracles to help others to escape danger, she was careless of the danger daily approaching closer to herself.

That next summer I tried to get Genia to join Herdis, Hedwig Collin and me at St. Tropez. With those two advocates to help, I hoped to win her over. But she could not, or would not, come.

We took a funny little house with a spiral staircase encased in a tower, and settled down for a few weeks. Being so near Monte Carlo, my incurable love of gambling drove me to try my luck. Under pressure from Herdis and Hedwig, both of whom knew this weakness of mine only too well, I agreed that when I had lost a certain amount of money, I would not ask them to lend me any more.

Inside the Casino, it seemed that every seat at every roulette table was taken. I groaned. Each player looked as determined to remain in his seat as I was to occupy it. Well, we could stand and watch.

At exactly the same moment a stratagem occurred to all three of us. We stood and surveyed the game innocently enough, but we also talked and laughed gaily among

ourselves. The players turned around and glared at us. We were much too busy chatting to notice. Finally a portly man jumped up in a rage and strode away. Promptly I sat down.

Of course, in no time at all I had lost most of my money. When it should all be gone I would have to stop – and I did not want to stop. Then I heard Herdis' clear voice, saying to the croupier in her lovely French, "Oh, please, let her win just once, only once!"

He looked up, surprised at such directness, and smiled. And I won. My neighbor nudged my arm. "Why don't you take in your chips?" she whispered. They made two big piles in front of me. But I would not have been I if I had stopped playing before I had lost the last one back to the bank.

Again the next summer, when Bert Brecht and I spent three weeks in Paris at a writers' congress, I begged Genia to meet me there and go back to Denmark with me. But she would not leave Vienna.

Bert Brecht, considered by many to be the greatest living German writer, was a surprisingly wonderful traveling companion. Since he and his wife, Helene, lived not far from me, in an idyllic house with a garden running right down to the sea, we were constantly together. I had known Brecht as a strong-willed, stubborn man. He liked me, as any man might like a woman old enough to be his mother. We both took rooms in a modest hotel in the Latin Quarter and had our meals together. From the first day, Brecht amazed me by his courtesy and consideration. Although he was surrounded by the most famous artists in all mediums, and by beautiful and charming women, all of whom adored the "Master," not once in those three weeks did he forget me. He either included me in his own activities, or made certain that I was with interesting people.

At last, in 1938, Genia came to Denmark. For some reason, she seemed to prefer to stay in Copenhagen rather than in the big house I had bought on Thurø. So I went back and forth to see her.

One day she arrived at my door, like a small cyclone of gaiety and laughter. My houseful of refugees instantly succumbed to her smile, so warm that it must surely melt an iceberg. The next day she said casually, "Oh, by the way, Karin, will you telephone your beloved Dr. Reinsholm and tell him that I would like to see him tomorrow?"

"But why on earth?"

She laughed. "Don't you think it's time for me to see the man you speak of as though he were a demigod?" I thought she intended to ask him about my health.

She came back from Svendborg full of admiration for my friend. "I like him so very much that I intend to stay in his hospital for a few days," she said.

"For God's sake, are you ill?"

"Not at all. It's nothing. I'll be back in a whiff! You know I don't take my little ailments seriously."

During the following days I spent as much time with Genia as I could spare from my guests. Her hospital room was turned into a salon. She entertained the nurses and doctors and kept them laughing with her sallies. On the third day I told her that some friends from Norway had written that they would be there the next day to visit her. Genia loved people and never tired of them. But she did not seem pleased. She only said, "Well, telephone in the morning, and we will see."

When I called the hospital, the nurse answered, "Call back a little later. The patient has been under an anesthetic for three hours, and is not yet conscious."

My heart stopped. As always, facing a real tragedy, the tears crowding my throat would not fall. I was paralyzed with fear. Somehow, without asking Dr. Reinsholm, I knew that it was cancer. In the afternoon I saw Genia for a minute. She was weak, and white of face. But she smiled, and joked about her unwonted laziness.

A week later Dr. Reinsholm ordered me also to the hospital. But I was soon well and about again and able to spend most of the day in Genia's room. During those quiet hours she confessed that she had known for years that something was wrong. She had kept silent so as to keep Hemme from worrying. That was like Genia.

All during her convalescence on Thurø, she behaved as if everything were perfect, as if her only concern was to persuade Hemme to leave Austria. She managed it so that he never had the slightest suspicion of her illness. But she could not shake his decision to remain in the city where he had lived all his life. Every cable obstinately repeated, "What can happen to me here? I shall stay where I am."

As soon as she was well enough, Genia went to Paris. There she saw some friends high up in French government circles. Through them she succeeded in getting Hemme to Zurich. She was also lucky enough to have all their furniture crated and shipped, so that even though they had to start life anew in a strange city, they could do so in their old familiar and beautiful setting.

Genia had with her for those dark months two wonderful women – Mariedl, our "house beauty," who was Genia's chief secretary, and Mize, who had gone to Genia years before as a lady's maid and had immediately become a close friend. Without these two, it is doubtful if even Genia could have concealed from Hemme for the six short months that he lived the inhuman pain she suffered. He died without knowing that Genia would soon follow him.

Early in 1939 Elna Munch, a very old friend and the wife of the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, came to join me in the United States. We bought a car and set off on a whirlwind jaunt over the country. We returned in time to explore the World's Fair, for which my sister Alma had recreated a replica of a Danish colony garden. It was a tremendous success. People came from all over the States just to sit on a bench there, living again their childhood memories of similar gardens, and watching the stork in its nest on the roof of the summer house.

Elna Munch went back to Denmark. In September she wrote, "Things look bad. People here do not realize it, but we know better. If everything breaks down, will you find an apartment for my husband and me? I cannot say any more."

Through my bewilderment came an inkling of what she meant, of what she must mean. She was warning me not to return to Denmark in October as I had planned.

I stayed.

On the ninth of the following April, Hitler invaded Denmark. If it had not been for Elna Munch's warning, I would probably have perished long since in a concentration camp. The Nazis would not have forgotten that I had often spoke against them from a public lecture platform.

So I stayed in America. And I fell in love.

I am not speaking here of a love affair with a human being – although only because I have at last become too discreet – but of the most wonderful, responsive sweetheart anyone could have: the exciting, inexhaustibly varied city of New York.

Next to Copenhagen, the gayest and most happy-go-lucky of places, New York had always been my favorite. But now I was no longer a transient, a visitor with the subconscious awareness that no matter how pleasant my stay, my eyes would soon embrace another skyline.

I had, besides my return ticket, about a thousand dollars in cash. I stayed, of course, with Alma and Joost, so that I had no hotel bill. I knew that back in Denmark I had more money coming in than I could use. So I spent freely, buying what I chose of gifts and giving parties.

Suddenly, with the invasion of Denmark, I had no more reserve of capital. That was all right, I thought, I could easily earn more. I wrote articles and short stories and sent them out. In Europe I was so well known that acceptance of anything I wrote was automatic. A magazine or book publisher would gladly take in advance whatever I wanted to send him.

Apparently, American editors had shorter memories. Although in the past some seven of my books had appeared here, I had no luck at all. All at once I remembered that no reporters had come to meet me when my modest merchant ship had docked in the harbor. There had been no press interviews, no competition for my talents. My sister suggested that I engage a press agent. That was unthinkable. On the other hand, I needed money on which to live.

The Bibi books had become classics in every European country. I went to the American publishers who had brought out one of them in English. They had no one on their staff who could read the German editions I had with me. "If someone who knows German says they are good, will you publish the rest of the Bibi books?" I asked.

"That would depend upon who it was," they said.

Instantly I thought of the one perfect person, a woman whom, as an intimate of Genia's, I had come to know very well, Dorothy Thompson. Then a fresh and extremely charming young girl, Dorothy walked into people's hearts, as we Danes say, in her wooden shoes. Everybody loved her, and she seemed to love them back. When her marriage to a young, good-looking Hungarian writer whom I privately called "Mr. Nobody," ended unhappily, it fell to Genia to see her through the heartbreak.

"What about Dorothy Thompson?" I said to the publisher.

"Of course. If she vouches for them, we'll take them immediately."

In reply to my letter saying that I was in distress and needed her help, Dorothy wrote just as I had known she would. "Send me the books, darling, and I will read them in a couple of days."

I sent the books. Weeks passed. I wrote again, apologizing, for bothering her, but reminding her that the matter vitally concerned my livelihood. Another note came, promising that Dorothy would read the books without delay.

Months later, I met Dorothy by chance. "I'm so sorry that I haven't had time to read your books," she said. "I know they'd only take a couple of hours. But I just can't find the time – I have so much to do. You know how it is …" And that was the end of that.

I was glad that Genia was no longer alive. She, the warmest-hearted person imaginable, would have been ill to know that such a thing could happen.

One of the biggest American publishers became interested in bringing out my memoirs. Madame Ivy Litvinov offered to shape and perfect the language if I would write it in my faulty English. I went to Washington and for weeks spent several hours a day at the Russian embassy with her. Alas, she was too "fascinated" and not nearly severe enough with what I wrote, and the publisher refused our manuscript.

I had no luck in anything. Soon I became too discouraged to try again. I earned a very little, translating motion picture dialogue into Danish. Out of that sum came a tax of twenty per cent and a fee for the typist. Every time I spoke to Denmark or England on the short-wave radio, I received ten dollars, less tax.

I had always enjoyed being prodigal with my money. Without any income, I found a new joy in making every cent stretch as far as possible. I had to be careful, to keep from being a dead weight on Alma and Joost. But it was also fun. And no city in the world extends so many free pleasures to its people as does New York. I never felt as refugees here so often do, that everything – concerts, theaters, books – are too expensive. I am lucky enough not to miss what I cannot have. And so many good things come to me every day that I do not even think of whatever is out of reach.

The radio brought me the finest of concerts and lectures. Out of doors there was the whole city to amuse me. I spent a nickel and rode on the subway to whatever distant spot I had chosen to explore that day. Or for a dime I rode up Riverside Drive on a double-deck Fifth Avenue bus to Fort Tryon Park. Here, from early spring to late fall, flowers spread themselves out like a soft, multicolored rug. I sat on a bench and ate the sandwich I had brought for lunch. Then I crossed the park and climbed a hill, and I was at the Cloisters.

In the garden and in the vaulted halls of the Cloisters, I felt the same peace and joy as in an ancient Gothic cathedral. It did not matter that in addition to the many authentic Gothic arches, window frames and walls brought over from Europe, some of the beautiful masonry was actually modern. The effect was perfect. At certain hours I could wander about looking at the Gobelin tapestries, medieval furniture, sculptures in marble and in wood dating from the Roman empire, to the strains of soft orchestral music.

Then there was Central Park. I found many lovely spots tucked away from the sight of the ordinary visitor. Lonely people who had made the park their second home dozed in the sun, while squirrels rummaged in their pockets for nuts. Pigeons strutted on the grass, made love, and flew away again.

One day I stumbled on a celebration of Shakespeare's birthday. A small part of the park had been planted in his honor with all the flowers and shrubs mentioned in his works. I had known this garden as a neglected, unkempt place. Suddenly, as I walked by a steep cliff, the garden lay before my eyes completely restored. A freshly-painted fence also enclosed a minute lake where silvery fish flashed among lily pads. Water from a small fountain made a musical splashing. I learned that the restoration had been a labor of love. For weeks young landscape gardeners, under the supervision of the Park Commissioner, had spent their spare time, without pay, bringing the garden back to beauty once more.

I discovered the free lectures given at Cooper Union Institute several nights a week by authorities on art, on political science and almost any other subject one could name. I haunted the museums – all of them free. The Metropolitan Museum of Art was an old friend, but I had not known the Museum of Natural History. More exciting, I think, even

than viewing the exhibits myself, was to watch the crowds of children who thronged the place. They came without teachers or parents, simply because they loved the place.

I learned that by merely writing a note, one could receive tickets to excellent concerts at the Metropolitan and Frick Art Museums, and any number of other places. Dozens of private art galleries line Fifty-seventh Street. Having been invited by friends to the opening of a couple of exhibitions, I wrote my name and address in the guest-book. Then I was invited to them all, to many more, in fact, than I could possibly attend.

As for books – I know of no other country where people can avail themselves of the unbelievable service extended by the American public libraries. At the main building of the New York Public Library, on Fifth Avenue at Forty-second Street, a person doing research can work for weeks in a private room which is set aside for him, along with as many reference books as he needs. There is not only no charge, but the librarians go out of their way to be helpful.

While I was exploring New York, I had the unexpected happiness of a reunion with Agnes Smedley. We left the heat of the city and went together to the artists' colony called Yaddo, at Saratoga Springs, New York. The main house, really a mansion, is a replica of Carmen Sylva's Castle Linago, near Prague. Carmen had often stayed for months at a time with the family who later founded Yaddo as a place where painters, writers and musicians could work without being disturbed.

We slept in the main house, and after breakfast took our lunch baskets to the log cabin assigned to each of us. There were some thirty or forty of these cabins, set well apart from each other, in the big private park. The painters' cabins had good north light; the writers had big windows to let in the sun on their desks. Every cabin had its own fireplace, a stack of cordwood, a divan, a couple of large writing tables, and a basin with running water.

In the afternoon a station wagon took us into the town of Saratoga Springs for cocktails or ice cream. After an excellent dinner, we often gathered to listen to the professional musicians among us. Sometimes we just sat and talked. Agnes was in very bad health. But she was still the center of the crowd. She told us stories from her incredible experiences in China, and the sound of her fresh, irresistible laughter echoed in the room.

Another reunion proved to be less pleasant.

When Charlie and I were living in Potsdam in 1923, we were asked to make a trip through East Prussia, the Corridor, Silesia, West Prussia and the Ruhr – Charlie as an economist, I as a writer. Margaret Gärtner, publisher of a political economy magazine, was our guide.

She turned out to be a charming and interesting person, and I saw her occasionally during the following years. Although I knew vaguely that she had some connection with the Krupp family and interests, it never occurred to me that she was involved in anything more than working for the restoration of the old *gemütlich* Germany.

Just after I had settled in the United States, I received a letter from Miss Gärtner asking me to call on her at a New York hotel. I supposed that, like other refugees, she was alone and without money. I immediately tried to think up some sort of work for her. She received me with tears in her eyes, looking both glad and surprised.

I was surprised and puzzled – first by her emotion, since we were not close enough friends for her to weep at meeting me. Then, she was certainly not poor. Her suite was luxurious.

How could she have brought so much money out of Germany? There on the desk lay piles of papers. How had she evaded the stringent censorship?

The editor of a luxury magazine was there, too. I supposed that Margaret had already received orders for some articles. That would account for the evidences of money and for the manuscripts.

But not long afterward I received another letter from her, from Washington, saying that she had been suddenly called to visit the German ambassador there. I stared at the letter. It bore the seal of the embassy! She was not returning to New York, she said, but was leaving at once for Germany via Japan.

I felt as though I had been rolling in mud.

In a week or two all the papers carried a story of the arrest of a group of German spies and saboteurs. The FBI had, apparently, been unable to catch the ringleader, Goebbels' right-hand agent, who had already left the country. Her name was Margaret Gärtner.

I did not resent having been duped. Actually I must have deceived myself, for surely the signs had been there for me to see.

In 1943 I went to stay with Bert Brecht and his wife near Los Angeles. I loved the good hot California sun, and I loved being with my old friends. Their little thirteen-year-old daughter was my constant companion. She liked and "protected" me because, as she said, "You are more childish than I am!"

Still, although I stayed away eight months, I missed New York. And I was worried by letters from Alma. Joost was not well, and he refused to call in a doctor. When I did return, my first glance at Joost told me that he had not long to live. He still refused any sort of medical attention. My sister was frantic. They had lived happily together for forty-seven years.

At last Joost was taken to the hospital. Alma did not leave his side. Soon he could no longer move or speak. Finally, by the growing coldness of his hand in hers, Alma knew that he had died.

Not long after Joost had left us, his son went into the army. Alma sold the big house, and with their daughter, took a small apartment on West Fifty-seventh Street in New York. As I like to have a place quite for myself, I found a room a few blocks west of my sister's apartment, on the same street. It was spotless and sunny, and cost me five dollars a week. I had thought proudly that I knew of everything that New York had to offer the poor. But I kept making wonderful discoveries.

I borrowed an electric toaster and a small electric stove from Alma. With their help I cooked my breakfast and my lunch. At a Horn and Hardart retail store on Tenth Avenue, I bought good salads, and meat and fish dishes left from the day before. Everything tasted good. From a baker near by I bought day-old bread at half price. Fruit and vegetables came from an inexpensive market.

My Danish trunk had been crammed with clothes from the best shops in Copenhagen, Vienna and Paris. Now they began to wear out. I replaced them for about

$5.95 apiece with quite nice dresses from the gigantic self-service store on Union Square called Klein's. Truly, my adored city was generous to its people.

My one great disappointment in New York was its potter's field. This island burial ground is as free as the city prisons, and in the same grim sort of way. Curiosity led me there. One day I simply rang the bell at the morgue of Bellevue Hospital, on the lower East Side, which is run by the city. The head of the morgue obligingly took me around to see everything. Then he asked me to go with him the next time the barge, carrying its cargo of unknown dead, should make the trip up the East River to its island destination.

Some of these unfortunate people have been murdered, some have committed suicide, or have been run over, or have starved or frozen to death; but all of them lack friends or relations able to pay for a private burial. Thirty-six unpainted boxes, side by side in three layers, fill a grave. Inmates of the near-by prison shovel a few clods of damp earth on the boxes, and the business is done.

The only redeeming, joyous thing about the dreary island is the sight of the old fire horses, pensioned off there for the remainder of their lives. They run about at will, enjoying their freedom. Beneath their hoofs the paupers, once as vigorous as they, lie quietly in oblivion.

I decided that if I should die in America, I would request in my will that I be buried with the poor, in potter's field. I hoped that the resulting publicity would bring about some improvement in their treatment. I found, alas, that it would not be allowed. I was poor enough in my own eyes, but I was not a pauper.

The next time I went to the White House, I asked Mrs. Roosevelt to help me change the way New York buries its unfortunates. She replied that there was still so much to be done for the living that she had no strength or time for the dead. And perhaps she is right. But I would feel better if at least a minister were there to commend the paupers souls to God.

31

Unforgettable People

If I were a real lady I should, being now over seventy, probably sit dreaming by the fire. But I gave up in despair trying to be a lady years ago. Or perhaps it gave me up. Also, I am a chatterbox; it is much too late to change that. And who would sit by the fire and talk to a woman whose eyes, having once been squint, then turned around and faced one east, one west, and now gazed only backward, into the past?

No, the days are too short and too full for dreaming. Only rarely, as at this moment, when the doctor has ordered complete rest, with no reading or writing, am I grateful for my scrapbook of a mind. Things – material possessions – mean nothing to me, places but little more. It is people, good and bad, wise and foolish, humble and proud, that walk out of my memory to keep me company.

Here comes Henrik Pontoppidan, the novelist and Nobel Prize winner. His father, a minister in Randers, had filled the sprawling parsonage with a big family. Henrik was

much older than I and we did not meet for years after we had both left Randers. I told him then that as a child I had liked his father very much.

"No," he said, "you did not."

"But I did! He died when I was seven, but I remember him clearly."

Pontoppidan said, "You did not like my father. He was not a likable man."

This stubbornness was characteristic. At a dinner party in his house I admired the very old cream-colored Wedgwood china. "What a coincidence!" I exclaimed. "I have exactly the same Wedgwood at home!"

Pontoppidan smiled. "No, you haven't. You may have something like it, but not the same."

I protested that it was the same. He only answered, "My dear friend, I don't like to contradict you, especially as you are my guest. I will simply say that this set is the only genuine Wedgwood in Denmark. My aunt, who was nearly a hundred, just died and left it to me. I can prove that it is unique."

There was nothing to say, so I remained silent.

We were very good friends. One year Pontoppidan's wife had to spend some months in a hospital, so he came to near-by Svendborg to write a new book. In his loneliness he sought me out for long walks through the lovely forests along the shore of the island.

One morning a telegram asked me to come to dinner at noon. He was standing in his doorway to welcome me. "Forgive me for disrupting your plans for the day." He took both my hands and said in an unsteady voice, "I need a friend. I miss my wife so much. Last night I almost hired a boat and rowed over to you. But what would you have thought if I had intruded myself on you at midnight?"

"Tell me, Henrik, what is it?"

"I was getting ready for bed last night about ten. A knock sounded at the door. It was a messenger. I thought, of course, that my wife was worse. Instead, it was a telegram notifying me I had been awarded the Nobel Prize! I was struck dumb! I wanted to ask the messenger to drink a glass of wine with me. But naturally that wouldn't have done at all. So I thought of you – ! Come let us have dinner now, and a glass of wine."

I was glad for him, but also a little amused. How like the very proper Pontoppidan to think at such a moment of what would or would not do!

It was Saturday, my regular marketing day, and I had brought along a string bag for my purchases. After dinner I persuaded Pontoppidan to walk with me to the market of hundreds of booths piled with flowers, fish, fowl, and vegetables. He steered me to a stand full of flowers and said to the woman, "I want these."

"How many?"

"All of them, of course!"

I did not have the heart to remind him that I could not possibly carry so many flowers to the boat even if I had not had to buy other things. When I accepted them and started toward the food booths, Pontoppidan said, "Where are you going?"

"To buy meat, sausages, cheese and fish."

He stopped me on the spot. "My dear friend – ! You know how I enjoy your company. But surely you do not expect me – a man – to go with you to buy such things!" He made a grimace of disgust. "I cannot do it. Forgive me, dear friend, and good-by." And he left me.

I remember another Danish Nobel Prize winner, Henrik Dam, who discovered Vitamin K. At first meeting, Dam seems only like a learned and rather boring professor. When one knows him, however, one discovers him to be a delightful talker, very progressive, gay, eager to listen to others, and interested in everything between hell and heaven.

The prize, which we Danes regard as a huge fortune, did not mean new comforts for Dam, since his work required expensive equipment. He and his wife continued to live very frugally. When someone asked him if he would not like to receive the Danish Cross of the Commander – "I would not accept it," he said. "The only way to reward a scientist is to give him a completely equipped laboratory."

Henrik Dam needed hundreds of chickens for research. He could not afford to build a warm chicken coop, and during a cold spell many of the chickens died. Whenever I dined at their house after that, Henrik and his wife went into the back yard after dinner and carried all the chickens inside to be near the stove. I knew that in the morning, as on every other day of the long winter, this patient couple would carry them back to the drafty shack that gave them too little cover.

I first met Thomas Mann at a party given by the German minister in Copenhagen in celebration of Mann's having won the Nobel Prize. All evening he was surrounded by admirers. Across the room sat a plain, elderly woman, alone. I went over and spoke with her. It was Mrs. Mann, and she was a great surprise. As we talked I thought smugly how clever I had been to single her out, and how much all the rest of the people in the room were missing. Mrs. Mann's face and manner would pass unnoticed in any crowd. But a few minutes' conversation was enough to show that she possessed a clear, sharp and witty brain, combined engagingly with a modest charm.

Another Nobel Prize winner, Sinclair Lewis, I first met in Vienna, through Dorothy Thompson. He almost frightened me; he towered over me; I understood little of his English and nothing at all of his jokes. But he and Dorothy together were a joy to watch. They completed each other, both of them gay and full of life and talent.

One evening when I went to the house they shared with Edgar Mowrer, Lewis opened the door, picked me up in his arms, kissed me and swung me high into the air until I screamed. I was sure he had gone quite mad. He was wearing a bright silk kerchief around his head, and by sticking out his upper lip kept a toothbrush balanced against his nose, like a mustache. He looked like a red-haired pirate.

And Colette, the wonderful Colette, my favorite among the living French writers. Once she came to Vienna when I was there. Naturally, the Authors' Union gave a banquet in her honor. I was supposed to sit near her, on the dais. But I knew my French was too miserably inadequate. At the last moment I seated myself at the other end of the hall with Felix Salten, the author of *Bambi*.

Yet I still wanted to show Colette how much I loved her writing. It didn't matter that perhaps she did not know my books. I took off my necklace, which was set with precious stones, and hung it about her neck. Then, embarrassed at my own daring, I sat down again with Felix Salten.

"What a beautiful gesture," he said. "I wish I had something a hundred times as valuable to give you as a token of this moment. I haven't, but please accept this as a small memento." Felix pressed into my hand a gold cigarette case studded with diamonds.

Of course I refused. But he insisted. "Please do not make me sad by spurning my gift," he said.

The next morning I received a basket of beautiful flowers from Colette. With it came a note, saying, "If it were not for your books, I could not have written mine."

I knew the words were at least part French gallantry. But they made me very happy.

And now I wonder – what ever happened to that gold cigarette case? I have almost forgotten. I only remember that long ago I gave it away to someone. But to whom? I shall probably never know.

My mind saunters amiably and aimlessly through the fragrant lanes of memory. Now, as on turning a corner of a garden path, the faces of two extraordinary men, both Croatians, come before me. One of them is Stephen Radich. I had met him from time to time in Vienna, and when I went to Zagreb I visited his wife, who ran their little bookshop. The last time I saw either of them was in 1928, when I was on my way to Belgrade to lecture. Mrs. Radich was very sad. She said, "Every time Stephen leaves for Belgrade I am fearful that he will not come back alive. One day he will surely be killed. By now – it is a terrible thing, but I am half reconciled to the thought."

I saw the stocky, broad-shouldered Radich a few days later. He was, as always, fearless and full of fire. He described to me with rage and indignation the treatment of political prisoners under the government of the dictatorial King Alexander. Radich had just had a document printed, at his own expense, that told in detail of prison cases he had seen, and he had put a copy in every seat of the parliament so that no member could plead ignorance.

"Isn't that a very dangerous thing to do?" I asked.

His nearsighted eyes blazed. "I would have been a stinking coward if I had let such a consideration deter me." he said.

That was in July. Late in August Radich died of a pistol shot fired at him in parliament.

Beside the image of the fiery Radich is the image of Mestrovich, the small and slender sculptor of giant heroic figures. I had seen many of his works in European museums. But when he took me around to his studio, I was surprised to see wood carvings, in addition to the marble, bronze and clay figures I had expected. He told me, in his soft, pleasant voice, that he loved to work in wood best of all.

Since Donatello, I have never seen faces carved in wood with such vitality, so much humanity, and such power.

I had been at Albert Einstein's house in Berlin two or three times when I decided to seek him out for some information for one of my Bibi books. Naturally, a person as uneducated as I could have no idea of Einstein's real genius. But I felt very close to him as a human being.

At a dinner party we had sat next to each other and talked as if we were the only two people in the world. Much as I like to do the talking myself, I could have listened to him all night without tiring. He came to one of my lectures, and somehow made me feel that I spoke only to him.

So I went to Einstein for help with a children's book! Unbelievably, he took the time to explain patiently to me, as though to a ten-year-old, the entire theory of relativity. I listened and nodded. He made it sound quite reasonable. When he finished I thanked him. "Why, I understand the whole thing completely!" I said.

He smiled with that expression of eternal youth unique to him. "Yes, indeed. You do understand it, now that I have explained it step for step," he said gently. "What you have not yet found out is that you cannot make the connection between the steps!"

32

On Writing a Book

People often ask an author, "How does one go about being a writer?" For years I thought they were only making polite conversation. I would shrug and smile and say, "That depends …"

Now, after so long, it occurs to me that perhaps they actually want to know. And even if they do not, shouldn't I try to be just as polite, and really answer?

But the truth is, I do not know. For there are as many ways of writing books as there are writers. And a writer's way of expressing himself is as identifiable as his fingerprints. Unless he is imitating someone else, his choice of words, his construction, his repetitions, the music and rhythm of his thoughts, are his very own.

The conceiving of his idea is always sudden and immediate, and as mysterious as the conception of a child. After it has taken place, writers, in spite of their individuality, follow two main methods: the conscious and the unconscious. One writer works like a mason, laying stone upon stone to build his wall. An unconsciously working writer may suddenly behold his work all complete. It has slumbered within him, and only now does he learn that it is there. He neither planned nor thought about it. Still, it has fed on his blood, his dreams, the sap of his life, growing inside him without burdening him, although he may feel the birth pangs.

Or it may come like a dream that one grasps hastily in its flight at the moment of awakening. But the dreamer is still not certain of what his dream consisted. It filled his hands, but when he opened them, they were empty. Or he may have to clasp his prey so tightly that he cannot see the gift he has received until it takes form, slowly and unwillingly, word by word, phrase by phrase.

Although Tao Michaelis and I were both born writers, we were quite oppositely endowed. Tao had the gift of beautiful poetry. The difference between us was like that between the star-studded night and the sunny day.

Our essential unlikeness was that he thought, while as a writer I cannot think. Sometimes in the night a poem rises in my soul like a bubble on the water. I have no idea where it came from. It is there – that is all.

And I must have my tools, my pen, paper, and ink. It doesn't matter whether I sit at a three-cornered, a round or a square table. Noises do not disturb me, unless they be the cries of a child or an animal.

For years I needed a particular kind of pen, the first with which I learned to write as a child; it was called King Christian's pen. It has a very sharp point, but moves easily over the paper. Using it, I always felt a little like a sculptor fashioning a bas-relief in some plastic material. But even more strongly, I felt a current flowing between the three fingers touching the penholder, and the nib of the pen. The ink I used was always the same kind; I took it with me everywhere. The paper was less important, although I preferred firm, rough quarto paper which I could fold into long narrow strips.

If I was, as usual, in the mood for writing, I would take up my pen and dip it into the ink. The same feeling would come over me as when sitting in the theater waiting for the curtain to rise – a solemn sweet excitement. Any minute, I knew, a contact would establish itself between brain, fingers, pen, and ink. It was as if the pen absorbed some creative essence from the uninteresting black fluid in the bottle. The contact was made, the pen touched the paper, the letters became words, the words sentences, the sentences paragraphs …

How I loved those cabalistic signs marching across the paper, so small that the typesetter had to use a magnifying glass. Nansen always asked me to write a bigger hand. Time after time I promised to do so, but I never could.

It took all my strength to write, although I sat very quietly and the movement of the pen was slight. As long as my creative flow lasted, the handwriting remained the same. I did not even have to read through what I had written. But when the handwriting said, "Stop! You're getting into trouble," I obeyed. Its judgment was infallible. Either the letters would grow a trifle larger, or the lines would wander crookedly. Or some of the letters would slant as if they were tired and would like to lie down. I needed only to look at a word or two, and I could see that I was indeed getting into trouble. Suddenly I would realize that I was exhausted.

Later I was persuaded to use a typewriter. I greatly missed the silent, reliable advice of my pen. Now I had to rely on my own judgment. It was much less sound. Sometimes I would have to leave what I had written for days or weeks before I could decide what was good and what was bad. Again and again I returned to the faithful pen. But eventually my eyes rebelled. Besides, where could I find a printer now who would use a magnifying glass to set my manuscript?

The Dangerous Age was never close to my heart as a book, but I have a great fondness for the manuscript. Every time I take its thirty-seven yellowed narrow strips into my hands, I have the tender, indulgent feeling of a mother who fondles the christening dress of her child.

When *The Dangerous Age* was published there was only one other serious competitor for public attention, a novel called *Marie Claire*. It was written by Marguerite Audoux, whom nobody had ever expected to write anything at all.

Marguerite Audoux was an orphan who grew up a servant in a convent without learning to read or write. She went to Paris as a young girl and earned her living by sewing in a factory. Slowly she learned to read a little. Slowly she taught herself to write, one letter at a time.

No one knows how she met Charles Louis Philippe, one of the finest writers of the new twentieth century. Both of them were desperately poor. When Marguerite came home after a day s work in the factory, she made their bare apartment immaculate and

cooked the food. Philippe never became widely known, but his fellow-writers adored him. During the long winter evenings, one by one they would climb the interminable, steep stairs to spend a few hours with him and the silent Marguerite. To reach the apartment door they had to go through a narrow, dingy hall, lined with musty storage bins. But once inside they found a warm welcome and good talk.

Philippe died about 1908. Marguerite stayed on in their attic. In his things she found a number of books that belonged to other people, and returned them. Octave Mirbeau, the author of *Jardin des Supplices*, looked through a volume Marguerite had brought back, and found pencil scribblings in the margin of many pages. It could not have been done accidentally, and his curiosity was aroused.

Once more he climbed the long stairs to the attic and asked Marguerite if she knew who had written in the book. She blushed furiously and then went very pale. "It was I who did it," she said miserably. "I thought I had rubbed out all the writing with an eraser. That book I must have overlooked. Please forgive me. I – I had no paper."

"Of course. It is nothing. But tell me, Marguerite, in what language did you write? I can make nothing of these lines."

She blushed again. "I was never taught to … that is the only way I know to make words." She had simply put down one letter close to the next, letters corresponding to the sounds of words, and without any divisions between. The lines looked like a never-ending snake of letters.

With difficulty Mirbeau persuaded her to read some of it aloud. He was amazed at the originality of her mind and asked if she had tried to write anything from her own heart. She showed him hundreds of scraps of all sorts of paper covered with those painfully traced symbols.

Mirbeau arranged that Marguerite, who was the only person in the world who could decipher what she had written, should read it aloud to his secretary. The secretary transcribed it into normal French. When they had finished, there was the book, *Marie Claire*. It was a classic, an unforgettable story of a sweet and naïve woman's soul.

The literary world waited eagerly for her next books. She produced a dozen or so, very well written, but quite average novels.

Some years later I visited her. I found an old woman, forgotten and abandoned, wearing the shabby garb of a factory worker. She died destitute, in the attic room where once she had been happy with Charles Philippe.

Every human being, if he presents himself with absolute truth, can write one first-class book out of his own life. One of the writers I knew well in Vienna was Leonard Frank, the author of *Der Mensch ist gut* (Man is Good). This handsome man was one of several natural children of an officer and a servant girl. The couple were devoted to each other, but for some reason never married. As he became famous and successful, Leonard Frank tried to make a home for his mother. But she insisted on remaining a cook.

One day, as they sat in her bare and ugly servant's room, his mother said, "Son, how do you write a book?"

He looked at her questioningly. She went on. "I mean, do you write with pencil, or pen and ink?"

"Why, whichever is at hand."

"On what sort of paper? Lined paper, or plain?"

He was amused. "Well, Mother, with whatever I have."

"Oh – well, now you have paper and pencil. What do you do then? I mean, how do you know what to write?"

He laughed. "Why, Mother, I write what I have thought, or heard, or seen, or experienced."

She was satisfied. "Thank you. Now I know."

A few months later she questioned him again. "Tell me, Son, when you have written many pages and you think it is enough for a book, what do you do then? Do you go to a printer and ask him to print it?"

"No, I take my manuscript to a publisher," her son said, trying not to show his amusement. "If he accepts it, he takes care of the printing."

His mother looked puzzled. "Publisher? What an odd word! How do you spell it? And where do you find one?"

Her son showed her where to find the listing in the telephone directory. Two months later he found his mother bursting with a happy secret. She took out her savings book. "Look, Son – one thousand marks! And it's all mine! Don't look so astonished, I haven't robbed anyone – I was paid all that money for my book. I took my pages, just as you told me, and went to a publisher. He is going to bring out my book in the spring!"

This, too, was a good book, because it told her story in words and thoughts as simple and unpretentious as she was herself. She never wrote another.

One writer is a playwright, another a poet, a third a novelist. Some, like Henrik Ibsen, are poet and playwright; or, like Victor Hugo, poet and novelist; a few, like Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, are all three. No one agrees as to which form is the most difficult. To me it would be hardest to write a play, for there one has to plan the structure and almost every line at the beginning, while – at least sometimes – novels write themselves. But on reading one of my books, Bjørnson wrote me that to him writing a play was nothing compared to the painting of life, with all its details, in a novel.

Some writers carry within themselves each sentence they have written. Arno Holz, who wrote the great German classic, *Phantasus*, was not known to the general public and remained very poor all his life. I went several times to see him in his drafty loft room in North Berlin, the poorest part of the city. His bed had two rags for blankets, there were no sheets or pillowcases. But badly as he needed money, he would not let anything be published that was not as perfect as he could make it.

When *Phantasus* was at last ready for the printer, Holz found that twenty pages of the poem had disappeared. Publication had to be put off. Some years later he wrote again the missing verses, sadly knowing that they were inferior to the originals. After the book was published Holz found the missing pages stuck in an old map. The original and the second version were identical, word for word.

I am quite the opposite. If, by chance, I take one of my fifty books down from the shelf and look into it, more than likely I will have forgotten not only the details, but the entire plot of the book. Once I wrote, for my own amusement, a detective story called *Rachel*, which was translated all over Europe. While Tao and I were in Greece I received a letter from a French reader, saying that the last page had accidentally been torn out of his copy and that all the bookstores had sold out their stock. He begged me to tell him who had committed the murder.

I sat down to write him. But what to say? I called out to Tao, "Who was it that committed the murder in *Rachel?*"

He, too, had forgotten. I wrote to the man in France that I would let him know as soon as I got back to Denmark.

At home again, I took out the book, thinking that it would come back to me with the first few sentences. But I could not remember having written one word of it! I read it through with as much interest and surprise as though I were seeing it for the first time.

One of my books came to me in a curious way. One day I was walking in the pouring rain along the streets of Copenhagen with Herdis Bergstrøm. A bus stopped near us. Herdis got on at the rear, as one does in all Danish buses. Just at that moment my eye caught sight of something shining white in a puddle – a pearl, real or imitation. In the instant that I stood there staring at it, a whole story was born in my mind.

I pulled Herdis off the bus again, to her amazement, and insisted on going home. Feverishly I jotted down what had been revealed to my consciousness, and absorbed by my blood and my nerves in a single moment. I was terrified that it would elude me, grow pale and disappear.

The String of Pearls, as I called the book, is not my best nor perhaps even one of my best, but it is definitely the one that is read with the greatest excitement.

Another book grew more slowly but no less mysteriously in my brain. In Vienna I heard the tragic story of Ricarda Huch, Germany's greatest woman author. As a young girl she had gone to visit her older sister. She fell in love with her brother-in-law, and he with her. The two ran away to Paris, but were overcome by remorse. The man returned to his wife and children. The girl, bitterly unhappy, later married someone else. After some time she got a divorce, began to write books and became famous.

Her sister's children grew up and went to study at the University of Munich. Their aunt, whose name they had never been allowed to mention, lived in Munich, and they went to see her. They soon realized what had happened. They knew that their parents were not happy together, and they now insisted that their father and mother get a divorce so that the two lovers, who still mourned their lost happiness, could spend the rest of their lives together.

They were married.

The story closed two months later with the man and the woman in separate hotel rooms on opposite sides of a mountain. They had found that every vestige of love between them had vanished long before without their knowing it. They had cherished only the memory of love.

I decided to make a book of the story. Since it was close to my heart, I would write it in the first person, either as a diary or in the form of letters. I chose the latter method.

But letters to whom? In whom would the heroine feel enough confidence to reveal herself completely? To a sister … But sisters differ greatly. One cannot always say to one sister what one would freely confide in another. I would need several sisters.

Suddenly, as in a vision, I saw several young girls in white summer dresses seated in a garden. That gave me the title, so alliterative that it sounded like the beginning of a folk song: *Seven Sisters Were Sitting …*

Seven! That was a lot. Whom should I take for models? My school friends? Acquaintances made on shipboard? After a voyage I always returned to harbor like a barge laden with material. I could not, however, think of anyone to take as my models.

Then I sat at my work table, dipped my pen in the ink, and waited patiently. Soon the sisters appeared from all directions, seven sisters who told each other in their letters all their joys and sorrows. And now the strangest thing happened to my handwriting. As I sat almost passively at my table their letters piled up before me – in seven different handwritings. Only one of them, the main figure, expressed herself in my own handwriting. One wrote as clumsily as a child; another with sharp needle-like strokes; a third betrayed herself to be superficial, elegant, thoughtless. One wrote like a man, with a firm, logical and aggressive hand. Another showed that she had found her happiness among the proletariat.

Much to my surprise, *Seven Sisters Were Sitting* achieved a great success in all European countries, although in France the publishers gave it the rather dull title of *Femmes*. American publishers did not like its being written in letter form.

Not long after the book's publication, I received a letter and a package from Romain Rolland. I had never met him or corresponded with him. The parcel contained some of his books. The note thanked me for the pleasure he had had in reading *Femmes*. He added, "After reading your book, I wonder that I ever dared write about a woman."

Those seven sisters, who became persons of living flesh and blood, were born in the dark workshop of the unconscious.

33

Twilight

Thousands of times I have heard it said that it is one's duty to improve one's character and develop into a better human being. It sounds very nice, but I have never had time to do it. Every hour has been brimming with work, or music, or love. Recently, during a sleepless hour, I found myself trying to assess my more prominent faults and virtues. Did they balance each other? And what sort of person am I, after all? Surely by now – at my age – I should know.

I find that there is hardly a fault that I do not possess in the worst degree. I also find that every virtue seems to have settled down in my character.

For years I was told that I would not tell the truth as long as I could dig up a lie. I tried hard to follow the narrow and devious path of truth. Always, I suddenly saw, I had stepped to the right or the left side of the absolute truth, and in no time I had got so far away that I could not grope my way back. I remember as a child asking the Almighty in my prayers to "speak a word to the Truth, since I honestly love it, but it does not seem to love me."

Ever since I have been grown up, people go to the other extreme. They complain that I am too truthful. Well, it is not out of morality, but simply because my memory is capricious. It is easier and more practical to stick to the truth than to try to remember all the lies one has invented.

I did try as a child to be honest, although I knew I was a horrible thief. I had to steal to see whether God was clever enough to know what I was doing while He was busy taking care of China or Egypt.

As I grew older I stopped stealing. It was too dangerous. Instead, I amused myself by gazing into a jeweler's window and wishing that a runaway horse would smash the glass. Then I could fill my pockets with pearls and diamonds before the policeman came.

Mother said I was diligent. That was confusing, because she also said I was lazy.

I was certainly patient. If she set me a task I would do it, hour after hour, the longer the better. An old man in the town of Randers lived in the poorhouse. He had to pull up the grass from between the cobblestones. He was feeble and complained that the work made his back hurt. I offered to help him, and began at the other end of town so that we would work toward each other. I got up early every morning and pretended to my mother that I was going across the meadow to row our boat. I had to stop when Mother found both knees gone in three pairs of stockings.

Yet I am also impatient. I never could practice difficult passages on the piano. I simply skipped them and went on to the easier bits. Now, if I comb my hair and it misbehaves, I can cry and stamp my foot on the floor.

Every once in a while I am afraid of becoming like the miser in the story who starved to death sitting among sacks of silver and gold. At these times I give away everything I have. Yet I also have saving spells when I feel almost willing to sell my soul to the devil for hard cash. I would do any work for my mother for something less than a nickel. I sat with pencil and paper and figured out that if every day I earned a nickel and put it into the bank to draw interest, it would take me so and so many years to earn half a million. It is the same today. I will walk two miles to save bus fare. The next day I will buy a hat that I do not need and that does not become me. The chances are, if I ever wear the hat, my sister will tell me I have jammed it on back-to-front.

But out of my miser-spendthrift attitude toward money, I have evolved an excellent system by which a husband and wife may avoid friction over their bills. For it seems to me that money is one of the most frequent stumbling blocks to a happy marriage. I am not speaking about couples of whom each has so much that it doesn't matter, or those who have so little that they cannot possibly stretch it over necessary expenses, but of ordinary folk who have enough but are always caught up in quarrels about it.

First the husband and wife must pool all income. No matter who earns most or all of it – they put it into the common fund. Then come joint expenses, housekeeping money, maid's wages, rent, taxes, the children's clothes, doctor's and dentist's bills, emergencies, club dues, and so on. What is left, and if the budget is sound something must be left, belongs in equal shares to the husband and wife.

Now comes the important part. Neither partner must have anything to say about the way the other spends his share. The man of the family may fancy expensive cigars, he may like to play poker, or he may collect stamps. The woman may support her mother without even telling her husband, or buy costume jewelry; or she may be a little miser and hoard her money.

If they both feel absolutely free to spend as much of their share as they like for whatever they like, they will have twice as much pleasure out of it. And, at the first of the month when the bills come in, there will be no quarrels.

This plan, which is really so simple once one has thought of it, has been tried by many people who heard me suggest it in lectures. Touching, grateful letters have told me how well it worked. Another plan of mine, nearly as obviously right, has never been tried. The one great chance vouchsafed me to launch it was ruined by my own clumsy stupidity.

It came to me through the years, as I watched women whose husbands' love had turned elsewhere being humiliated by having to accept alimony or a settlement in exchange for a divorce. I knew of cases where the marriage failed through no fault of either person, and yet because she was not properly protected, the woman was dependent on help, sometimes even grudgingly given.

The plan is this: every woman should be insured at birth by her parents. If she dies in childhood, the premiums are forfeited. If she lives, the father continues the payments until she has finished her education and begun to earn her own living. Then the girl takes over.

If her marriage is not a success, the husband is not liable for his wife's support, nor does she need to ask him for help. If the marriage is a success, the insurance is turned into a life policy or annuity, payable at a stated age. The woman and her husband pay the premiums out of their common funds. If the husband should die, the widow receives either a lump sum or payments over the years.

So many economists to whom I had broached the idea were enthusiastic about it that I became increasingly anxious to see it enacted on a national scale. Then, some years before Hitler came into power when I was still friendly to Germany, I went to a PEN congress in Berlin. At a banquet in our honor in the city hall I was seated at the end of the table. I knew therefore that my neighbor would be someone of prominence. It was a man I did not know. I took up his place card: Hjalmar Schacht. Dimly I remembered some friend having said that this same Hjalmar Schacht was the very man to put through my scheme. But who was he?

I fingered the card, but no enlightenment seeped through the pasteboard surface to my brain. "Tell me," I said at last, "who are you?"

He looked astonished. "I – why, I am Hjalmar Schacht," he said, as if that explained everything.

'Yes, I see that, and I have been wanting to meet you. But for the life of me I cannot remember just who it is that you are. What do you do?"

The man's face was distorted with anger and contempt. "I am president of the Reichsbank!" he snapped. Nor did he sacrifice another word on me for the rest of the evening.

Thus, perhaps by a narrow margin, Germany escaped being the first country in the world to have insurance for women. But then – there was Hitler. What wonderful bait my plan would have been for the Nazis. As my grandmother, Ulrikke Elisabeth, used to say, "Nothing is so bad that it is not good for something."

I am not religious, at least not in the conventional sense. Yet I hold certain beliefs. One of these is that some human beings can see beyond the limits of ordinary knowledge. There was my mother's servant girl, who knew I had not been killed in the railroad wreck, who "saw" me in my blood-spattered dress, safe and uninjured. Then there was Joseph Delmont, who knew how he was going to die.

When I first met Joseph Delmont in Genia's home, he had just had a great success with some of his fantastic romance and adventure tales. He told me then, "My fate is to commit suicide. I know it. You'll see."

We were often together and I heard much about his venturesome life. One of fourteen children, Delmont had run away at the age of twelve and soon joined the Hagenbeck expeditions. He trapped and brought in countless specimens. But once he came upon a tiger which had gnawed off its trapped foot and still could not get away. The expression in the animal's eyes shocked him so much that he left the expedition.

Delmont began a new career, as a writer. He still loved animals, however, and kept a baby tiger in his Berlin apartment. Even when it grew up, the tiger was as tame as a dog. Delmont never took it out except at the end of a heavy chain. But the people on the streets were frightened and the police forced him to put his gentle tiger in the Dortmund zoo. Delmont unhappily went on a two-year voyage around the world.

On his return he went straight to Dortmund and insisted on seeing his dear friend. Without thinking, he whistled the same tune he had always whistled on arriving at his Berlin apartment. Instantly there was a terrifying roar and the thud of a heavy body against iron cage bars. The tiger had recognized the tune. Delmont thrust his hand between the bars and the tiger, growling with pleasure, gently enveloped the hand in his rough, curling tongue. Delmont got permission to go into the cage at his own risk. Inside, he and the tiger rolled around on the ground and played like two puppies.

When finally Delmont had to go, the tiger gazed after him with a look of despair and cried aloud with such anguish that his master could not bear it. He took to his heels and ran through the zoo park like a man pursued. "If I had had a gun with me then," he told me afterward, "I would have ended it for us both. As it is, I am haunted by those heartbroken cries. The day will come when I can no longer stand hearing them ring in my ears."

Two years later Joseph Delmont shot himself.

Cruelty? No, that is perhaps the one fault I do not possess. I think that never in my life have I knowingly done anything to hurt another person. And flowers, insects and animals are as sacred to me as human beings.

Nor am I vindictive. For those few times in my life when others have hurt me, I bear no grudge.

I have always suffered from a morbid reluctance to ask favors of my friends. I say "morbid" because I felt that to make demands could be to lose my friends. At the same time I knew that any one of them would give me the coat off his back.

I have often been teased for believing everything that anyone told me. As long as I have not caught a person being untruthful, I have a blind faith in his words. Yet not even my beloved Aunt Sophy could make me believe anything that did not fit in with my own way of thinking. Holy stories were just as real to me as our lovely fairy tales, and no more so. At the same time, I went around trying to sprinkle salt on the tails of sparrows because Father had told me that was the way to catch them.

So I believed in everything and in nothing.

I was born the most disorderly person imaginable. Sophus Michaelis, who had an admirable sense of order, never scolded me for my untidiness in all the years we were

married. Slowly I succeeded in adapting my habits to his. Now I am neat enough to deceive people who do not know me. But my weakness breaks out every once in a while. My dear sister Alma arranges the rooms to perfection. Then I stir everything up just to find my purse. And, once found, I cannot find anything in it. A welter of superfluous objects hides money, address book, keys, pencil, from me. For weeks I promise myself to clear the whole business out. Finally, in a hysterical fit of neatness, I do it – and begin accumulating all over again.

If ever there was a coward, it is I. I am afraid of anything that can hurt. As a child I never dared ride in a sleigh with the other children for fear it would overturn. I was afraid of being hit by snowballs; partly because it would never have occurred to me to defend myself by throwing a snowball back. I never went skating after once falling on the ice. On the other hand, I always swam like a minnow. Perhaps it was because of my curiosity. I had to get beneath the water, way down to the bottom, and see how it looked there.

Although I am a coward, I am not even wholly that. I was never afraid of darkness. Rather, I was on very good terms with it, for while it was dark I could imagine myself in any faraway land I fancied. Once, in Vienna, when the dentist had to saw off some teeth and treat me for an infection, I sat in his chair for five hours a day for a month without even groaning. The dentist could not believe his luck. My system was to follow the second hand of my watch with my eyes and promise myself, "When it really gets too bad, then I shall faint." Somehow it never got quite to that point.

But that is physical courage. What about moral courage? Yes, on thinking back, I believe I have a lot. Knowing that Hitler had listed me "a dangerous woman," I lectured on platforms surrounded by watchful Gestapo men. I drove through Germany in a car, stopping for a day or so where I wished and freely showing my passport to the police. I was frightened, but I did it – through Germany to Vienna, and back again.

As I went, I offered sanctuary in my Danish home to any liberal writers who could flee the country. Later many of them came, and others whom I did not know, but who had heard there was always room and enough to eat on Thurø. Many had been imprisoned and tortured, then released as a lesson to other writers. Often I could hear them screaming in their sleep.

So far with my moral courage, so good. But here is a threadbare spot, and there …

I had, besides my refugees, guests from several countries. One man among these last I came to suspect strongly of being a spy. I was frightened for my refugees, and concerned as well for the dozens of German Jews, living in hiding under assumed names, with whom I corresponded. What could I do? Even if I had dared to denounce the man, there was no evidence that he had actually done anything as yet. And I did not dare.

One morning I was in the garden trying to think of a way out when my nose began to bleed violently. After two days of hemorrhage the doctor ordered me to the hospital for an operation. In the last moment before I went under the anesthetic I thought gratefully that now I could get rid of the spy.

I sent word to all my guests that unfortunately they must leave. All of them, except the man, were also told that they were to return the same evening. It worked. I never saw him again.

But had I learned that the man had harmed one of the people under my protection, could I have denounced him? I honestly do not think I could. Thank Heaven I was not put to the test.

I have been told all my life that I am too impulsive. This fault remains my faithful companion. But I have never needed to regret anything done on the spur of the moment. So perhaps it is not such a very great fault, after all.

Herman Bang, the Danish writer whose work and friendship I valued so highly, was a homosexual. Naturally the subject was never mentioned to him. One night Peter and Betty Nansen came to my house very much upset by an article by a prominent writer which, although it did not use his name, referred scathingly to Herman Bang's "sickness." Bang was in despair. He had locked himself in, refused to see anyone, and was trying to drink himself into a stupor. Nansen and his wife were afraid he would commit suicide. We all felt helpless.

After they left, I could not sleep. Finally, near dawn, I got up and wrote to Bang, pouring out all my love and admiration. Did I dare speak openly about himself? I decided that I must.

His answer came two days later. "Dear Little Troll, you have been a true friend," he wrote. "I was about to make an end to myself. When your letter came I was able to weep for the first time. I really believe that that saved my life. I am so grateful that I will confide to you what I have never told anyone else. I will tell you my story and why I became what I am … Thank you."

I did not expect him to keep his promise, and, of course, he never did. But I was glad I had acted on impulse.

Thoughtless, impulsive indiscretions of mine have often caused eyebrows to go up in the air like umbrellas in a sudden rain.

Sometimes, alas, suspicion has been unjustified.

Once I was "chaperoned" on a trip by a man, a young and very handsome man. It was during the first World War. I was asked by the Austrian government to go with some other writers through the occupied countries. But I was to be the only woman in the group. I accepted promptly. But the foreign minister was more considerate of my feelings than I was myself. He delegated the well-mannered secretary of embassy, Paul von Hevecy, to go along solely to make my journey comfortable.

The other correspondents had places in various sections of the train. For some reason Hevecy and I had a compartment to ourselves as well as an attendant to cook and serve our food. The unconventional arrangements did not bother me, nor did I think of protesting.

We had great fun. We talked and talked. It was something like a leisurely honeymoon, except that we were not honeymooners. Hevecy was much younger than I.

When evening fell and our servant came in loaded down with bedclothes for the twin beds, I was embarrassed. He finished and left. Hevecy turned and stared out of the window, telling one story after another while I undressed and slipped under the covers. Then I turned my head to the wall to give him some privacy. All during the night, at half-hour intervals, a man with a lantern entered the compartment and shone the light this way and that. As soon as, presumably, he was satisfied that both beds were properly occupied, he went out again.

In the morning I awoke to the fresh smell of cologne-soaked cotton on my forehead. "This is the way I always clean my face on a train," Hevecy said. "Now you hurry up while I go find out how soon coffee will be ready."

All that day as the train crawled along we talked, exchanging secrets like two girls. He told me of a beautiful mistress he had had in Constantinople who was married to a jealous Turk. When the husband had to go away, he used to leave a eunuch on guard before her door. But Hevecy lived right on the banks of the Bosphorus, as she did. He stepped out of his window into the river, swam to his beloved, and was admitted straight from the water into her room through the casement.

That night the train stopped in a snowy mountain gorge. We got out and walked for hours. It was a matchless night, so lovely that it needed only one thing to make it quite perfect – that I could have been, not with a good friend, but with an ardent lover.

Many years later I met Hevecy again and we relived every moment of those two days. I spoke frankly of my longing for a loved one on that incredibly beautiful night. His answer amazed me.

"I, too, felt that longing. But I knew that we were not suited to each other."

I looked at him. How could he have misunderstood me so completely? "What do you mean?"

"Didn't you notice? It was the same then as it is now. We've been walking together for more than half an hour. And not once have we been in step."

Was this one of the eternal truths? If so, why had I not known it long ago? It might have saved me a lot of trouble.

My double-mindedness affects my work. For a writer, a good memory is most important. My memory is fantastically good – in some ways. The recollection of a smell – not an odor re-encountered, but only its shade – can in a second take me back to any hour in the last seventy years. Unfortunately I, for whom the sense of smell was so highly developed and highly cherished, lost it some years ago as the result of an operation. Yet I still feel the same need of fine perfumes, and the same love of memories to which odors used to lead me.

On the other hand, I am apt to forget my own name. If not literally my own, then the names of dear friends whom I have known for years. My eyes remember little. I forget places and landscapes as though I had never seen them. I have no idea of direction. I can visit a friend many times, and when I leave be unable to find the front door. After a party I can remember neither the names of the other guests or what the women wore. I saw a woman once in a lovely dress. I told her how becoming it was. The next year I saw her again, and again mentioned how beautiful she looked. She laughed, and told me that it was the same dress, and I had used the same words about it. I had no remembrance of having seen either her or the dress before.

I remember things from long ago, and forget things as recent as yesterday. Perhaps this is a sign of senility. But then I have always done so. So I think it is rather duality – memory and forgetfulness.

Of course, I am ambitious. Who is not? But after publishing four or five books and being torn to pieces and praised to the heavens by the critics, the whole business of reviews came to mean very little. I have never tried to influence a critic in my favor. I

know that I was born to write, and to say so is no sign of modesty. Still, I have never felt my writing was finer than anybody else's. Hundreds of times I have thought, and said, "This is written far better than I could have done it."

I am glad that now the awful war is done, *School of Joy*, which deals with Genia's wonderful school in Vienna, is to be brought out again in France, and *Seven Sisters Are Sitting* is being reprinted in several countries. The Bibi books, too, classics in every European country but especially, for some reason, in Italy, will again reach the young-in-heart wherever they have been loved before. I am glad that my name is still very much alive.

Despite the urgings of ambition, I have for thirty years advocated that all art should be anonymous, that no book, no painting, no sculpture, be signed. In this way, a work of art would go out into the world to be judged for itself, not by what has been said about previous work from the same hand. The artist, having proven himself, should be supported by the state. Then he could work in peace.

Whatever people say about me as a person or as an artist is *Pippe Wurst und egal*, as the Austrians say when they mean, "I don't give a damn!" That is one side of my vanity. The other betrays itself in an excessive desire to please. If I go to a party and one person there does not like me, it makes me sick. The person can equally well be a king or a street sweeper.

I used to spend a month or two every year in a great mansion at Odense, in Denmark. The first lady's maid there, an elderly and surly woman, seemed to hate everybody, even herself. Vainly I tried to make friends with her. One day I won. I bought a length of beautiful, bright-colored material and gave it to her. I told her I knew how wonderful she would look in a dress made of it. From that moment on, I had one friend more. And it seemed one of the greatest triumphs of my life.

My curiosity is enormous. I would like to know everything about everybody. Yet I have never opened a drawer or a cupboard to look over things that did not belong to me. Only once did I see something not intended for my eyes.

I was looking for a stamp. Tao was out, but the key of his desk was, of course, in its lock. There was the stamp drawer, the middle one. I opened it. There was a poem, dated the day before. Surely it had been written to me, I thought with a sweet hope. Without doubt Tao had never written a more beautiful poem. But there near the end, plain to be seen, was the name of the young theater director's wife.

I laid it back in the drawer and went away. I did not mention the poem to Tao.

I have the great gift of equanimity. Nothing can depress me for long. This may also be a character defect. But I can keep my balance better than people with more profound natures – so I am content.

I am and have always been highly sensuous. When I see a certain kind of dark red rose, I instantly recognize in my memory its deep fragrance. I feel it not only in my nose, but as though it were touching my skin. At times I have felt that the odor came to me through my ears, sometimes through the tips of my fingers.

My ears, so sensitive to music, are deaf to what people call noise. I lived for three weeks in Brugge, in Belgium, in a hotel next to a railway station. I did not hear a single one of the snorting, clanging trains constantly passing my window.

My tactile sense hardly exists. I can spill boiling water over my hand and feel only a slight pain. The hand will become red, but will not blister.

Certainly, in addition to being sensuous, I am very sensual. Sexuality never led me astray. But I have been in love ever since I can remember.

How early does a child begin to love? I believe that most little girls (I know almost nothing about little boys) begin quite early and feel quite as strongly as grownups. I was not too particular. If a man had a wooden leg, or a hunched back, or a broken nose, that was reason enough. Those were sacrificial loves. Then there were boys in school and undoubtedly a few teachers, a minister, at least one policeman, and a picture or two from the books in my father's library. These loves were very happy, since they arrived and departed without leaving the slightest scar on my young heart.

I have never been without love for at least one person, but most often it has been for three at the same time – one a great love, one dwindling, and one growing.

I have, too, been greatly loved. Few women have known the burning devotion I aroused in Charlie. And Tao …

When Tao died, in 1932, his widow sent for me. She presented me with the most lovely and valuable of his Chinese wall paintings. "He would want me to give you something of beauty in his memory," she said. "I have always known that his heart really belonged to you."

I am still often in love, and will be to my last hour. Naturally, I am clever enough to conceal the fact in a world that tries to believe that a woman loses the capacity to love with her first gray hair.

Also, since I have always been well aware of my own lack of good looks, I have been grateful each time a man has shown interest in me. No man, even if he looked worse than the devil himself, has ever offered to kiss me in vain. Each kiss I have taken as a gift. Kisses are like nature's wild flowers; they grow along every roadside, every ditch; they cost nothing, and everyone should be able to pick them to his heart's content.

Just as we came to this point in setting down this fraction of all the memories gathered during a long and multicolored life, I was forced to take to my bed and forbidden every activity, even the pleasure of seeing my friends. Lenore, my collaborator, says that I am still the Little Troll of the old days, and that the heart that has embraced so much love will not loose its hold on life just yet. But she loves me, and she could be wrong …

And so I will try to put down what may be my last words.

Even though I am not religious, I believe in life after death. I have always had a vague, sweet feeling that somewhere in infinite space my beloved grandmother, Ulrikke Elisabeth, and Great-aunt Sophy still hover about within calling distance, in case I should need help.

And although I myself closed my mother's eyes and took her back to Randers and had her laid beside her Little Jack, to me she still sits under our big gnarled apple tree. Her work-worn hands, still so silken-smooth, rest in her lap. Her face wears her habitual radiantly smiling expression. Her day is over. But she cannot bear to leave this earth while any of her children remain here and may come to sorrow or danger.

These may be dreams. But one thing I know. I know how the last hour will come to me. After a life so unbelievably full, rich, and happy, death can only be wonderful. I will

find myself once more running up the broad stairs in Nansens old publishing house, crossing the long outer office, and stopping before the tall white door. With thumping heart I will raise my hand to knock.

The door opens, and with it a new world. Nansen closes his arms around me and covers my face with kisses. “So it was that!” he says softly into my ear. “You dear, dear little fool! Why didn’t you tell me long ago – ?”

Then, magically, we will be standing as we stood so often, not in his office, but in the wide window niche at his home. It is a starlit night of spring. We look down into the velvet darkness of violets and lilies of the valley around the ancient castle in the park below. We breathe the odor of a thousand growing things.

Suddenly Nansen unlaces his fingers from mine. His voice is hardly audible. “Karin, often you have let me feel your sadness at not meaning anything real in my life. As often I have tried to speak of this. But how could I convince you?

“Now listen carefully. For what I am going to say can be said only once. Karin, with you I share the best, the very best of myself. What you do not share has no value, either to you or to anybody else.”

Nansen never repeated these words, although I longed to hear them. But at that great moment, when I am about to learn the meaning of tomorrow, I will stand again within his embrace. And I will hear those words again. They will not be breathed faintly against my cheek. They will be strong and solemn.

And while I drink in his mysterious, elusive odor, and the sight of his pale face, the smile on my lips will become one with his. And so, together, we will sink into the blessed darkness of eternity.

The green little graveyard on Thurø will receive me. Like the island itself, it rises beautifully from the sea. In soft terraces it surrounds a venerable church. The new grave will have no angel, no marble cross to mark it. There will be only a small smooth stone, without name or date.

Every day at sunset, when the islanders visit their graves, which they keep as immaculate as their homes, they will stop a moment and smile. “She must have been half crazy,” they will say. “Did you ever see such a thing? No name. How will she be called on Judgment Day?”

Another will say, “Such a fool with her money, lending to anyone, anyone at all – and with no security! What would have happened to her if she had lived longer?”

Perhaps one of them will say, “Of course, she really was a little queer in the head. But there was a lot of good in her.”

Then the church bells will ring down the sun, and the islanders will go home to their suppers. But before the graveyard is deserted again, one among them may leave a pretty weed, or a flower taken from someone who had too many, on my grave to keep me company.

NOTE til s. 123:

Karin Michaëlis påstår, at hun forhindrede, at d'Annunzio fik Nobelprisen. Hun skriver, at en langt ringere forfattere fik prisen i stedet.
Den italienske forfatter, som fik Nobelprisen (i 1926), hed Grazia Deladda (ikke Della Grazia, som KM fejlagtigt skrev) og hun havde været nomineret (= foreslået) 17 gange inden da.
Ingen har nogensinde fået litteraturnobelprisen uden at have været nomineret gennem flere år. D'Annunzio har aldrig været nomineret.
Eftersom Nobel i sit testamente havde skrevet, at modtagernes værker skulle have en idealistisk tendens, og d'Annunzio var kendt som en dekadent forfatter, hvis levnedsløb var præget af skandaler, ville det også være højst besynderligt, hvis nogen skulle finde på at nominere ham. På Nobelprisens hjemmeside nobelprize.org kan man under punktet Nominations se, hvilke forfattere der er blevet nominerede, og hvem der har nomineret dem, dog først 50 år efter, at det er sket.

Kirsten Klitgård 2023