

REIGEN (Hands Around)

Arthur Schnitzler

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SCENE ONE. THE TART AND THE SOLDIER

[Late evening. A bridge over the Danube. THE SOLDIER enters whistling, on his way back to the barracks.]

TART: Come on, dearie. [THE SOLDIER turns around but proceeds on his way.] Come on, won't you?

SOLDIER: Oh, so I'm dearie?

TART: Sure, who else? Come on with me, why don't you? I live right near.

SOLDIER: Got no time. Got to get back to the barracks.

TART: Oh you'll get back to the barracks alright. My place is lots nicer.

SOLDIER: [Close to her.] Maybe so.

TART: Pst. A policeman might come any moment.

SOLDIER: You're crazy! Policeman! I've got my bayonet, haven't I?

TART: Aw, come on, won't you?

SOLDIER: Leave me alone. I got no money.

TART: I don't need your money.

SOLDIER: [Standing still, they are under a street lamp.] You don't need money? Who do you think you are, anyway?

TART: Oh I get money from the civilians. But a fellow like you can get it free, any time.

SOLDIER: I guess you're the one my pal Huber told me about—

TART: Don't know any Huber.

SOLDIER: You're the one, alright. He picked you up in that Café down by the river and went home with you.

TART: Lord, I've gone home with plenty from that Café, dearie !

SOLDIER: Well, come on, let's go.

TART: What's your hurry now?

SOLDIER: Well, what's the use of waitin'? I got to be in the barracks by ten.

TART: Been in the service long?

SOLDIER: What's that got to do with you? How far do you live?

TART: Ten minutes walk.

SOLDIER: That's too far for me. Gimme a kiss.

TART: [Kissing him.] Suits me fine when I like a fellow!

SOLDIER: Well, it don't suit me. No, I'm not goin' with you, it's too damn far.

TART: I know what, come tomorrow afternoon, huh?

SOLDIER: Good idea. Gimme your address.

TART: But you won't turn up, I know your kind.

SOLDIER: Listen, you can count on me!

TART: See here—if it's too far for you to come home tonight, how about down there— [Points toward the Danube.]

SOLDIER: What's down there?

TART: It's nice and quiet there . . . no one'll come around.

SOLDIER: Oh, that's not the real thing.

TART: It's always the real thing with me, sweetie. Aw, come on, stay with me. Tomorrow maybe we're dead!

SOLDIER: Alright then, but make it fast.

TART: Look out, though, it's pitch black down there. If you slip you'll land in the Danube.

SOLDIER: Might be the best thing.

TART: Pst, go easy now. We're almost at the bench.

SOLDIER: You know your way around alright.

TART: I'd like a fellow like you for a sweetheart.

SOLDIER: I'd keep you too damn busy!

TART: I'd put a stop to that soon enough.

SOLDIER: That's a good one! Ha!

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TART: Quiet, will you? Once in a while a watchman does stumble into this place. God, would you believe we was right in the middle of the city?

SOLDIER: Come on, here--

TART: You're crazy, if we slip we'll roll right down in the water.

SOLDIER: [Seizing her.] Oh, you--

TART: Hold on tight.

SOLDIER: Don't worry . . .

* * *

TART: We should've gone to the bench.

SOLDIER: Aw, who cares? . . . Well, get a move on, will you?

TART: What's your hurry?

SOLDIER: I got to get back to the barracks, I'm late already .

TART: What's your name, anyway?

SOLDIER: What's my name got to do with you?

TART: My name's Leocadia.

SOLDIER: Ha! That's the first time I've banged a name like that.

TART: Say--

SOLDIER: What do you want now?

TART: You might slip me a bit for carfare, at least!

SOLDIER: Ha! . . . Take me for a sucker? . . . So long, Leocadia! . . .

TART: Bum! Piker! [He has disappeared.]

SCENE TWO. THE SOLDIER AND THE CHAMBERMAID

[The Prater. Sunday Night. A path leading from the Amusement Park to the dark lanes. One can still hear the confused and jangling music from the Amusement Park, and the trombone strains of an ordinary Polka.]

CHAMBERMAID: Come on, now, tell me why you had to leave so soon, anyway. [SOLDIER laughs stupidly, in embarrassment.] It was so lovely there. I'm crazy about dancing. [SOLDIER grabs her around the waist. She does not protest.] We're not dancing anymore. What are you holding me so tight for?

SOLDIER: What's your name? Kathi?

CHAMBERMAID: You've always got a Kathi on the brain.

SOLDIER: Oh I know what it is . . . Marie.

CHAMBERMAID: Lordy, it's dark here. It kinda scares me.

SOLDIER: You needn't be scared when you're with me. Thank God I'm the man I am!

CHAMBERMAID: But where are we heading for, anyway? There ain't a soul here. Please, let's go on back! Lord, it's dark!

SOLDIER: [Drawing on his cigar so that the end glows red.] It's gettin' lighter now. Ha ha! Oh you sweetie, you!

CHAMBERMAID: Hey, what are you doin'? If I'd a known—!

SOLDIER: I'll be damned if there was a plumper piece of goods in the dance—hall than you, Miss Marie.

CHAMBERMAID: Did you try 'em all out?

SOLDIER: Oh you can find out plenty just dancing. And how! Crikey!

CHAMBERMAID: But you did dance more with that crooked—faced blonde than you did with me.

SOLDIER: She's an old friend of an old friend of mine.

CHAMBERMAID: That corporal with the turned—up moustache!

SOLDIER: Oh no, the civilian, you know, the man who sat at the table with me at first, with the beery voice.

CHAMBERMAID: Oh sure, I know. That's a fresh feller, that is .

SOLDIER: Did he get fresh with you? Wait till I get at him. What did he do to you?

CHAMBERMAID: Oh nothing—I just saw how he was with the others.

SOLDIER: Listen, Miss Marie . . .

CHAMBERMAID: You'll burn me with that cigar.

SOLDIER: Beg your pardon—Miss Marie. Say, how about gettin' a little chummy, eh?

CHAMBERMAID: I don't know you very well yet . . .

SOLDIER: Hell, lots of people get chummy before they know each other.

CHAMBERMAID: Well, perhaps, next time when we . . . But Mr. Franz—

SOLDIER: So you've found out my name, have you?

CHAMBERMAID: But Mr. Franz—

SOLDIER: Leave off the Mister, Marie.

CHAMBERMAID: Say, don't be so fresh—what if somebody came!

SOLDIER: What if they did, you can't see a damn thing here.

CHAMBERMAID: For goodness sakes, what do you think you're doing, anyway?

SOLDIER: Look, there's two just like us.

CHAMBERMAID: Where? I don't see anything.

SOLDIER: There—in front of us.

CHAMBERMAID: What do you mean—"just like us"?

SOLDIER: Oh well, I mean, they like each other too.

CHAMBERMAID: Say, look out, will you? I almost fell.

SOLDIER: Oh, that's the fence, I guess.

CHAMBERMAID: If you keep on pushing like that I'll fall down .

SOLDIER: Sssh, not so loud.

CHAMBERMAID: I'll scream if you don't look out— See here, what are you doin'—say—

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SOLDIER: There isn't a soul anywheres near.

CHAMBERMAID: Let's go on back where there are people.

SOLDIER: We don't need people, do we, baby, to . . . Ha ha.

CHAMBERMAID: But for God's sakes, Mr. Franz, honest— if I'd a known— Oh my God— look out—
Oh—!

SOLDIER: [Blissfully.] Lord almighty! . . . Oh! . . .

CHAMBERMAID: . . . I can't see your face at all.

SOLDIER: Face, hell . . .

* * *

SOLDIER: Look here, Marie, you can't just lay there on the grass all night.

CHAMBERMAID: Well, help me up then.

SOLDIER: Up you go, baby.

CHAMBERMAID: Oh my God, Franz.

SOLDIER: What's the matter now?

CHAMBERMAID: You're a bad lot, Franz.

SOLDIER: Sure, sure. Hey, wait a minute.

CHAMBERMAID: You're not going to leave me here!

SOLDIER: Let a fellow light a cigarette, can't you?

CHAMBERMAID: It's awful dark.

SOLDIER: It'll be light again tomorrow morning.

CHAMBERMAID: Say you like me a little, don't you?

SOLDIER: Lord, you must have felt I did, Marie!

CHAMBERMAID: Where are we going now?

SOLDIER: Back, of course.

CHAMBERMAID: Don't walk so fast!

SOLDIER: What's worrying you? I don't like walking in the dark.

CHAMBERMAID: Say, do you like me a little, Franz?

SOLDIER: I just told you I did, didn't I?

CHAMBERMAID: Come on, give me a kiss, huh?

SOLDIER: [Condescendingly.] There . . . Listen — you can hear the music again.

CHAMBERMAID: I suppose you want to dance again?

SOLDIER: Sure, why not?

CHAMBERMAID: Well, you see, Franz, I've got to go home. They'll be sore at me already, my missus don't like me to go out at all, anyhow.

SOLDIER: Alright then, run along home.

CHAMBERMAID: I kinda thought you'd take me home, Mr. Franz.

SOLDIER: Take you home? Oh—

CHAMBERMAID: It's sorta lonesome goin' home all alone—

SOLDIER: Where do you live, anyway?

CHAMBERMAID: It ain't far at all—it's in Porzellan Street.

SOLDIER: That so? Well, that's pretty much on my way . . . but it's too early for me now . . . it's my night out, I don't have to be back at the barracks before twelve. I'm goin' to dance some more.

CHAMBERMAID: Oh I know you, now it's the pie-faced blonde's turn!

SOLDIER: Ha! She's not so damn pie-faced at that.

CHAMBERMAID: Oh God, men are awful. I bet you treat 'em all like this.

SOLDIER: All's a bit too much!

CHAMBERMAID: Please, Franz — just for tonight — stay with me, won't you—?

SOLDIER: Alright, alright. But I can have a few more dances, can't I?

CHAMBERMAID: I ain't goin' to dance with no one no more!

SOLDIER: Here we are already . . .

CHAMBERMAID: Where?

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SOLDIER: Back at the dance-hall, of course! How quick we got back. They're still playing that . . . tadata
tadata-- [Sings.] Well then, if you want to wait for me I'll take you home . . . if you don't . . . tootly-oo--

CHAMBERMAID: I'll wait for you. [They step into the dance hall.]

SOLDIER: Treat yourself to a glass of beer, Miss Marie. [Turning to a blonde girl who is just dancing with a youth, very politely.] May I have a dance, Miss?--

SCENE THREE. THE CHAMBERMAID AND THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN

[A hot summer's afternoon. The parents have already gone to the country. It is the cook's day off. In the kitchen the CHAMBERMAID is writing a letter to her soldier sweetheart.]

The bell rings from the YOUNG GENTLEMAN'S room. She rises and goes to his room.

The YOUNG GENTLEMAN is lying on the sofa, smoking and reading a French novel.]

CHAMBERMAID: Pardon me, sir, did you ring?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh yes, Marie, Oh yes, I guess I did ring, didn't I? . . . Now what was it I wanted . . . Ah yes, of course, the blinds . . . let down the blinds, Marie . . . It's much cooler when the blinds are down . . .

[CHAMBERMAID goes to window and lets down the blinds. YOUNG GENTLEMAN starts reading again.]

What are you doing, Marie? Oh yes. But it's too dark to read now . . .

CHAMBERMAID: You're always so busy studying, sir.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Loftily.] Yes . . . yes . . . [MARIE goes. YOUNG GENTLEMAN tries to read further, but soon lets the book fall and rings again. CHAMBERMAID appears.] By the way, Marie . . . now, what was I going to say . . . Oh yes, is there any Cognac in the house?

CHAMBERMAID: Yes, sir, but it's locked up, I guess.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, who has the keys?

CHAMBERMAID: Lini has them.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Who's Lini?

CHAMBERMAID: She's the cook, Mr. Alfred.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, go and tell Lini.

CHAMBERMAID: It's her day off, sir.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh—

CHAMBERMAID: Shall I go get some from the Café, sir?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: No, don't bother . . . it's hot enough as it is. I don't need any Cognac. You might bring me a glass of water, though, Marie. But wait . . . let it run till it's good and cold. [CHAMBERMAID goes out. YOUNG GENTLEMAN looks at her. As she reaches the door, she turns around and looks at him. He promptly gazes into the air. The CHAMBERMAID turns on the water faucet, letting it run. Then she goes into her small room, washes her hands, tidies her hair in front of the mirror. Then she brings the glass of water to the YOUNG GENTLEMAN, approaching the sofa as she does so. The YOUNG GENTLEMAN half raises himself from the sofa, the CHAMBERMAID hands him the glass, and their fingers touch.] Thanks. What's the matter? Be careful, put the glass back on the tray . . . [He lies down again and stretches himself full length.] What time is it, anyway?

CHAMBERMAID: Five o'clock, sir.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh, five . . . Alright. [CHAMBERMAID goes, turns around as she reaches the door and smiles as she notices that the YOUNG GENTLEMAN has watched her. The YOUNG GENTLEMAN remains lying down for a while, then suddenly stands up. He walks to the door then back again and lies down on the sofa. Tries to read again. After a few moments, he rings again. CHAMBERMAID appears, with a smile that she does not attempt to conceal.] By the way, Marie, I've been wanting to ask you—wasn't Doctor Schueller here this morning?

CHAMBERMAID: No, nobody was here this morning.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: That's strange. Doctor Schueller wasn't here at all? Do you know Doctor Schueller anyway?

CHAMBERMAID: Sure I do. He's the tall gentleman with the black beard.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Yes. You're sure he wasn't here, after all?

CHAMBERMAID: No, sir, nobody was here.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [With decision.] Come here, Marie.

CHAMBERMAID: [Coming nearer.] Yes, sir.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Closer . . . that's right . . . I was just wondering . . .

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CHAMBERMAID: What were you wondering, sir?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Wondering . . . wondering—about your blouse . . . what kind of material . . . come on, come a little closer. I won't bite you.

CHAMBERMAID: [Coming closer.] What about my blouse? Don't you like it, sir?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Touching the blouse and drawing her towards him.] Blue . . . and a very lovely blue. [Simply.] You dress very nicely, Marie.

CHAMBERMAID: But, sir . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, what's the matter? . . . [Opens her blouse. Matter of fact.] You have a beautiful white skin, Marie.

CHAMBERMAID: You're flattering me, sir.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Kissing her breast.] That can't hurt you.

CHAMBERMAID: Oh no.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You sigh so. What are you sighing for?

CHAMBERMAID: Oh, Mr. Alfred . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: What pretty slippers you have on . . .

CHAMBERMAID: But . . . sir . . . if somebody should ring—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Who'd be ringing now?

CHAMBERMAID: But, sir . . . it's so light here . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You don't have to be bashful before me. You don't have to before anyone, anyway . . . you're so pretty. I mean it, Marie, you're so . . . do you know, even your hair is fragrant.

CHAMBERMAID: Mr. Alfred . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Don't make such a fuss, Marie . . . I've sen you worse than this. When I came home the other night and went out to get some water, the door to your room was open . . . well . . .

CHAMBERMAID: [Hiding her face.] Oh my God, Mr. Alfred, I didn't think you could be so wicked.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: I saw a lot, alright . . . that . . . and that . . . and that . . . and—

CHAMBERMAID: But, Mr. Alfred!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Come, come here . . . there, that's right . . .

CHAMBERMAID: But if someone should ring now—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh stop fussing, will you . . . just let them ring . . . [Bell rings.]

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YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Hell . . . the fellow's making enough noise, alright . . . He probably rang before and we never noticed it.

CHAMBERMAID: Oh, I was listening all the time.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, you might go look anyhow . . . through the peep-hole.

CHAMBERMAID: Mr. Alfred . . . honest . . . you're so . . . so wicked . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Go and see who's there, will you? [CHAMBERMAID goes. YOUNG GENTLEMAN raises the blinds quickly.]

CHAMBERMAID: [Appearing again.] He must have gone away again . No one's there now. Maybe it was Doctor Schueller.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Annoyed.] Alright. [CHAMBERMAID comes close to him, but he draws away.] I'm going to the Café now, Marie—

CHAMBERMAID: [Affectionately.] So soon . . . Mr. Alfred.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Sternly.] I'm going to the Café. If Doctor Schueller should come—

CHAMBERMAID: He won't come no more today.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Sternly.] If Doctor Schueller should come—I—I—I'll be at the Café. [He goes into the next room. The CHAMBERMAID picks up a cigar from the table, sticks it in her mouth and goes out.]

SCENE FOUR. THE YOUNG GENTLEMAN AND THE MARRIED LADY

[Evening. A drawing room furnished with commonplace elegance in the Schwindgasse. The YOUNG GENTLEMAN enters in hat and overcoat, and lights the candles. Then he opens the door to the adjoining room and glances into it. The candles shed a beam across the floor to a canopied bed, which stands against the wall. In one corner of the bedroom a fireplace casts a red glow on the hangings around the bed. The YOUNG GENTLEMAN surveys the bedroom. From a tall mirror he takes an atomizer and sprays the pillows with violet perfume. He thereupon walks through both rooms spraying continually until all about him is impregnated with the odor of violets. Then he takes off his hat and overcoat, sits down on the blue velvet armchair, lights a cigarette and smokes. After a little while he rises again and makes sure that the green shutters are closed. Suddenly he goes into the bedroom, opens the drawer of the night-table, feels inside and finds a tortoise-shell hair-pin. He looks for a place to hide it in, finally sticks it in the pocket of his overcoat. Then he opens a cupboard in the drawing-room, takes out a silver tray, a bottle of Cognac and two liqueur glasses, and places them on the table. From his overcoat, then, he takes out a small white package. This he opens and lays beside the Cognac; goes back to the cupboard, and takes out two small plates, knives and forks. He takes a marron glacé out of the package and eats it, washing it down rapidly with a glass of Cognac. Then he looks at his watch. He paces to and fro; standing a while in front of the big mirror to arrange his hair and small moustache with a pocket-comb. He goes to the hall door and listens. No sound. Then he draws together the blue curtains over the bedroom door. The bell rings. The YOUNG GENTLEMAN pulls himself quickly together, sits down in the armchair and rises only when the door opens and the MARRIED LADY enters.

The MARRIED LADY, heavily veiled, closes the door behind her, and stands there a moment with her left hand pressed to her heart, as if she were under violent emotional stress.]

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Goes to her, taking her gloved hand and kissing it. In a low voice.] Thank you.

MARRIED LADY: Alfred—Alfred!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Come, my dear . . . come, Emma . . .

MARRIED LADY: Let me alone a moment—please . . . Please, Alfred! [She is still standing at the door. He faces her, holding her hand.] Where am I? What place is this?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: My rooms.

MARRIED LADY: This is a horrible house, Alfred.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Why? It's a highly respectable house.

MARRIED LADY: I met two men on the stairs.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Friends?

MARRIED LADY: I don't know. Maybe.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Excuse me, my dear—but surely you know who your friends are.

MARRIED LADY: But I couldn't see a thing.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, even if they were your best friends they couldn't have recognized you. Even I . . . if I didn't know it was you . . . that veil—

MARRIED LADY: There are two of them.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Aren't you going to come a little nearer? . . . At least you could take you hat off!

MARRIED LADY: Are you mad, Alfred? I told you: five minutes . . . No, not a minute more . . . I swear—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, then, the veil—

MARRIED: There are two.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Alright, both veils—you could let me see you, at least.

MARRIED LADY: Do you really love me, Alfred?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Deeply hurt.] Emma—how can you ask . . .

MARRIED LADY: It's so hot here.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You've got your fur coat on—you'll surely catch cold.

MARRIED LADY: [Finally walking into the room, sinking into the armchair.] I'm dead tired.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Allow me. [Takes off her veils, takes the pin out of her hat, puts hat, pin and veils

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aside. MARRIED LADY does not demur. He stands in front of her, shaking his head.]

MARRIED LADY: What's the matter?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You've never looked so beautiful.

MARRIED LADY: Really?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Alone . . . alone with you—Emma— [He sinks on his knees by the armchair, takes both her hands and covers them with kisses.]

MARRIED LADY: Now—now you must let me go again. I've done what you wanted me to. [YOUNG GENTLEMAN lets his head sink on her lap.] You promised me you'd be good.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Yes.

MARRIED LADY: It's suffocating in this room.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Standing up.] You still have your coat on.

MARRIED LADY: Put it next to my hat. [YOUNG GENTLEMAN takes her coat off and lays it on the sofa.]

And now—adieu—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Emma! Emma!

MARRIED LADY: The five minutes were up long ago.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Not even one!

MARRIED LADY: Alfred, tell me exactly what time it is.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: It's exactly quarter past six.

MARRIED LADY: I should have been at my sister's long ago.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Your sister can see you often . . .

MARRIED LADY: Oh God, Alfred, why have you made me do this?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Because I—adore you, Emma.

MARRIED LADY: How many others have you said that to?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Since I've known you—no one.

MARRIED LADY: What a frivolous creature I am! If anyone had told me . . . a week ago . . . or even yesterday . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: And day before yesterday you'd already promised me . . .

MARRIED LADY: You tormented me so. But I didn't want to do it. God is my witness—I didn't want to do it . . . Yesterday I was absolutely determined . . . Do you know, I even wrote you a long letter last night!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: I didn't receive any.

MARRIED LADY: I tore it up. Oh, I should have sent you that letter!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: I'm glad you didn't.

MARRIED LADY: Oh no, it's disgraceful . . . of me. I can't make myself out. Goodbye, Alfred, let me go. [YOUNG GENTLEMAN takes her in his arms and covers her face with passionate kisses.] Is this how you keep your promise? . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: One more kiss—just one.

MARRIED LADY: The last one. [He kisses her, she responds; their lips are joined for a long time.]

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Shall I tell you something, Emma? Now I know what happiness is, for the first time. [MARRIED LADY sinks back into the armchair. He sits on the arm, his arm lightly encircling her back.] . . .

. . . or rather, I know now what happiness might be. [MARRIED LADY sighs deeply. He kisses her again.]

MARRIED LADY: Alfred, Alfred, what are you doing to me?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: It's not all bad here, is it, Emma? . . . And we're so safe here. After all, it's a thousand times nicer than those meetings outside.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, don't remind me of them.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: But I shall always think of them with great delight. Every minute I'm allowed by your side is a sweet memory to me.

MARRIED LADY: Do you remember the Charity Ball?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Do I remember it! Why, I was sitting near you all during supper, right near you. Your husband had champagne . . . [MARRIED LADY looks at him reproachfully.] I was only going to speak about the champagne. By the way, Emma, wouldn't you like a glass of Cognac?

MARRIED LADY: Just a drop, but first give me a glass of water .

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YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Certainly . . . where is that . . . Oh yes, . . . [He draws aside the curtains and goes into the bedroom, She looks after him. **YOUNG GENTLEMAN** comes back with a carafe of water and two glasses.]

MARRIED LADY: Where were you?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: In the . . . next room. [Pours a glass of water.]

MARRIED LADY: I'm going to ask you something, Alfred—and you've got to swear you'll answer the truth.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: I swear—

MARRIED LADY: Has any other woman ever been in these rooms?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: But, Emma—this house was built twenty years ago!

MARRIED LADY: You know perfectly well what I mean, Alfred . . . With you! In your rooms!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Here—with me—Emma? Really, it isn't very nice of you to think of such things.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, so you have . . . how shall I say . . . No, I'd rather not ask you. It's better not to. It's my fault, anyway. One pays for everything.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: What do you mean? What's the matter? Who pays for what?

MARRIED LADY: No, no, no, I mustn't return to consciousness . . . otherwise I'd die of shame.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Shaking his head sadly, the water carafe in his hand.] Emma, if you only knew how you are hurting me. [MARRIED LADY pours herself a glass of Cognac.] I want to tell you something, Emma. If you are ashamed to be here—if I mean nothing to you—if you don't feel that you mean all the bliss in the world to me—then you'd better go.

MARRIED LADY: Yes—I mean to.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Taking her hand.] But if you'd only realize that I can't live without you, that the mere kissing of your hand means more to me than all the caresses of all the women in the world . . . Emma, I'm not like the other young men who can play at love—perhaps I'm too naive . . .

MARRIED LADY: But suppose you really are like other men?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Then you wouldn't be here now—because you're not like other women.

MARRIED LADY: How did you know that?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Drawing her onto the sofa, sitting next to her.] I've thought a great deal about you. I know that you're unhappy.

MARRIED LADY: [Pleased.] Yes.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Life is so empty, so meaningless—and then—so short—so appallingly short! There's only one happiness . . . to find someone who loves you— [MARRIED LADY takes a candied pear from the table and puts it in her mouth.] Give me half! [She gives it to him with her lips.]

MARRIED LADY: [Takes the **YOUNG GENTLEMAN'S** hands which have begun to stray.] What are you doing, Alfred? . . . What about your promise?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Swallowing the pear, then bolder.] Life is so short.

MARRIED LADY: [Weakly.] But surely that's no reason—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Mechanically.] Oh yes.

MARRIED LADY: [Weaker still.] Really, Alfred, you did promise . . . be good . . . And it's so light . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh come, come . . . my only one, my darling . . . [He lifts her up from the sofa.]

MARRIED LADY: What are you doing?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: It's not at all light in there.

MARRIED LADY: Is there another room?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Drawing her after him.] A charming one . . . and quite dark.

MARRIED LADY: I think we'd better stay here. [YOUNG GENTLEMAN, already leading her beyond the curtains and into the bedroom, unfastens her bodice.] You're so . . . Heavens, what are you doing to me, Alfred!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: I adore you, Emma!

MARRIED LADY: But wait—wait a minute . . . [Weakly.] Go . . . I'll call you.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Let me—let you— [Fussed.] —I mean, can't I—help you—

MARRIED LADY: You're tearing everything.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You don't wear corsets?

MARRIED LADY: I never wear corsets. Neither does Ida Rubinstein. But you might unbutton my shoes.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

[YOUNG GENTLEMAN unbuttons her shoes, kisses her feet. She slips into bed.] Oh, I'm cold.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You'll soon be warm.

MARRIED LADY: [Laughing softly.] Think so!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Vaguely annoyed, to himself.] She needn't have said that. [Undresses in the dark.]

MARRIED LADY: [Tenderly.] Come, come, come.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Now in a better mood.] Right away—

MARRIED LADY: It smells so of violets here.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: That's you yourself . . . Yes [To her.] you yourself.

MARRIED LADY: Alfred . . . Alfred!!!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Emma . . .

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YOUNG GENTLEMAN: It's obvious that I love you too much . . . yes . . . beyond all reason.

MARRIED LADY:

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: For days I've been going about like mad. I had a feeling this would happen.

MARRIED LADY: Don't worry about it.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh, of course not. After all, it's only natural when . . .

MARRIED LADY: Don't . . . don't . . . You're just nervous. Calm yourself . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Do you know Stendhal?

MARRIED LADY: Stendhal?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: The Psychology of Love.

MARRIED LADY: No, why do you ask me?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: There's a story in it that's very significant.

MARRIED LADY: What kind of story?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, there's a gathering of cavalry officers—

MARRIED LADY: Yes . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: And they're telling about their love affairs . And every one of them says that when they were with the woman they loved most deeply, you know, most passionately . . . well, that she—that he—well, to make a long story short, that in spite of loving this woman so, the same thing happened as with me, just now.

MARRIED LADY: Yes.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: That's very characteristic.

MARRIED LADY: Yes.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: That's not the end of it yet. One of them claims that it's never happened to him in his whole life, but Stendhal remarks that he was a notorious liar.

MARRIED LADY: I see.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Even so, it depresses one, in spite of its unimportance— That's the stupid part of it.

MARRIED LADY: Of course. Anyway, you know, you did promise to be good.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Now don't laugh, that doesn't help.

MARRIED LADY: But I'm not laughing. That Stendhal thing is very interesting. Although I always thought that only older men . . . or very . . . you know, people who've indulged in excesses . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: What an idea! That has absolutely nothing to do with it. But I forgot to tell you the best of Stendhal's stories. One of those cavalry officers actually said that he'd spent three nights, or even six, with the woman he had passionately desired . . . longed for, you know—for weeks—and all they did on every one of those nights together was to weep for joy . . . both of them . . .

MARRIED LADY: Both?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Yes. Does that surprise you? It seems perfectly comprehensible to me—especially when one's in love.

MARRIED LADY: But surely, there must be many who don't weep.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Nervously.] Certainly . . . and that was an exceptional case, of course.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, I thought Stendhal said that all cavalry officers weep on such occasions.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Now you're making fun again.

MARRIED LADY: Not at all! Don't be childish, Alfred!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, it does get on one's nerves . . . Besides, I have a feeling that you keep thinking about it all the time. That upsets me a lot.

MARRIED LADY: I'm not thinking of it at all.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: If only I could be convinced of your love.

MARRIED LADY: Do you still demand proofs?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: There you are—always joking.

MARRIED LADY: How so? Come, put your handsome head here.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Ah, that feels good.

MARRIED LADY: Do you love me?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: But you don't need to cry too, do you?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Drawing away from her, highly irritated.] There you are again, the same old thing. I begged you so . . .

MARRIED LADY: But I only said that you needn't cry . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: You said: 'needn't cry too.'

MARRIED LADY: Darling, you're wrought up.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: I know I am.

MARRIED LADY: But you shouldn't be. In fact, I like us to be—well—sort of good friends . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: There you go again.

MARRIED LADY: But don't you remember? That was one of our first conversations together. We were going to be good friends; nothing more. Oh, that was beautiful . . . we were at my sister's, at that big ball in January, dancing the quadrille. . . . Good heavens, I should have gone long ago . . . my sister's expecting me . . . what shall I say to her . . . Adieu, Alfred—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Emma! You're going to leave me like this?

MARRIED LADY: Yes!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Five minutes more . . .

MARRIED LADY: Very well. Five minutes more. But you must promise not to—to stir. Yes? . . . I'll just give you a goodbye kiss. No, no . . . quiet, I said . . . don't budge, or else I'll get right up, you darling . . . darling . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Emma . . . my adorable . . .

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MARRIED LADY: My Alfred—

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh, it's heaven to be with you.

MARRIED LADY: But I really must go now.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Oh, let your sister wait.

MARRIED LADY: I've got to go home. It's much too late for my sister's now. What time is it, anyway?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: How should I know?

MARRIED LADY: You might just look at your watch.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: My watch is in my vest.

MARRIED LADY: Well, go get it.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Rises with a mighty effort.] Eight.

MARRIED LADY: [Quickly rising.] Good heavens . . . Quick, Alfred, hand me my stockings. What on earth shall I say? They're undoubtedly waiting for me at home . . . eight o' clock.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: When will I see you again?

MARRIED LADY: Never.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Emma! Then you don't love me anymore?

MARRIED LADY: That's just it. Give me my shoes.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Never again? Here are your shoes.

MARRIED LADY: There's a button-hook in my bag. Get it, please, quick . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Here's the button-hook.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

MARRIED LADY: Alfred, this may ruin us both.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Very disagreeably affected.] How so?

MARRIED LADY: Well, what shall I say when he asks me where I've been?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: At your sister's.

MARRIED LADY: Yes, if I could lie.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, you'll just have to.

MARRIED LADY: And all this for such a man. Oh, come here . . . I want to give you just one more kiss. [She embraces him.] And now—leave me alone and go into the other room, I can't dress when you're around. [YOUNG GENTLEMAN goes into living-room, where he dresses, eats pastry and drinks a glass of Cognac. Presently she calls .] Alfred!

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Yes, sweet?

MARRIED LADY: After all it was much better that we didn't weep.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Not without pride, smiling.] How can you be so frivolous?

MARRIED LADY: What are we to do if we happen to meet accidentally at some party again?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Accidentally . . . But surely you'll be at the Lobheimers too tomorrow, won't you?

MARRIED LADY: Yes. And you too?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Certainly. May I have the first dance?

MARRIED LADY: Oh, I shan't go. What are you thinking of? Why I'd . . . [Walks into living room, fully dressed, takes a chocolate tart .] I'd sink right through the floor for shame.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, at the Lobheimers then, tomorrow. That's fine.

MARRIED LADY: No, no . . . I won't go . . . definitely not.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Well, then, day after tomorrow . . . here.

MARRIED LADY: Are you mad?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: At six . . .

MARRIED LADY: There are taxis at this corner, aren't there?

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Yes, all you want. All right then, day after tomorrow, here, at six. Say yes, my adorable sweet.

MARRIED LADY: . . . We'll talk it over tomorrow at the dance .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Embracing her.] My own beloved.

MARRIED LADY: Don't muss my hair again.

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: Tomorrow at the Lobheimers then, and the day after in my arms.

MARRIED LADY: Goodbye . . .

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Suddenly worried again.] But what will you say to him—now?

MARRIED LADY: Don't ask me . . . don't ask . . . it's all too horrible . . . Why do I love you so?—Adieu.—If I meet people on the stairs again I'll have heart failure. [YOUNG GENTLEMAN kisses her hand once again. MARRIED LADY goes.]

YOUNG GENTLEMAN: [Alone, sits on the sofa, chuckles to himself and murmurs softly.] Well, at least I'm having an affair with a respectable woman.

SCENE FIVE. THE MARRIED LADY AND THE HUSBAND

[A comfortable bedroom. Half past ten at night. The MARRIED LADY is in bed, reading. The HUSBAND enters the room in dressing gown.]

MARRIED LADY: [Without looking up.] Not working anymore?

HUSBAND: No. I'm too tired. And besides . . .

MARRIED LADY: What?

HUSBAND: I suddenly felt so lonely sitting at my desk. I had a longing for you.

MARRIED LADY: [Looking up.] Really?

HUSBAND: [Sitting on the edge of the bed.] Don't read any more. You'll ruin your eyes.

MARRIED LADY: [Closing the book.] Is anything wrong with you?

HUSBAND: Nothing, dear. I'm just in love with you. You must know that!

MARRIED LADY: There are times when one might forget it.

HUSBAND: There are times when one should forget it.

MARRIED LADY: Why?

HUSBAND: Because otherwise marriage would be an imperfect thing. It would— . . . how shall I put it . . . it would lose its sacredness.

MARRIED LADY: Oh . . .

HUSBAND: Believe me . . . that's true. If we hadn't sometimes forgotten . . . during the five years we've been married . . . that we were in love with each other—we certainly wouldn't be now.

MARRIED LADY: That's over my head.

HUSBAND: It's perfectly simple: we've had about ten or twelve love episodes together up to now, haven't we?

MARRIED LADY: I haven't counted!

HUSBAND: If we'd drained the first one to the last drop, if I'd surrendered completely to my passion for you right at the start, the same thing that happens to millions of other loving couples would have happened to us. We'd be through with each other.

MARRIED LADY: Oh . . . that's what you mean!

HUSBAND: Believe me, Emma—in the first days of our marriage I was afraid it would happen.

MARRIED LADY: So was I.

HUSBAND: You see? Wasn't I right? That's why it's such a wise thing from time to time to live together like good friends.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, yes.

HUSBAND: And that's why we're always able to live through our honeymoon days again, just because I never allow them to . . .

MARRIED LADY: Drag into months.

HUSBAND: Quite so.

MARRIED LADY: And now . . . another period of friendship has apparently run its course.

HUSBAND: [Pressing her to him tenderly.] So it seems.

MARRIED LADY: But what if . . . if I feel differently?

HUSBAND: You don't feel differently. You're the wisest and most adorable creature that ever lived. I'm very happy that I've found you.

MARRIED LADY: It's charming the way you can woo . . . in sections.

HUSBAND: [Slipping into bed.] To a man who's looked about the world a bit—come, lay your head on my shoulder—who's seen a bit of life, marriage seems much more mysterious, as a matter of fact, than it does to you girls of good family. You come to us pure . . . and, up to a certain point, ignorant, and that's why you really have a much clearer insight into the way of love than we have.

MARRIED LADY: [Laughing.] Oh!

HUSBAND: Certainly. Because all the varied experiences that we necessarily must pass through before

REIGEN (Hands Around)

marriage have confused and unsettled us. You've heard a lot and know a lot and have probably read a lot, but you have actually no conception of what we men have to live through. What is commonly called Love eventually becomes a thing utterly repellent to us; which is hardly surprising when you think of the creatures we have to turn to!

MARRIED LADY: Tell me, what kind of creatures?

HUSBAND: [Kissing her forehead.] Be thankful, my dear, that you've never had a glimpse of these conditions. Besides, most of these creatures are greatly to be pitied. We mustn't cast stones at them.

MARRIED LADY: I think this pity of yours is a bit misplaced.

HUSBAND: [With noble compassion.] They deserve it. You girls of refinement and good family, you who wait quietly under the protection of your parents for the honorable man who is to lead you into the bonds of matrimony—how can you know the misery that hounds these poor creatures into the arms of Sin?

MARRIED LADY: But do they all sell themselves?

HUSBAND: I wouldn't go so far as to say that. And I don't only mean material misery. There is also—I might say—a misery that is moral; an inability to grasp what is permissible, and more specifically, what is noble.

MARRIED LADY: But why are they to be pitied? They get along quite well!

HUSBAND: You have strange ideas, my dear. You mustn't forget that these creatures are destined by nature to sink lower and lower. There are no half-way stops for them.

MARRIED LADY: [Cuddling up to him.] The sinking seems to be rather pleasurable.

HUSBAND: [Pained.] How can you say things like that, Emma? I've always thought that nothing could be more repulsive to respectable women like you than those who are not respectable.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, of course, Karl, of course. I was only talking. Go on, tell me some more. It's so nice when you speak like that. Tell me things.

HUSBAND: What about?

MARRIED LADY: Well—about these creatures.

HUSBAND: Why on earth should I?

MARRIED LADY: Look, Karl, don't you remember, I begged you right from the beginning, many times, to tell me things about your youth.

HUSBAND: But why should that interest you?

MARRIED LADY: Well, aren't you my husband? And isn't it unfair, my not knowing anything about your past?—

HUSBAND: You surely don't expect me to be so tasteless as to—but enough, Emma . . . that would be sacrilege.

MARRIED LADY: And yet . . . you must have held heaven knows how many other women in your arms like this.

HUSBAND: Don't say "Women." You're the only "woman," to me.

MARRIED LADY: But there's one question you've got to answer . . . otherwise . . . otherwise . . . the honeymoon is out.

HUSBAND: You certainly have a strange way of speaking . . . remember that you're a mother . . . that our little girl is sleeping right in there . . .

MARRIED LADY: [Cuddling again.] I'd like a little boy too.

HUSBAND: Emma!

MARRIED LADY: Oh, don't act like that . . . certainly I'm your wife . . . but I'd like to be your sweetheart too . . . just a weeny bit.

HUSBAND: Would you really?

MARRIED LADY: Well—answer my question first.

HUSBAND: Well?

MARRIED LADY: Was there . . . a married woman . . . among them?

HUSBAND: What do you mean? What are you driving at?

MARRIED LADY: You know perfectly well.

HUSBAND: [Slightly disturbed.] What makes you ask that?

MARRIED LADY: I'd like to know whether . . . that is, I know there are women like that . . . but I want to

REIGEN (Hands Around)

know whether you . . .

HUSBAND: [Serious.] Do you know a woman like that?

MARRIED LADY: Well, I can't tell.

HUSBAND: Do you suppose there's a woman like that among your friends?

MARRIED LADY: How could I say, with certainty—or deny it?

HUSBAND: Has one of your friends ever . . . after all, when women are together they talk quite freely . . . has one of them ever confessed . . . ?

MARRIED LADY: [Wavering.] No.

HUSBAND: Have you ever suspected one of your friends of . . .

MARRIED LADY: Suspect . . . Oh . . . suspect . . .

HUSBAND: You seem to have.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, no, Karl, absolutely not. When I think it over, I really couldn't imagine it of any one.

HUSBAND: No one?

MARRIED LADY: No one of my friends.

HUSBAND: Promise me something, Emma.

MARRIED LADY: Well?

HUSBAND: That you'll never have anything to do with a woman who's the least bit under suspicion of not . . . not leading a quite spotless life.

MARRIED LADY: And I've got to promise you that now?

HUSBAND: Of course I know that you won't try to associate with women like that. But it might just happen that you'd . . . as a matter of fact, it occurs very often that just such women of doubtful reputation attach themselves to the society of decent women, partly to give themselves a foil, partly . . . how shall I put it . . . partly out of a sort of craving for virtue.

MARRIED LADY: I see.

HUSBAND: Yes, I think I hit the nail on the head. Craving for virtue. For you may be sure that these women are all very unhappy.

MARRIED LADY: Why?

HUSBAND: You ask that, Emma?— How can you? Just imagine the kind of life these women lead! Full of lies, tricks, meanness, full of danger.

MARRIED LADY: Yes, I suppose you're right.

HUSBAND: Truly—they pay dearly for their crumb of happiness . . . their crumb of . . .

MARRIED LADY: Pleasure.

HUSBAND: Why pleasure? What makes you call that pleasure?

MARRIED LADY: Well—there must be some—! Otherwise they wouldn't do it.

HUSBAND: It's nothing at all . . . just an intoxication.

MARRIED LADY: [Reflectively.] An intoxication.

HUSBAND: No, it isn't even intoxication. But whatever it is—it's dearly paid for, that's sure!

MARRIED LADY: So you've . . . you've been through it all once . . . haven't you?

HUSBAND: Yes, Emma. It's my saddest memory.

MARRIED LADY: Who was it? Tell me! Do I know her?

HUSBAND: Are you mad?

MARRIED LADY: Was it long ago? Was it long before you married me?

HUSBAND: Don't ask. I beg of you not to ask.

MARRIED LADY: But, Karl!

HUSBAND: She is dead.

MARRIED LADY: You mean that?

HUSBAND: It may sound a little ridiculous, but it strikes me that all these women die young.

MARRIED LADY: Did you love her very much?

HUSBAND: One doesn't love liars.

MARRIED LADY: Then why . . .

HUSBAND: Intoxication.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

MARRIED LADY: So it is that, after all?

HUSBAND: Don't talk about it any more, please. All that is long past. There's only one I've ever loved—and that's you. One can only love where one finds purity and truth.

MARRIED LADY: Karl!

HUSBAND: Oh, how safe, how wonderful one feels in arms like yours. Why didn't I know you when you were a child? Then I think I wouldn't even have looked at other women.

MARRIED LADY: Karl!

HUSBAND: How beautiful you are! Beautiful! Oh, come . . . [Turns out the light.]

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MARRIED LADY: Do you know what this reminds me of?

HUSBAND: What, my darling?

MARRIED LADY: Of . . . of . . . of Venice.

HUSBAND: The first night . . .

MARRIED LADY: Yes . . . you . . .

HUSBAND: What? Come, tell me!

MARRIED LADY: You—you're just as in love.

HUSBAND: Yes.

MARRIED LADY: Oh . . . if only you'd always . . .

HUSBAND: [In her arms.] If what?

MARRIED LADY: My own Karl!

HUSBAND: What did you mean, if only I'd always . . . ?

MARRIED LADY: Oh, well . . .

HUSBAND: Come, what was that, if only I'd always . . .

MARRIED LADY: Well then, I'd always know that you loved me.

HUSBAND: You should know that anyway. One can't always be the lover, one has to enter the battle of life now and then, to fight and struggle! Don't ever forget that, my dear. There's time for everything in married life—that's the beautiful part of it. There aren't many who—after five years—can still remember Venice.

MARRIED LADY: Oh, no!

HUSBAND: And now . . . good night, my dearest!

MARRIED LADY: Good night!

SCENE SIX. THE HUSBAND AND THE SWEET YOUNG GIRL

[A private room in the Restaurant Riedhof, comfortable, moderately elegant. The gas oven is lit. The remnants of a meal are on the table. Pastry, fruit, cheese. A Hungarian white wine is in the wine glasses.]

The HUSBAND is smoking an Havana cigar and leaning back in a corner of the sofa.

The SWEET YOUNG GIRL sits on a chair next to him and, with a spoon, scoops off the whipped cream from the pastry, swallowing it with pleasure.]

HUSBAND: Taste good?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Eats on.] Oh!

HUSBAND: Want another?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, I've eaten too much already.

HUSBAND: You haven't any wine left. [Fills her glass.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No . . . please . . . I'll just let it stand.

HUSBAND: Come, sit by me.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Just a minute . . . not finished yet. [HUSBAND stands up, goes behind her chair and puts his arms around her, turning her head up to him.] Well, what is it?

HUSBAND: I'd like a kiss.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Gives him a kiss.] You're pretty fresh.

HUSBAND: Has that just occurred to you?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, no, I discovered that before . . . on the street. You must have a fine opinion of me.

HUSBAND: Why?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: For going to a private room with you right away.

HUSBAND: Well, hardly right away.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But you do have such a winning way.

HUSBAND: Think so, really?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: And after all, what's the harm?

HUSBAND: What indeed.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What difference is it whether one goes for a walk or—

HUSBAND: It's too cold to walk, anyway.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, much too cold.

HUSBAND: But it's nice and warm here, isn't it? [Sits on the sofa again, pulling the SWEET YOUNG GIRL down next to him.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Weakening.] Yes . . .

HUSBAND: Tell me . . . you've noticed me before, haven't you?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Of course. I noticed you on Singer Street.

HUSBAND: I don't mean only today. I mean the day before, and the day before that, when I was following you.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Lots of men follow me.

HUSBAND: I don't doubt it. But did you notice me?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Do you know what happened to me just the other day? My own cousin's husband tried to follow me in the dark and didn't recognize me.

HUSBAND: Did he speak to you?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Speak to me? D'you think everybody's as fresh as you are?

HUSBAND: Well, it does happen, you know.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Certainly it happens.

HUSBAND: Well what do you do then?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Nothing at all. I just don't answer.

HUSBAND: Hmmm . . . but you answered me.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Are you mad at me?

HUSBAND: [Kissing her impulsively.] Your lips taste of whipped cream.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, they're naturally sweet.

HUSBAND: I suppose a great many have told you that?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: A great many! What crazy ideas you have!

HUSBAND: Be honest for once. How many have kissed this mouth of yours?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Why do you want to know? You wouldn't believe it if I told you!

HUSBAND: Why not?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Try and guess.

HUSBAND: Well . . . let's say . . . but you won't be angry?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Why should I be angry?

HUSBAND: Alright then, I guess . . . twenty.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Freeing herself from him.] Why not start at a hundred?

HUSBAND: Well, I only guessed.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But you didn't guess right.

HUSBAND: Alright, then, ten.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Offended.] Of course. When a girl lets herself get talked to on the street and goes right to a private room with a man . . .

HUSBAND: Don't be so childish. Whether one walks along the street or sits in a room . . . After all, we're in a restaurant. Any moment the waiter might come in—there's really nothing wrong in it . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: That's what I just figured out myself.

HUSBAND: Were you ever in a private room before?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, if I must speak the truth; yes.

HUSBAND: Now, I like it when you're straightforward like that .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But not the way—the way you think. I was in a private room with a girl friend and her fiancé last Easter, once.

HUSBAND: It wouldn't have been a catastrophe if you'd gone once with—your sweetheart.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Of course it wouldn't have been a catastrophe. But I have no sweetheart.

HUSBAND: Oh, go on!

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Honest to God I haven't.

HUSBAND: But you're not trying to make me believe that I'm . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: That you what? . . . I haven't had one for over six months.

HUSBAND: Oh, I see . . . But before that? Who was it then?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Why are you so curious?

HUSBAND: I'm curious because I love you.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Do you mean that?

HUSBAND: Of course I do. You must see that. So come, tell me . [Presses her closely to him.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, what do you want me to tell you?

HUSBAND: Oh, don't make me go on coaxing you. I want to know who it was.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Laughing.] Well, a man.

HUSBAND: But who—who?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: He looked a little like you.

HUSBAND: Did he now?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: If you hadn't looked so much like him . . .

HUSBAND: What would have happened?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Now why ask, when you see that . . .

HUSBAND: [Understanding.] Oh, so that's why you let me speak to you.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes, if you insist.

HUSBAND: Now I really don't know whether to be glad or annoyed.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I'd be glad if I were in your place.

HUSBAND: I suppose so.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Even the way you talk reminds me so of him . . . and the way you look at one . . .

HUSBAND: What was he?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Even the eyes—

HUSBAND: What was his name?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Don't look at me that way, please. [HUSBAND embraces her. Long, passionate kiss. SWEET YOUNG GIRL tries to pull herself free and stand up.]

HUSBAND: Why do you go away from me?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: It's time to go home.

HUSBAND: Later.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, really I must go home now. What do you suppose mother would say?

HUSBAND: You live with your mother?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Of course I live with my mother. What did you think?

HUSBAND: I see. Do you live alone with her?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: "Alone" is good! There're five of us! Two boys and two more girls.

HUSBAND: Don't sit so far away from me. Are you the oldest?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, I'm the second. The oldest is Kathi, she's in business, in a flower-shop. Then I come.

HUSBAND: And what do you do?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Me? I stay home.

HUSBAND: All the time?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, someone's got to stay home.

HUSBAND: Yes, of course—but what do you say to your mother when you—come home very late?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: That happens very seldom.

HUSBAND: Well, today, for instance. Your mother'll ask you, won't she?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Certainly she'll ask me. No matter how careful I am, they all wake up when I come in.

HUSBAND: Well, what will you say to her?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I'll say I've been to the theatre.

HUSBAND: Will she believe that?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Why shouldn't she? I go to the theatre lots . . . Why, just last Sunday I was at the opera with my girlfriend and her fiancé and my older brother.

HUSBAND: Where do you get the tickets?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, my brother's a hairdresser!

HUSBAND: Ah, hairdressers . . . probably theatrical hairdresser.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Why are you so curious?

HUSBAND: It interests me. And what is your other brother?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: He's still in school. He wants to be a teacher. Did you ever!

HUSBAND: And then you have a little sister besides?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes, she's still a kid, but you've got to keep an eye on her already. You have know idea how bad girls get in school nowadays! Would you believe it, I caught her having a rendezvous the other day.

HUSBAND: Really?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes. She went walking with a boy from the school at half past seven, in Strozzini Lane. The little brat!

HUSBAND: What did you do?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I gave her a spanking, alright!

HUSBAND: You're strict, aren't you?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Who else is there to be? The oldest girl is in business and all mother does is nag. Everything always falls on me . . .

HUSBAND: God, but you're sweet! [Kisses her, grows tender again.] You remind me of somebody too.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Really? Who?

HUSBAND: Not anyone special . . . just the . . . oh, well, when I was young. Come, my child, drink!

REIGEN (Hands Around)

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: How old are you, anyway? . . . You . . . oh, dear . . . I don't even know what your name is.

HUSBAND: Karl.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Is it really? You're really called Karl?

HUSBAND: Was his name Karl, too?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, that's absolutely a miracle . . . that's . . . and the eyes . . . the expression . . . [Shakes her head.]

HUSBAND: But you haven't yet told me who he was.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: He was a rotter, that's what he was—or else he wouldn't have left me in the lurch.

HUSBAND: Did you love him very much?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Certainly I did.

HUSBAND: I know what he was, a lieutenant.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, he wasn't in the army. They didn't take him. His father has a house in . . . but why should you know that?

HUSBAND: [Kissing her.] You've got grey eyes . . . at first I thought they were black.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, aren't they pretty enough for you? [HUSBAND kisses her eyes.] No, no . . . that's more than I can stand . . . please . . . Oh, Lord . . . no, please, let me get up . . . just for a minute . . . please.

HUSBAND: [More and more caressing.] Oh, no.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Please, Karl . . .

HUSBAND: How old are you? Eighteen?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Past nineteen.

HUSBAND: Nineteen . . . and I—

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: You're thirty . . .

HUSBAND: And then some . . . Don't let's talk about it.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: He was thirty-two, too, when I met him.

HUSBAND: How long ago was that.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I don't remember anymore . . . Say, there must have been something in my wine.

HUSBAND: Why?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I'm all . . . everything swims around . . .

HUSBAND: Just hold on to me tight. That's right . . . [He presses her to him, becomes more and more affectionate. She hardly resists him.] Listen, my sweet, we might just as well go now.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes . . . home.

HUSBAND: No, not exactly home . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What do you mean? . . . Oh, no; oh, no . . . I won't go anywhere, how can you suggest—

HUSBAND: Well then, my dear, listen—next time we meet we'll arrange it so that . . . [He has slipped to the floor, and laid his head in her lap.] That's lovely, oh, that's lovely . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What are you doing? [Kisses his hair.] Listen, there must have been something in that wine . . . so sleepy . . . what'd happen if I couldn't get up again? But, Karl, listen . . . Karl, really . . . if someone should come in . . . please, Karl . . . the waiter . . .

HUSBAND: Not a chance . . . no waiter will come in here . . . not if I know it . . .

* * * [SWEET YOUNG GIRL leans against the corner of the sofa with closed eyes.]

HUSBAND paces to and fro in the small room, then lights a cigarette. Prolonged silence.]

HUSBAND: [Contemplating the SWEET YOUNG GIRL for a long time, to himself.] Who knows who this girl really is, anyway? . . . Damn it all . . . So quick . . . not very wise of me . . . Hmmm . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Without opening her eyes.] There must have been something in the wine.

HUSBAND: But why?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Otherwise . . .

HUSBAND: Why do you blame everything on the wine? . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Where are you? Why are you so far away? Come to me. [HUSBAND goes and sits

REIGEN (Hands Around)

next to her.] Now tell me, do you really like me?

HUSBAND: You know I do . . . [Stops short.] Of course I do.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But, honest . . . it's so . . . Come on, tell me the truth, what was in the wine?

HUSBAND: What do you think I am, a poisoner?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But, look, I don't understand. I'm really not so . . . After all, we've only known each other for . . . Honest, I'm not like this . . . Honest to God—if you thought that of me . . .

HUSBAND: What are you worrying about? I don't think anything bad about you. I just think that you're fond of me.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes . . .

HUSBAND: After all, when two young people are alone in a room together eating supper and drinking wine . . . there doesn't have to be anything in the wine.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, I didn't really mean that.

HUSBAND: Then what did you say it for?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Rather defiantly.] I was ashamed of myself .

HUSBAND: That's absurd. There's absolutely no reason for that . Especially since I remind you of your first love.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes.

HUSBAND: Of the first.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes, that's right.

HUSBAND: Now I'd like very much to know who the others were.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: There weren't any.

HUSBAND: That's not true; that can't be true.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Please stop nagging at me.—

HUSBAND: Want a cigarette?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, thanks.

HUSBAND: Do you know how late it is?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, what?

HUSBAND: Half past eleven.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Really?

HUSBAND: Well—but—how about your mother? She's used to it, is she?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Do you really want to send me home already?

HUSBAND: But a while ago you yourself—

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: You've changed, haven't you? What did I do to you?

HUSBAND: Don't be silly, child, nothing of the kind.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Honest to God, it was only your expression that did it, otherwise I'd have been . . . long ago . . . lots of men have begged me to go to a private room with them.

HUSBAND: Well, how about . . . coming here soon again . . . or maybe somewhere else—

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Don't know.

HUSBAND: What do you mean, you don't know?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, you didn't have to ask, did you?

HUSBAND: Alright then, when? I'd like to explain to you first of all that I don't live in Vienna. I only come here for a few days at a time, now and then.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, go on, aren't you Viennese?

HUSBAND: Certainly I'm Viennese. But I live out of town now.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Where?

HUSBAND: Oh, what difference does it make.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Don't be afraid, I won't go there.

HUSBAND: Oh, well, you could come if it would amuse you. I live in Graz.

HUSBAND: Yes, what's so strange about that?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: You're married aren't you?

HUSBAND: [Highly startled.] What makes you think that?

REIGEN (Hands Around)

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, I just felt you were.

HUSBAND: Wouldn't it upset you if I were?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, I'd rather have you single, of course. But you are married?

HUSBAND: I'd like to know what makes you think so?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: When a man says he doesn't live in Vienna, and hasn't much time—

HUSBAND: Well, that's not so improbable.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I don't believe it.

HUSBAND: And your conscience wouldn't bother you at having led astray a married man?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, go on, your wife's probably doing the same thing.

HUSBAND: [Very indignant.] Now look here, I won't allow remarks like that!

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I thought you didn't have a wife.

HUSBAND: Whether I have or not is no excuse for saying things like that. [Stands up.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, now, Karl, what's the matter? Mad at me? Honest, I really didn't know you were married. I was just talking. Come on, please, be nice to me again.

HUSBAND: [Goes to her after a few moments.] You certainly are amazing creatures, you . . . women. [HUSBAND grows tender again.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No . . . don't . . . it's too late, anyway .

HUSBAND: Then listen to me, will you? Let's talk seriously. I'd like to see you again, often.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Would you, honest?

HUSBAND: But in that case there must . . . well, I've got to be able to depend on you. I can't be watching you all the time.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, I can take care of myself.

HUSBAND: You see, you're . . . well, not exactly inexperienced . . . but young—and—on the whole, men are an unscrupulous race.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: You don't say!

HUSBAND: I don't mean that only in a moral sense—Well, you understand me, surely—

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Look here, what do you think I am, anyway?

HUSBAND: Well, then—if you really want to be my sweetheart—mine alone—something can be arranged—even if I do live in Graz most of the time. After all, a place where people can walk in at any moment isn't the thing for us. [SWEET YOUNG GIRL cuddles up to him .] Next time . . . we'll be together somewhere else, won't we?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes.

HUSBAND: Where we can be entirely undisturbed.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes.

HUSBAND: [Embracing her passionately.] We'll talk over the details on the way home. [Stands up, opens the door.] Waiter . . . the check!

SCENE SEVEN. THE SWEET YOUNG GIRL AND THE POET

[A small room, comfortably and tastefully furnished. Curtains that make the room half-dark. Red shades. Big desk, covered with papers and books. A small upright piano against the wall.]

The SWEET YOUNG GIRL and the POET enter together. The POET closes the door behind them.]

POET: There, my darling. [Kisses her.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Wearing a hat and coat.] Oh! How lovely it is here! Only one can't see a thing!

POET: Your eyes'll have to get used to the semi-darkness. Those sweet eyes— [Kisses her eyes.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: These sweet eyes won't have time to do that, though.

POET: Why not?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Because I'm only going to stay a minute.

POET: But you'll take your hat off, won't you?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Just for a minute?

POET: [Takes the pin from her hat and puts aside hat.] And the cloak—

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What's the point? I have to go right away again.

POET: But you must rest a little! We've been walking for three hours.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: We've been driving.

POET: Yes, on the way home—but we tramped around Weidling for three whole hours. So do sit down, my dear . . . wherever you want; here at the desk; no, that's not comfortable. Sit on the sofa. —There— [Pushes her down.] And if you're very tired you can lie down. There— [He stretches her out.] And now put your little head on the pillow.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Laughing.] But I'm not in the least tired !

POET: You think you're not. There—and if you get sleepy, just go ahead and sleep. I'll stay very quiet. I can play you a lullaby, too . . . of my own . . . [Goes to piano.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Your own?

POET: Yes.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I thought you were a doctor, Robert.

POET: Why? I told you I was a writer.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But all the writers are doctors.

POET: No; not all. I'm not, for instance. But what made you think of that now?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, because you said that the piece you're playing was your own.

POET: Well—maybe it isn't mine. What difference does it make? Who cares who wrote it? It's enough that it's beautiful—isn't it?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Certainly. Just so it's beautiful—that's the chief thing.

POET: Do you know what I meant?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Meant what?

POET: What I just said.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Sleepily.] Of course I did.

POET: [Stands up, goes to her, strokes her hair.] You didn't understand a word.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, go on, I'm not as stupid as all that.

POET: Certainly you're that stupid. But that's just why I like you. Ah, it's so delightful when you women are stupid—the way you are, I mean.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Hey, stop being insulting!

POET: Angel child! It feels good to lie on a soft Persian rug, doesn't it?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, yes. Go on, play some more piano, won't you?

POET: No, I'd rather stay here with you. [Strokes her.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: How about letting a little more light in?

POET: Oh, no . . . This twilight is soothing. We've been practically bathed in sunlight the whole day. Now, having emerged from our bath we're throwing the mantle of twilight over ourselves . . . [Laughs.] . . . Ah,

REIGEN (Hands Around)

no—that should be said another way . . . Don't you think so?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Don't know.

POET: [Drawing away from her slightly.] Divine stupidity! [Takes out a notebook and scribbles a few words in it.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What are you doing? [Turning towards him.] What are you writing?

POET: Sun, bath, twilight, cloak . . . there . . . [Puts back the notebook. Then, aloud.] Nothing . . . Now tell me, my sweet, wouldn't you like something to eat or drink?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I'm not at all thirsty, but I am hungry.

POET: Hmm . . . I'd rather you were thirsty. I have some Cognac in the house, but I'd have to go out to get food.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Can't someone get it for you?

POET: That's difficult, my servant isn't here just now—but wait—I'll go myself. What would you like?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But it's really hardly worthwhile, I have to go home, anyway.

POET: Child, there's no thought of that. But I'll tell you something; when we leave here we'll go somewhere for supper.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, no. I haven't time for that. Where would we go anyway. Some friend might see us.

POET: Have you so many friends?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, one is enough to get us into trouble .

POET: What kind of trouble?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, suppose my mother heard about it . . .

POET: But we can go somewhere where no one'll see us, there are restaurants with private rooms.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Chanting.] Yes, supper in a private room!

POET: Have you ever been in a private room?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: To tell the truth—yes.

POET: Who was the lucky fellow?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, not the way you think . . . I was with a girl friend and her fiancé. They took me along.

POET: I see. I'm supposed to believe that!

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: You don't have to believe it!

POET: [Close to her.] Did you blush just now? One can't see a thing, it's so dark. I can't even distinguish your features. [Touches her cheek with his hand.] But I can identify you this way just as well.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, see that you don't mistake me for somebody else.

POET: It's strange, I can't remember anymore what you look like.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Thank you kindly!

POET: [Serious.] No, really, it's uncanny, I simply can't visualize you. In a certain sense I've forgotten you already.— If I were to forget the sound of your voice too . . . what would you be then?—Near and far at the same time . . . uncanny.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What are you raving about?

POET: Nothing, angel, nothing. Where are your lips? . . . [Kisses her.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Hadn't you better turn on the lights?

POET: No. [Growing very affectionate.] Tell me, do you love me?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, a lot . . . a lot!

POET: Have you ever loved anyone as much as me?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: I've already told you, no.

POET: But . . . [Sighs.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: He was my fiancé.

POET: I wish you wouldn't think about him now.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Say . . . what are you doing . . . see here . . .

POET: Let's imagine now that we're in some place in Inda.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: They wouldn't be as wicked as you, there.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

POET: How idiotic! Divine—ah, if you only realized what you mean to me . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well?

POET: Stop pushing me away all the time; I'm not doing anything to you—yet.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: My corset hurts me.

POET: [Simply.] Take it off.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes. But you mustn't be naughty because I do.

POET: No. [SWEET YOUNG GIRL stands up, takes off corset in darkness. POET remains on the sofa.] By the way, haven't you any desire at all to know my name?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Yes, what is it?

POET: I'd rather not tell you my name. I'll tell you what I call myself, instead.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What's the difference?

POET: Well, what I call myself professionally—as a writer.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, you don't write under your real name? [POET comes close to her.] Now don't! . . . go away!

POET: What fragrance emanates from your body. How sweet . . . [Kisses her breast.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: You're tearing my chemise.

POET: Away . . . away with all these inessentials.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But, Robert . . . !

POET: And now let's go to our Indian palace.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: First tell me that you really love me.

POET: But I adore you— [Kisses her passionately.] — I worship you, my treasure, my springtime . . . my . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Robert . . . Robert . . . !

* * *

POET: That was transcendental bliss . . . I'm called . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Robert, my Robert!

POET: I'm called Biebitz.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Why are you called Biebitz?

POET: Biebitz isn't my name—I'm just called Biebitz . . . Well, don't you know the name?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No.

POET: You haven't heard the name Biebitz? Ah—divine! Really? You're only pretending you don't know it, aren't you?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Honest to God, I've never heard of it!

POET: Don't you ever go to the theatre?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, yes—I went just the other night—with my girl friend and her uncle—we went to the opera to hear Cavalleria.

POET: Hmmm, so you never go to the Royal Theatre?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Nobody ever sends me tickets for that.

POET: I'll send you a ticket.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, lovely! But don't forget! And send one for something funny.

POET: Oh . . . funny . . . you don't want to see something sad?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Not very much.

POET: Even if it's a play I wrote?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: A play you wrote? You write for the theatre?

POET: Excuse me, but I want to light up. I haven't seen you since you've been my sweetheart. Angel! [Lights a candle.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, lord, I feel so ashamed. At least give me a cover.

POET: Later! [Approaches her with the candle, surveys her at length.]

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: [Covering her face with her hands.] Now don't, Robert!

POET: You are beautiful, you are beauty itself, you are Nature, you are holy simplicity.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Ouch, you're dripping that candle on me! Look out, can't you?

REIGEN (Hands Around)

POET: [Putting aside the candle.] You are what I've been searching for a long time. You love me, and me alone—you'd love me if I were only a dry-goods clerk. That's a wonderful feeling. I confess that I've been harboring a certain doubt up to this moment. Tell me honestly, didn't you suspect that I was Biebitz?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, heavens, what are you driving at, anyway? I don't know nay Biebitz.

POET: Such is fame! No, forget what I told you, forget the name I told you too. I'm Robert to you and always will be. I was only joking. [Lightly.] I'm not a playwright at all, I'm a salesman, and I play the piano for choral societies at night.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Now I can't make you out at all . . . and my goodness, the way you stare at me. What's the matter, anyway, what's wrong?

POET: It's so extraordinary—something that's hardly ever happened to me before, my sweet—the tears are coming to my eyes. You move me deeply. We'll stay together, won't we? We'll love each other very much.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Say, is that true about the choral societies?

POET: Yes, but don't ask anymore. If you love me, stop asking questions. Tell me, can you manage to make yourself free for a few weeks?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What do you mean, free?

POET: Well, away from home.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What an idea! How could I do that? What would mother say? And then, if I weren't there everything would go wrong at home.

POET: I'd imagined it all so beautifully, we two together, going off somewhere in the great solitude, into the forest, into Nature, to live for a few weeks. Nature . . . into Nature. And then, one day, Adieu—to part from each other, without knowing where we will go.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Now you're talking of saying goodbye already! And I thought you liked me so much.

POET: That's just why— [Bends over her and kisses her brow .] You adorable creature!

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Come, hold me tight, I'm so cold.

POET: I suppose it's time for you to get dressed. Wait, I'll light a few more candles.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Don't look.

POET: No. [At the window.] Tell me, my child, are you happy?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: How do you mean?

POET: I mean, do you lead a happy life?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: It could be better.

POET: You misunderstand me. You've told me enough about your domestic circumstances. I know that you're no princess. I mean, putting material things aside—just feeling yourself alive. As a matter of fact, do you feel yourself actually living?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Say, haven't you any comb?

POET: [Goes to dressing-table, gives her comb, gazes at her .] God in heaven, how enchanting you look!

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Now . . . don't!

POET: Please, stay a while longer, stay here, I'll get something for supper and . . .

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: But it's much too late now.

POET: It isn't nine yet.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: No, please, I've got to run along.

POET: When will we see each other again?

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Well, when do you want to see me?

POET: Tomorrow.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: What day is tomorrow?

POET: Saturday.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Oh, I can't then. I have to take my little sister to her godfather.

POET: Alright then, Sunday . . . hmmm . . . on Sunday . . . let me explain something to you—I'm not Biebitz, but Biebitz is a friend of mine. I'll introduce him to you sometime. Well, on Sunday Biebitz's play is being given. I'll send you a ticket and then I'll pick you up at the theatre afterwards. You'll tell me how you liked the play, won't you?

REIGEN (Hands Around)

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: Honest, this Biebitz business—I'm all mixed up now.

POET: I won't really know you until I've found out how you reacted towards this play.

SWEET YOUNG GIRL: There . . . I'm ready now.

POET: Let's go, my love! [They leave.]

REIGEN (Hands Around)

SCENE EIGHT. THE POET AND THE ACTRESS

[Room in a country Inn. A Spring night. The moon shines over the hills and fields. The windows are open. Deep silence.]

The POET and the ACTRESS enter. As they do so, the lighted candle in the POET'S hand goes out.]

POET: Oh . . .

ACTRESS: What's the matter?

POET: The light.—But we don't need any. Look, it's quite bright. Marvelous! [ACTRESS suddenly sinks down on her knees before window, with folded hands.] What's the matter? [No answer.] What are you doing?

ACTRESS: [Indignant.] Can't you see I'm praying?

POET: Do you believe in God?

ACTRESS: Of course, I'm no bloody heathen.

POET: I see.

ACTRESS: Come along, kneel next to me. You might pray for once, too. It won't put a dent in your halo. [POET kneels next to her and embraces her.] Libertine! [Gets up.] Do you happen to know whom I was praying to?

POET: To God, I suppose.

ACTRESS: [With great irony.] Yes! I was praying to you.

POET: Then why did you look out of the window?

ACTRESS: I'd rather you told me where you've dragged me to—you seducer!

POET: But, my dear child, this was your idea. You wanted to go to the country—and this place especially.

ACTRESS: Well, wasn't it a good idea?

POET: Certainly; it's enchanting here. When you consider that it's only two hours from Vienna—and then this utter solitude. And what lovely country!

ACTRESS: Gorgeous, isn't it? You could write a great deal here if you had any talent.

POET: Have you been here before?

ACTRESS: Have I been here before? Ha! I've lived here for years!

POET: With whom?

ACTRESS: With Fritz, of course.

POET: I see.

ACTRESS: How I adored that man!

POET: So you've told me.

ACTRESS: A thousand pardons—I can just as well go if I bore you!

POET: You bore me? . . . You haven't the faintest idea what you mean to me . . . You're a whole world in itself . . . You are divine, you are genius itself . . . You are . . . you are godly simplicity . . . Truly, you . . . But you shouldn't talk about Fritz now .

ACTRESS: There must have been an aberration. There!

POET: It's fine of you to admit that.

ACTRESS: Come here, give me a kiss! [POET kisses her.] Now let's say goodnight! Farewell, my pet!

POET: What do you mean, "farewell"?

ACTRESS: Well, I'm going to bed.

POET: That's alright, but as for this "good night" business . . . where am I supposed to spend the night?

ACTRESS: There are surely many other rooms in this house.

POET: Other rooms don't attract me. Anyway, I'd better light up here, hadn't I?

ACTRESS: Yes.

POET: [Lights a candle on the night-table.] What a pretty room . . . the people here are very pious . . . lots of holy pictures . . . it would be interesting to spend some time among these natives . . . it's another world altogether. We know so little about other people, actually.

ACTRESS: Stop talking rot and hand me my purse from the table .

REIGEN (Hands Around)

POET: Here, my only beloved! [ACTRESS takes a little framed picture from her purse and puts it on the night-table.] What's that?

ACTRESS: That's the Madonna.

POET: You always carry her with you?

ACTRESS: Certainly, she's my talisman. Now go, Robert!

POET: You're joking. Can't I help you?

ACTRESS: No, you can go.

POET: When shall I come back?

ACTRESS: In ten minutes.

POET: [Kisses her.] So long, then!

ACTRESS: Where will you go?

POET: I'll walk up and down in front of the window. I'm very fond of walking about outdoors at night. My best ideas come to me that way. And especially near you, enveloped—so to speak—in my longing for you . . . enmeshed in your art.

ACTRESS: You talk like an idiot.

POET: [Hurt.] Some women would have said . . . like a poet.

ACTRESS: Now hurry up and go. But don't start any flirtation with the chambermaid. [POET goes. ACTRESS undresses. She hears the POET clattering down the wooden stairs, and later hears his footsteps outside the window. As soon as she is undressed, she goes to the window, looks down below where he is standing, and whispers to him.] Come! [POET rushes upstairs and into the room, just as she has slipped into bed and blown out the candle, and locks the door.] There, now you can sit down next to me and tell me things.

POET: Don't you want me to shut the window? Aren't you cold?

ACTRESS: Oh, no.

POET: What do you want me to tell you?

ACTRESS: Well, whom are you unfaithful to at this moment?

POET: Unfortunately to no one, just yet.

ACTRESS: Well, console yourself, I'm deceiving somebody too.

POET: I don't doubt that.

ACTRESS: And who do you think it is?

POET: My dear, how can I possibly know.

ACTRESS: Well, guess.

POET: Wait . . . your director.

ACTRESS: Darling, I'm not a chorus-girl.

POET: Well, I just thought . . .

ACTRESS: Guess again.

POET: You're deceiving your leading man . . . Benno—

ACTRESS: Ha! He doesn't love any woman . . . didn't you know that? He's having an affair with the postman!

POET: You don't say!

ACTRESS: Come, give me a kiss. [POET throws his arms about her.] What do you think you're doing?

POET: Well, don't torture me so.

ACTRESS: Listen, Robert, I have a suggestion. Lie down next to me.

POET: Sold!

ACTRESS: Hurry, hurry!

POET: See here, if I'd have had my way, I'd have been there long ago . . . Listen.

ACTRESS: What?

POET: The crickets are chirping outside.

ACTRESS: You're crazy, my pet, there aren't any crickets hereabouts.

POET: But you hear them, don't you?

ACTRESS: Oh, hurry up and come!

POET: Here I am. [Goes to her.]

REIGEN (Hands Around)

ACTRESS: Now, lie nice and quiet . . . Pst . . . don't budge .

POET: What is the matter with you now?

ACTRESS: I suppose you'd like to have an affair with me, wouldn't you?

POET: That ought to be clear to you by now.

ACTRESS: Well, lots would like to . . .

POET: But it can hardly be denied that at this particular moment I seem to have the best chance.

ACTRESS: Come then, my cricket. I shall call you cricket from now on.

POET: Splendid . . .

ACTRESS: Now, who am I deceiving?

POET: Who? . . . Me, perhaps . . .

ACTRESS: My poor child, you're mentally defective.

POET: Or else someone . . . whom you've never even seen . . . someone you don't know . . . someone who is destined for you and whom you may never find . . .

ACTRESS: For heaven's sake, stop talking fantastic nonsense.

POET: . . . Isn't it strange . . . even you—and one would have thought— . . . Oh, no, it would rob you of your best quality to . . . come, come . . . come—

* * *

ACTRESS: This is much nicer than acting in idiotic plays . . . don't you think so?

POET: Well, you can be glad at least that you act in good ones now and then.

ACTRESS: You conceited pup, I suppose you're referring to your own again?

POET: I am indeed!

ACTRESS: [Serious.] It really is a heavenly play!

POET: There now, you see?

ACTRESS: Yes, you're a great genius, Robert!

POET: While we're on the subject, you might tell me why you refused to appear day before yesterday. There wasn't a thing the matter with you.

ACTRESS: I wanted to annoy you.

POET: But what for? What have I done to you?

ACTRESS: You were arrogant.

POET: In what way?

ACTRESS: Everybody in the theatre thinks you are.

POET: I see.

ACTRESS: But I tell them: That man has a right to be arrogant .

POET: And what do they say?

ACTRESS: What should they say? I don't discuss things with any of them.

POET: I see.

ACTRESS: They'd like nothing better than to poison me. But they won't get a chance.

POET: Don't think of other people now. Just be happy that we're here together, and tell me that you love me.

ACTRESS: Do you still demand proofs?

POET: Love can't be proved, anyway.

ACTRESS: That's magnificent! What is it that you want, then?

POET: How many have you given proofs to in this way . . . and did you love all of them?

ACTRESS: Oh, no. I've only loved one.

POET: [Embracing her.] My . . .

ACTRESS: Fritz.

POET: My name is Robert. Just what do I mean to you if you're thinking of Fritz now?

ACTRESS: You're a caprice.

POET: I'm glad I know it, at least.

ACTRESS: But come now, aren't you proud?

POET: What have I got to be proud of?

ACTRESS: I think you have some reason to be.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

POET: Oh, because of what just . . .

ACTRESS: Yes, my pale little cricket, because of that! Well, how is the chirping coming along? Are they still chirping?

POET: Incessantly. Can't you hear it?

ACTRESS: Certainly I hear it. But they're frogs, my pet.

POET: You're mistaken; frogs croak.

ACTRESS: Certainly they croak.

POET: But not here, my child; there's only chirping done here .

ACTRESS: You are positively the most obstinate person I ever knew. Give me a kiss, my froggy!

POET: Please don't call me that. It makes me nervous.

ACTRESS: Well, what shall I call you?

POET: I have a name, haven't I? Robert.

ACTRESS: Oh, that's so stupid.

POET: Nevertheless, I beg you to call me simply by my own name.

ACTRESS: Very well, then, Robert, give me a kiss . . . Ah! [She kisses him.] Are you satisfied now, Froggy? Hahahaha!

POET: Would you allow me to light a cigarette?

ACTRESS: Give me one, too. [He takes a cigarette case from the night-table, takes out two cigarettes, lights both and gives her one .] By the way, you haven't said a word about my performance yesterday.

POET: What performance?

ACTRESS: Now really!

POET: Oh, yes. But I wasn't at the theatre.

ACTRESS: You will have your little jest.

POET: Nothing of the sort. But as you canceled the performance day before yesterday, I quite naturally assumed that you wouldn't be in full possession of your faculties yesterday either, so I preferred to stay away.

ACTRESS: Well, you missed a lot.

POET: Did I?

ACTRESS: It was sensational. The audience went pale.

POET: Did you actually see them do it?

ACTRESS: Benno said: My child, you acted like a goddess.

POET: Hmmm . . . and sick as a dog day before yesterday.

ACTRESS: Yes, indeed; I was, too. And do you know why? Out of longing for you.

POET: A while ago you told me that you refused to play just to annoy me.

ACTRESS: Oh, what do you know about my love for you? Everything leaves you cold. And I've been tossing about in fever night after night. A hundred and four degrees!

POET: That's pretty high for a caprice.

ACTRESS: A caprice, you call it? I'm dying of love for you and you call it a caprice—?!

POET: And how about Fritz . . . ?

ACTRESS: Fritz? . . . Don't talk to me about that jailbird!

SCENE NINE. THE ACTRESS AND THE COUNT

[The ACTRESS' bedroom. Very luxuriously furnished. It is high noon; the blinds are still down; a candle is still burning on the night-table, and the ACTRESS is still lying on her canopied bed. Innumerable newspapers are strewn over the bedspread.

The COUNT enters, dressed in the uniform of an Officer of the Dragons. He remains standing in the doorway.]

ACTRESS: Ah, Count!

COUNT: I have your mother's permission, otherwise I would not have—

ACTRESS: Come right in, won't you?

COUNT: Thank you. Excuse me—coming right in from the street, it's very hard to see anything. Ah . . . there we are . . . [At the bed.] How do you do?

ACTRESS: Do sit down, Count.

COUNT: Your mother told me you were indisposed . . . Nothing serious, I hope.

ACTRESS: Nothing serious? I nearly died.

COUNT: Good heavens, how was that possible?

ACTRESS: Anyway, it's terribly nice of you to bother about me .

COUNT: Nearly died! And yesterday you acted like a goddess!

ACTRESS: It was quite a triumph, I think.

COUNT: Magnificent! . . . The audience was absolutely carried away . . . not to speak of myself.

ACTRESS: Thank you for the lovely flowers.

COUNT: Don't mention it, please.

ACTRESS: [Turning her eyes in the direction of a huge basket of flowers standing on a little table by the window.] There they are.

COUNT: Last night you were literally showered with flowers and wreaths.

ACTRESS: They're all in my dressing-room still. I took only your basket home with me.

COUNT: [Kissing her hand.] That was charming of you. [ACTRESS takes his hand suddenly and kisses it.] But, my dear . . .

ACTRESS: Don't be alarmed, Count, that doesn't obligate you in any way!

COUNT: You are an extraordinary creature . . . one might almost say, puzzling— [Pause.]

ACTRESS: Miss Birken is easier to solve, I imagine.

COUNT: Yes, Little Miss Birken is no problem . . . although I really know her only superficially.

ACTRESS: Ha!

COUNT: You may believe me. But you're a distinct problem. I've always had a passion for problems. When I saw you for the first time last night, I realized what a great pleasure I had missed in not seeing you act before.

ACTRESS: Was it really the first time you'd seen me?

COUNT: Yes. You see, it's very difficult for me to go to the theatre. I'm used to dining late . . . so that when one finally gets there the best part's over. Isn't that so?

ACTRESS: You'd better dine earlier from now on.

COUNT: Yes, I've been thinking of that. Or not dining at all . It's really not much pleasure, dining.

ACTRESS: Is there any pleasure yet left for you, you youthful dotard?

COUNT: I wonder about that myself, sometimes! But I'm not a dotard. There must be some other reason.

ACTRESS: You think so?

COUNT: Yes. For instance, Louis says I'm a philosopher. He means, you see, that I think too much.

ACTRESS: Yes . . . it's disastrous to think.

COUNT: I have too much time, that's why I think so much. You see, it's this way, Madame, I thought that things would be better if they transferred me to Vienna. There's distraction here, and excitement . But when you come right down to it, it's no different than up there.

ACTRESS: Up where?

REIGEN (Hands Around)

COUNT: You know, Madame, down there, in Hungary, in those rotten holes where our garrisons were stationed.

ACTRESS: Well, what did you do in Hungary?

COUNT: What I told you, Madame, military service.

ACTRESS: But why did you stay such a long time in Hungary?

COUNT: Oh well, it just happened so.

ACTRESS: It must be enough to drive one mad.

COUNT: How so? Actually, there's more to do there than here. You know, what with drilling recruits, remount riding . . . and then, the country isn't as bad as they say. It's really quite beautiful, that prairie-land—and as for the sunsets there, it's really a shame I'm not a painter. I've often thought if I were a painter I'd surely paint them . There was a fellow in our regiment, young Splan, he could have done it. —But what am I telling you all these boring things for?

ACTRESS: Oh, don't say that, I'm being royally entertained.

COUNT: You know, Madame, it's so easy to chat with you. Louis said so too; and it's a very hard thing to find.

ACTRESS: In Hungary, I can imagine.

COUNT: But it's just as hard in Vienna! People everywhere are alike; the only difference is that there's more of a crowd where more of 'em are. Incidentally, do you like people, Madame?

ACTRESS: Like them? I loathe them! I can hardly bear to see them! I don't see anyone ever, as a matter of fact. I'm always alone, there's never a soul in this house.

COUNT: Ah, I thought you were a hater of society. Artistic people are often that way. When one moves in higher realms . . . well, you're lucky, at least you know why you're living!

ACTRESS: Who says I do? I haven't the faintest idea what I'm living for!

COUNT: But, surely, Madame—fame—honors—

ACTRESS: Is that supposed to be happiness?

COUNT: Happiness? There's no such thing, Madame. It's the very things that people talk about most that don't exist . . . for instance, Love. That's one of them.

ACTRESS: You may be right.

COUNT: Pleasure . . . intoxication . . . granted, they're not to be denied . . . they're facts. I am enjoying something . . . good, I know that I'm enjoying it. Or I'm drunk, good again. That's definite too. And when it's over, it's over and done with.

ACTRESS: [Grandly.] Over and done with!

COUNT: But if—how shall I express it—if one doesn't surrender to the moment alone, but thinks of the past or the future—well, you're done for, either way. The past is sad . . . the future is uncertain . . . in a word, nothing but confusion. Isn't that so?

ACTRESS: [Nodding, with wide eyes.] You've hit the nail on the head.

COUNT: So you see, Madame, once that's become clear it makes absolutely no difference whether one lives in Vienna or in the Hungarian plains or in Kalamazoo. Or, for instance . . . I wonder where I laid my cap? Ah, thank you . . . what were we saying?

ACTRESS: Kalamazoo.

COUNT: Oh yes. Well, as I said, there's not much difference. It's the same thing whether I sit in the Casino or in the Club.

ACTRESS: And what has that to do with love?

COUNT: If you believe in love, you'll always find someone to love you.

ACTRESS: Miss Birken, for instance.

COUNT: I really don't know why you keep referring to little Miss Birken all the time, Madame.

ACTRESS: She's your sweetheart, isn't she?

COUNT: Who said so?

ACTRESS: Everybody knows it.

COUNT: Except me. That's remarkable.

ACTRESS: But you fought a duel because of her!

REIGEN (Hands Around)

COUNT: Maybe I was shot dead and didn't notice it.

ACTRESS: I see you're a man of honor, Count. Come, sit a little nearer.

COUNT: If I may . . .

ACTRESS: Over here. [She draws him to her, runs her fingers through his hair.] I knew you would come today!

COUNT: How so?

ACTRESS: In fact, I knew it last night in the theatre.

COUNT: Then you did see me from the stage?

ACTRESS: My dear man! Didn't you notice that I was acting only for you?

COUNT: I can't believe it!

ACTRESS: I was so flustered when I saw you sitting in the first row!

COUNT: Flustered? On my account? Why, I had no idea that you even noticed me.

ACTRESS: You're enough to drive one to despair with that superior manner of yours.

COUNT: But, Madame . . .

ACTRESS: "But, Madame!" . . . Really, you might at least unbuckle your sabre!

COUNT: If I may. [Unbuckles sabre and lays it on bed.]

ACTRESS: And isn't it about time you kissed me? [COUNT kisses her, she doesn't release him.] I should never have laid eyes on you.

COUNT: But surely it's better as it is!

ACTRESS: Count, I'm afraid you're a poseur, after all!

COUNT: I? But why?

ACTRESS: Don't you think that many would be extremely happy if they were in your place?

COUNT: I'm very happy.

ACTRESS: Ha, I thought there was no such thing as happiness! How you look at me! I do believe you're afraid of me, Count!

COUNT: I told you you were a problem, didn't I?

ACTRESS: Oh, spare me your philosophy . . . come to me. And now ask me for something . . . you can have anything you want. You're so handsome.

COUNT: Well then, I beg you [Kisses her hand.] to let me come again tonight.

ACTRESS: Tonight? But I'm performing.

COUNT: After the theatre.

ACTRESS: And you want nothing else?

COUNT: I'll ask for everything else after the theatre.

ACTRESS: [Hurt.] You'll ask a long time, you miserable poseur .

COUNT: But, please, don't you see, you must see, we've been so open with each other so far . . . it would all be so much nicer at night, after the theatre . . . much cosier than now, when . . . I have the feeling constantly as if the door were about to open . . .

ACTRESS: The door can't open from the outside.

COUNT: But you see, I feel that one shouldn't plunge into something frivolously and spoil what might be a very beautiful thing.

ACTRESS: Might be! . .

COUNT: To be candid, I find love simply hideous in the morning.

ACTRESS: Really—you're the maddest thing I've ever come across!

COUNT: I'm not speaking of the common run of women . . . after all, it's all the same, in the aggregate. But women like you . . . call me a fool, if you will . . . women like you must not be made love to before breakfast. And therefore . . . you see . . .

ACTRESS: God, aren't you sweet!

COUNT: You see what I mean, don't you? Imagine it like this—

ACTRESS: Well, how do you imagine it?

COUNT: I had the idea. I'd wait for you after the theatre in my car, then we'd drive somewhere for supper—

ACTRESS: I'm not Miss Birken, you know.

REIGEN (Hands Around)

COUNT: I didn't say you were. Only it seems to me that atmosphere—mood—is important to everything. I'm never in the right mood till after supper. There's nothing more delightful than driving home together after supper, and then . . .

ACTRESS: Then what?

COUNT: Well, then . . . events can take their natural course .

ACTRESS: Sit closer. Closer.

COUNT: [Sitting on the bed.] There's a . . . an aroma of mignonette coming out of your pillows, isn't there?

ACTRESS: Don't you find it very hot in this room? [COUNT bends over and kisses her neck.] Oh, Count, that's not according to your program.

COUNT: Why do you say that? I have no program. [ACTRESS draws him to her.] It really is hot.

ACTRESS: Do you think so? And it's dark, too, almost as dark as night. [Pulls him down to her.] It is evening . . . it is night . . . close your eyes if it's too light for you. Come! . . . Come! [COUNT resists no longer.]

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ACTRESS: Well, how is your mood now, poseur?

COUNT: You're a little devil.

ACTRESS: What a thing to call me!

COUNT: Well then, angel.

ACTRESS: You should have been an actor! Really! You understand women! Do you know what I shall do now?

COUNT: Well?

ACTRESS: I shall tell you that I'll never see you again.

COUNT: But why?

ACTRESS: No, never. You're too dangerous for me! You drive a woman mad. You sit there now as if nothing at all had happened.

COUNT: But . . .

ACTRESS: Kindly remember, Count, that I have just been your beloved!

COUNT: I shall never forget it!

ACTRESS: And now how about tonight?

COUNT: What do you mean?

ACTRESS: Well—you were going to wait for me after the theatre.

COUNT: Very well then, how about day after tomorrow, say?

ACTRESS: What do you mean, day after tomorrow? We were talking about tonight.

COUNT: There wouldn't be any sense in that.

ACTRESS: Old dotard!

COUNT: You don't understand me. It's the—how shall I say it—the spiritual aspect of the thing that I'm referring to.

ACTRESS: What do I care about your spirit?

COUNT: Believe me, that belongs to it too. It's a fallacy to think that one can separate the one from the other.

ACTRESS: Oh, stop philosophizing. When I want philosophy I read books.

COUNT: One can never really learn from books.

ACTRESS: That's true enough! And that's why you should wait for me tonight. And as for the spiritual aspect, we'll attend to that alright, you rascal!

COUNT: Well, then, with your permission I'll have my car . . .

ACTRESS: You'll wait for me here, at home—

COUNT: . . . After the theatre.

ACTRESS: Of course. [He buckles on his sabre.] What are you doing?

COUNT: I think it's time for me to go. I've stayed a bit too long for a social call as it is.

ACTRESS: Well, it won't be a social call tonight.

COUNT: You think not?

ACTRESS: Let me take care of that. And now give me one more kiss, my little philosopher. There, you seducer, you . . . sweet child, you barterer of souls, you . . . [After a few ardent kisses, she pushes him forcibly

REIGEN (Hands Around)

from her.] . . . Count, it has been a great honor!

COUNT: I salute you, Madame! [At the door.] Good day.

ACTRESS: Goodbye, Kalamazoo!

SCENE TEN. THE COUNT AND THE TART

[Morning, about six o'clock.

A poorly furnished room with one window, over which dirty yellowish shades are pulled down. Faded greenish curtains. A chest of drawers. On it are a few photographs and a woman's hat, cheap and atrocious in taste. Garish Japanese fans are stuck in the mirror. On the table, covered with a reddish cloth, stands an oil-lamp with a yellow paper lampshade, burning dimly and smokily; a pitcher with some remnants of beer in it, and a half-empty glass. On the floor next to the bed a woman's clothes are lying in disorder, as if they had been hastily thrown off.

The TART is lying asleep in bed, breathing quietly. On the sofa, fully dressed and wearing a light overcoat, lies the COUNT. His hat is on the floor at the head of the sofa.]

COUNT: [Stirs, rubs his eyes, sits up quickly, looks about him] Where am I? . . . Oh yes. . . . So I did go home with the woman after all. . . . [Gets up, sees her bed.] There she lies. . . . God, the things that can happen to a man of my age. I haven't the faintest idea, did they carry me up here, I wonder? No. . . . I remember seeing — I came into the room . . . yes . . . I was still awake then, or had just waked up . . . or . . . is it just that this room reminds me of something? . . . 'pon my soul, yes. . . . I did see it all yesterday. . . . [Looks at his watch.] Yesterday hell! . . . a few hours ago— But I knew something was bound to happen. . . . I felt it coming. . . . When I began drinking yesterday I felt that . . . but what did happen, anyway? . . . Nothing, maybe. . . . Or did it . . . ? 'Pon my soul . . . since . . . well, for ten years this sort of thing hasn't happened to me, not knowing what. . . . Oh well, the whole point is that I was good and drunk. . . . If only I knew from when on. . . . I do remember perfectly well going into that dive with Louis . . . no, no . . . we left Sacher's together . . . and then, on the way over already. . . . Yes, that's right, I was riding in my car with Louis. . . . What's the use of racking my brains over it, anyway. What's the odds? . . . The main thing is to get out. [Stands up. The lamp shakes.] Oh! [Looks at the sleeping woman.] She sleeps soundly enough. I don't remember a damn thing — but I'll leave some money on the night-table . . . and beat it [Stands looking at her for quite a while.] If one didn't know what she was . . . ! [Studies her closely.] I've seen a lot of women that didn't look as virtuous, even in their sleep. 'Pon my soul. . . . Louis would probably say I was philosophizing again, but it's perfectly true. Sleep seems to be a leveler too—like its venerable brother, Death Hm, I'd just like to know whether . . . no, I would have remembered that . . . no, no, I collapsed on the sofa right away . . . and nothing happened. . . . It's incredible how all women look alike sometimes . . . well, let's move along. [He starts to go.] Oh yes . . . [Takes out his wallet and extracts a bill from it just as the TART wakes up.]

TART: Well . . . who's here so early—? [Recognizes him.] Hello, kid!

COUNT: Good morning. Sleep well?

TART: [Stretching.] Aw, come here. Give us a kiss.

COUNT: [Bends over her, hesitates, draws back.] I was just going . . .

TART: Going?

COUNT: It's really high time I did.

TART: You're going away just like this?

COUNT: [Almost embarrassed.] Like this?

TART: Well, so long then, see you another time.

COUNT: Yes, and good luck to you. How about shaking hands? [TART holds out her hand from the covers. COUNT takes it and kisses it mechanically, notices the fact, laughs.] Just like a princess. As a matter of fact, when one only . . .

TART: Why do you look at me that way?

COUNT: When one only sees the head, as it is now . . . when they're just waking up everyone looks innocent, anyway . . . 'pon my soul, one could imagine oneself almost anywhere, if only it didn't stink of kerosene . . .

TART: Yes, that lamp's always on the blink.

COUNT: How old are you, anyway?

TART: Well, what do you think?

REIGEN (Hands Around)

COUNT: Twenty-four.

TART: You don't say.

COUNT: Older than that?

TART: Going on twenty.

COUNT: And how long have you been . . .

TART: I've been in business for one year.

COUNT: You started early, alright.

TART: Better too soon than too late.

COUNT: [Sitting on the bed.] Tell me, are you really happy?

TART: What?

COUNT: I mean, are you getting along all right?

TART: Oh, I get along good enough.

COUNT: I see. But hasn't it ever occurred to you that you might be doing something else?

TART: What else could I be doing?

COUNT: Well . . . you're really a pretty girl, you know. You could have a lover, for instance.

TART: What makes you think I haven't got one?

COUNT: Yes, yes, I know—but I mean one man—one—who'd take care of you so that you wouldn't have to go with just any one.

TART: I don't go with just any one. Thank God I don't have to, I pick 'em out alright! [COUNT looks around the room. She notices it.] Next month we're moving downtown, where it's sweller.

COUNT: We? Who's we?

TART: Well, the Madam and the other girls who live here.

COUNT: There are still others here—?

TART: Right next door . . . don't you hear? . . . that's Milly, she was in the Café too.

COUNT: Somebody's snoring there.

TART: That's Milly, alright, she snores all day till ten at night, an' then she gets up and goes to the Café.

COUNT: But that's a horrible life.

TART: Sure it is. It makes the Madam sore, too. I'm always on the street by twelve noon, myself.

COUNT: What do you do on the street at twelve?

TART: What do you think I do? Work my beat.

COUNT: Oh yes . . . of course . . . [Stands up, takes out his wallet, puts a bill on her night-table.] Goodbye!

TART: Going already? . . . So long . . . Come back soon. [Turns on her side.]

COUNT: [Stops again.] Tell me . . . I suppose everything's about the same to you, isn't it?

TART: What?

COUNT: I mean, you don't get any pleasure out of it any more, do you?

TART: [Yawning.] God, I'm sleepy.

COUNT: It's all the same to you whether a man's young or old, whether he . . .

TART: What are you talking about?

COUNT: Well . . . [Suddenly struck by something.] 'Pon my soul, now I know whom you remind me of, it's . . .

TART: Do I look like somebody?

COUNT: Unbelievable, unbelievable, but please, just for a minute, don't speak at all, please . . . [Looks at her.] Exactly the same face, exactly the same face. [Kisses her suddenly on the eyes.]

TART: Well . . .

COUNT: 'Pon my soul, it's too bad that you're . . . nothing but a . . . You could make your fortune!

TART: You're just like Franz.

COUNT: Who's Franz?

TART: He's the waiter at our Café . . .

COUNT: How am I just like Franz?

TART: He's always saying I could make my fortune, too, and that I oughta marry him.

COUNT: Why don't you?

REIGEN (Hands Around)

TART: Thank you for nothing! . . . I don't want to marry, not on your life, not for no price. Maybe later on.

COUNT: The eyes . . . the identical eyes . . . Louis would most certainly call me an idiot, but I must kiss your eyes once more . . . there . . . and now, so long, I'm off.

TART: So long . . .

COUNT: [At the door.] By the way . . . aren't you at all surprised that . . .

TART: That what?

COUNT: That I don't want anything from you?

TART: Lots of men don't feel like it in the morning.

COUNT: Oh well . . . [To himself.] stupid of me to expect her to feel surprised . . . Well, so long . . . [Stands at the door.] It's really very annoying, all this. I know perfectly well that it's only a question of money to women like that . . . but why say "women like that" . . . at least she makes no bones about it, that's something to be thankful for . . . Say . . . I'll be in to see you soon.

TART: [With her eyes closed.] Good.

COUNT: When are you likely to be at home?

TART: I'm always home. All you got to do is ask for Leocadia .

COUNT: Leocadia . . . Fine . . . Well, good luck to you. [At the door.] The wine's still got me. Really, that beats everything . . . I come to a female like this and don't do anything but kiss her eyes, because she reminds me of somebody . . . [Turns to her.] Tell me, Leocadia, does that happen to you often, a man going away like this?

TART: Like what?

COUNT: The way I'm going . . .

TART: Early, you mean?

COUNT: No . . . I mean, men being with you—and not wanting anything from you?

TART: No, it's never happened to me before.

COUNT: Well, what do you make of it? Do you think I don't like you?

TART: Why shouldn't you like me? You liked me good enough last night.

COUNT: I like you now too.

TART: But you liked me better in the night?

COUNT: What makes you think that?

TART: What a silly thing to ask!

COUNT: Last night . . . but see here, didn't I tumble right onto the sofa?

TART: Sure . . . we both did, together.

COUNT: Together?

TART: Yes, don't you remember?

COUNT: I . . . we were . . . yes . . .

TART: But you went to sleep right off.

COUNT: Right off . . . I see . . . so that was it!

TART: Yes, sonny. You must have been good and pickled not to remember that.

COUNT: I see . . . and yet . . . there is a remote resemblance . . . So long . . . [Listens.] What's that noise?

TART: The maid's up already. You might give her something when you go out. The street door is open, too, so that'll save you the janitor's tip.

COUNT: Yes. [In the hall.] Well . . . it would have been beautiful if I'd only kissed her eyes. That would have been an adventure, almost . . . but I guess it wasn't to be . . . [The maid opens the door, stands there.] Ah—here, take this . . . Good night.

MAID: Good morning.

COUNT: Oh yes, of course . . . Good morning . . . good morning.

CURTAIN